



# THE BULLETIN OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH ON AGGRESSION

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*The European Editor produced this issue*

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**Editorial**  
**Ingrid Möller,**  
**European *Bulletin* Editor**



Welcome to the December 2011 edition of the *ISRA Bulletin* and a warm Hello to everyone from the beautiful historic city of Potsdam (see above).

This edition is created to inform all members about important ISRA-related facts. Our President-Elect, John Knutson, is concentrating our attention on the next elections and the upcoming World Meeting next July in Luxembourg. Please make sure to read also the information provided by the local hosts André Melzer & Georges Steffgen. Closely related to the conference is the YI Program. Executive Secretary Mike Potegal has included information on the YIP - please share this information with your students and younger colleagues.

I invited Roger Johnson to contribute an article about the Supreme Court Case on violent video games. Thanks to Roger a detailed summary of the case and the activities of ISRA members in the proceedings can be found in this issue. In my perspective, this article also further stimulates the discussion of the societal responsibility of our organisation - an issue that we might want to discuss in more detail at our meeting in July? I am aware of course

that only a subgroup of our members have a stake in this public debate about media violence effects on aggression. However, since this topic is on the political agenda not only in the U.S. but in European countries and other parts of the world (in Australia for example), and research results are often ignored or ridiculed by a diversity of parties involved, I thought it would be beneficial for all ISRA members to know more about this issue. The importance of this specific topic is also reflected in the *ISRA Violent Media Effects Commission* Craig Anderson is informing us about in this message as our President.

If you feel that other aggression-related topics that are currently or chronically on the agenda should be given as much room as the issue of media violence in this December *Bulletin*, please let us know about it and we are happy to assist by sharing it within the ISRA community in future Bulletins.

As always, the ISRA Flyer - designed to describe our society, increase our exposure, and attract new members - is included at the end of the *Bulletin*; **be sure to share this flyer with your colleagues and students.**

In closing, I want to repeat Eric's words and remind everyone that our goal for the *Bulletin* is to keep our members informed of scholarship in the area of aggression and to share each other's work. So, please email Eric (edubow@bgsu.edu) any materials you would like us to include in the next issue of the *Bulletin* in June 2012.

*Happy Holidays &  
A Happy New Year to all of you,  
Ingrid*

**A Message from Our President,  
Craig Anderson**



Dear ISRA colleagues,

My President's note will be much shorter this issue, in part because of the large stack of papers and exams stacked high on my desk awaiting my attention, and in part because we covered most of the major president-related happenings in the June issue. I am pleased to report one new major ISRA project that is now underway, something that I discussed in the June letter concerning policy issues.

**ISRA Violent Media Effects Commission**

Specifically, based on the advice and approval of the ISRA Council (as per our Constitution and By-laws), I have appointed a Commission charged with creating a statement on the scientific evidence regarding the effects of media violence. Here is the charge:

"The ISRA Violent Media Effects Commission is charged with the task of producing a public statement on the known effects of exposure to media violence, based on the current state of scientific knowledge. If the Commission finds sufficient evidence of harmful effects, then the Commission's public statement may include public policy recommendations, keeping in mind that effective policies may well differ across countries because of their different legal and cultural traditions and systems. The statement could be an original statement by the Commission, or could be an endorsement or modification of one or more similar statements offered in recent years by other major scientific bodies and/or groups of scientists who have appropriate expertise in the media violence domain. The statement (if sufficiently brief) or an Executive Summary statement (of a longer, more detailed statement) will be published in ISRA's journal *Aggressive Behavior* and will appear on the ISRA web site. It may also be published in the *ISRA Bulletin*."

Below is a list of the members of the Commission.

Leonard Berkowitz co-chair  
Barbara Krahé co-chair

Jeanne Brockmyer  
Brad Bushman  
Sarah Coyne  
Karen Dill  
Ed Donnerstein  
Douglas Gentile  
Rowell Huesmann  
Steven Kirsh  
Ingrid Möller  
Wayne Warburton

I thank the Council and Officers for their suggestions concerning the wording and the membership of this Commission. I also thank Len and Barbara for agreeing to serve as co-chairs, and the members for agreeing to serve on this Commission.

### **2012 ISRA World Meeting**

From what I've seen in various emails, planning for the 2012 meeting in Luxembourg is progressing very well. André Melzer and Georges Steffgen are local hosts. President-elect John Knutson is chairing the program committee. Executive Secretary Mike Potegal is again handling the Young Investigators program. The meeting website is up and running, so go ahead and visit it for more information:

<http://isra.uni.lu/index.php/ISRA-2012> .

### **Promote ISRA**

Once again, I ask all ISRA members to please look around your own university, your own scholarly "back yard", for people whose research interests intersect with aggression in an important way. Encourage them to join ISRA, to put together symposia for our World Meeting, to submit papers to *Aggressive Behavior*. And don't forget about your own graduate students. Student memberships are extremely inexpensive and very valuable.

I look forward to seeing you Luxembourg!

Regards,

Craig

**A Message from Our President-Elect,  
John Knutson**



Dear ISRA colleagues,

First, I hope you are enjoying the winter solstice. I know my views are not widely shared, but I truly love winter and the cold weather that comes with it. If you don't share my views on the joys of crisp cold days, then I hope you are able to find a warm sunny spot.

By now you should have received the call for papers and symposia for the 2012 meeting in Luxembourg. The program committee and the local organizers are excited about the structure of the meeting and the venue. We hope that you will be submitting your work and planning to join us for an enjoyable and productive meeting.

ISRA continues to be one of the few organizations that aspires to an interdisciplinary exchange of research on aggression and I hope you will encourage your colleagues from all disciplines to consider submitting a paper, a poster, or a symposium to ISRA this year.

The Nominations Committee is close to establishing a slate of nominees for the offices of President-Elect and Treasurer, as well as nominees for Council. According to the Constitution, the election should be completed by June 15. I hope to have the ballot prepared for distribution by the Executive Secretary by early March. With that deadline in mind, I want to remind the membership that the Constitution provides for direct nominations from the membership. Specifically, Article VI of the Constitution states: "Any group of five members may submit an additional nominee for any office, if the nomination is received before the date set for the mail ballot."

If you choose to submit a member-initiated nomination, please send the nomination to me by February 1 ([john-knutson@uiowa.edu](mailto:john-knutson@uiowa.edu)). Accompany the nomination with the endorsements of five members, and please indicate whether the nominee has been contacted and is actually willing to serve, if elected.

Regards,

John

## Important ISRA Notices

### ISRA Conference Proceedings to be Archived in PsycEXTRA

The American Psychological Association has offered to archive all ISRA conference proceedings into its database without charge. Anyone using PsycEXTRA could search by author, key words, topics, or particular conferences. Much of this information is currently unavailable, especially with reference to World Meetings held before 1998. APA members will have access to this database but others will have to pay. Many institutions will also have access to PsycEXTRA. Hopefully PsycEXTRA will allow many researchers quick access to papers presented throughout the full history of ISRA. This service should bring added professional exposure for ISRA members and for the society.

Some of the conference proceedings from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s may be hard to find. The ISRA archivist (Roger Johnson, [rjohnson@ramapo.edu](mailto:rjohnson@ramapo.edu)) asks anyone with old copies to please contact him. This material will be returned after it has been scanned into the database.

### ISRA WEBMASTER

Our ISRA webmaster is Yvon Delville, Dept. of Psychology, The University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712.

Please contact Yvon at [Delville@psy.utexas.edu](mailto:Delville@psy.utexas.edu) if there is information you would like to see on the website.

The website is: [www.ISRASociety.com](http://www.ISRASociety.com)

# How Do You Know when the Next Issue of *Aggressive Behavior* Is Available On-Line?

Wiley makes it possible to receive an email alert when a new issue is available. It requires that you create a Wiley log-in which can be done from Wiley's *Aggressive Behavior* home page. The link to receive "new content alerts" is located in the upper left section on the home page under "Journal Tools".

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**INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH ON AGGRESSION**

**ADVERTISE WITH US**

— *Call for Participation* —  
**XX<sup>th</sup> ISRA World Meeting**  
**University of Luxembourg**  
**July 17 to 21, 2012**



**Scientific Program – Call for Papers**

The XX<sup>th</sup> ISRA World Meeting in Luxembourg will reflect the dynamics and great diversity of current worldwide research on aggression.

You are cordially invited to **register** and **submit abstracts** for symposia, presentations or posters on the conference web site <http://isra.uni.lu> - registration is already possible!

Three **invited talks**, a **public lecture**, and the pre-conference workshop for **Young Investigators** (YI program) are some highlights of the scientific program.

We proudly announce a special pre-conference to the World Meeting: The **XVII. Workshop Aggression** will be an excellent opportunity to participate in the annual meeting of German-speaking aggression researchers. It aims particularly at discussing recent ideas and work-in-progress (Workshop language will be English, see p. 20 for further information).

**Social Program**

Non-scientific activities like **welcome reception**, **guided city tour**, **farewell reception**, and **lunch buffets** during the conference are **included** in the registration fees!

The **gala banquet** will take place at the Orangerie of the Mondorf Spa, a historic place

and a delight for nature lovers. Tickets for the gala banquet are 25 EUR per person.

**Important Dates in 2012**

Date	Event
<b>February 1</b>	Submission of <b>symposia</b> due
<b>March 1</b>	Submission of <b>abstracts</b> due
<b>June 16</b>	<b>Late</b> registration begins: <b>additional</b> fees
<b>July 15-17</b>	Pre-conference <b>XVII. Workshop Aggression</b>
<b>July 16-17</b>	Pre-conference <b>Young Investigator</b> program
<b>July 17-21</b>	<b>ISRA 2012 World Meeting</b>

**Meeting Venue**

Luxembourg City offers hotels of different price categories. Special **discount rates** for selected hotels may be found on the conference web site shortly.

**World Meeting Registration Fees per Person (EUR, €)**

Type	Early	Late	On-Site
<b>Member</b>	180 €	225 €	275 €
<b>Non-Member</b>	230 €	275 €	425 €
<b>Student</b>	100 €	125 €	150 €

**Luxembourg: Pre or Post Meeting Tourism**

Luxembourg is located in the very heart of Europe. **Paris** (France, 2 hrs by train), **Brussels** (Belgium, 3 hrs), **Trier** (Germany, 1 hr) and many other locations worth seeing are nearby.

**Further Information**

Visit the conference **web site** for additional information and to make your submission: <http://isra.uni.lu>.

**Local Hosts**

**André Melzer** ([andre.melzer@uni.lu](mailto:andre.melzer@uni.lu))

**Georges Steffgen** ([georges.steffgen@uni.lu](mailto:georges.steffgen@uni.lu))



## **Two ISRA INITIATIVES to ENCOURAGE YOUNG INVESTIGATORS**

### **(1) LAGERSPETZ AWARDS**

The Lagerspetz Awards are given to students, postdoctoral fellows and junior faculty for excellent presentations at the meeting. The awards honor Kirsti Lagerspetz, ISRA co-founder and contributor to aggression research. No application necessary: Submit an abstract, show up and do your best!

### **(2) THE YOUNG INVESTIGATOR (YI) PROGRAM**

The 2012 YI program is intended to encourage and assist people who are getting started or are in the early stages of their aggression research career.

Building on its great success at the last two ISRA meetings, the YI program includes:

- 1) Pre-meeting YI Workshop to facilitate career development by interaction with senior aggression researchers. The 2012 Workshop will focus on helping YIs with their own grant applications that are in planning, preparation or revision.
- 2) Planned but informal interactions with panels of mentors during the course of the meeting.
- 3) Networking with other young investigators and with members of ISRA.
- 4) Stipends for travel and meeting expenses will be available to applicants accepted into the program on an “as needed” basis.

### **YI PROGRAM APPLICATION: WHO and HOW (Deadline April 1, 2012)**

We encourage graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and junior faculty within 3 years of their Graduate degree to apply.

Please submit:

- 1) A scientific abstract for presentation,
- 2) a CV,
- 3) a 250-word statement summarizing your research interests and how participating in the YI Program would advance your professional development.

Students should include a student verification letter from their advisor. We will choose participants based on the originality and promise of their work in human or animal, observational, experimental or theoretical analyses of aggression.

**Note:** Submitting an application means that you propose to present a poster or a talk at the 2012 ISRA meeting AND you wish to be considered for the YI Program. The decisions about these two requests are separate. You will be informed first about whether the abstract is accepted for presentation (most are) and then about participating in the YI Program. The YI Program is independent of the Lagerspetz awards.

Please submit all your application materials for the YI Program to M. Potegal:

[poteg001@umn.edu](mailto:poteg001@umn.edu)

Find submission instructions at:

<http://isra.uni.lu/index.php/Young-Investigators>

*Michael Potegal*

## Video Game Violence: The Denouement

*Roger Johnson*

In June of 2010 I wrote a commentary for the *Bulletin* about the video game violence (VGV) controversy that was heating up in the U.S. courts. A year later, ISRA president Craig Anderson provided a very nice perspective on the case (*ISRA Bulletin*, Vol. 33 No. 1). At issue was a new California law which made it illegal to sell violent video games to children. Finally, on June 27, 2011 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 to overturn the California law. European Bulletin editor Ingrid Möller asked me to comment again since I live in California and am familiar with this most interesting case. There are lessons to be learned for everyone: media researchers, scientists in general, public policy analysts, pundits, and those who are ISRA members. The opinions below are my own and I would welcome comments or corrections ([rjohnson@ramapo.edu](mailto:rjohnson@ramapo.edu)).

### Background

Very briefly, this case was called Arnold Schwarzenegger (former CA governor) and Edmund Brown (former CA attorney general and current governor) v. Video Software Dealers Association and the Entertainment Software Association, Docket # 08-1448. The original CA law was introduced by state senator Leland Lee (PhD and child psychologist) and was soon passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor. It was immediately challenged and sent to the District Court of San Jose which ruled it unconstitutional. The case ended up in the 9<sup>th</sup> District Court in San Francisco which overturned the lower court decision. This ruling was then appealed by

the state to the Supreme Court, the highest court in the country.

Most of the media commentators turned out to be legally savvy but not scientifically savvy. Hence, most of the discussion focused on freedom of speech guaranteed by the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution. There are only a few categories of “speech” which are not protected such as yelling “fire” in a theater or overt depictions of sexual conduct.

Many in the U.S. (including almost all newspapers) would bitterly fight any attempt to expand the few categories of speech which can be regulated by law. Not surprisingly, most of the debate and commentary focused on this issue. California upped the stakes when it introduced scientific research which claimed to demonstrate that VGV does indeed have negative consequences on children. When this issue was presented at the lower court in California, the court dismissed the research and ruled that the scientific studies failed to demonstrate a causal link between VGV and harmful effects.

So we now had a strange mix of hot button issues: freedom of speech, the role of scientific research in shaping public policy, whether lawyers (even Supreme Court justices) had any business “ruling” about truth in science, outraged parents who detest media violence, newspaper editors who feared government censorship, and of course the wealthy and powerful media companies who profit handsomely by exploiting violence.

### ISRA Gets Involved (*sort of*)

Since much of the VGV research comes from ISRA members, many immediately sensed both an opportunity and a challenge. Should we sit isolated in an Ivory Tower and care not whether our research has any public impact or is read by anyone other than our

own colleagues? How many of us have written grants which state that the ultimate justification for funding is how our research may bring potential benefits to society? What better opportunity could there be than to have your research discussed by the Supreme Court and have your results on the front page of every newspaper in the country?

Let's remember that ISRA was founded during the Vietnam war by scientists troubled by all the violence in the world. (As archivist, may I ask that they be remembered: Robert Blanchard, Katsuzo Hayashi, Kirsti Lagerspetz, Zanvel Liff, Neal Miller, Ross Parke, Karl Pribram, Saul Rosenzweig, John Paul Scott, W.H. Thorpe, Gerald Hudgens, Irving Lazar, Jeanne Mueller, and Oleg Tikhomirow - details can be found in *Aggressive Behavior*, Vol. 13, 1987, p. 53-57.) These scholars wrote our constitution and made sure that public education was one of the main goals of the society.

I have been attending ISRA world meetings since 1972 and I can hardly remember any meeting where media violence was not part of the program. In his June, 2010 *Bulletin* article, Craig Anderson recalls a defining meeting in 1996 when he and Len Eron (9<sup>th</sup> president of ISRA) and everyone agreed that the debate was over about the harmful effects of media violence. My memory goes back further: I can remember perhaps in the 1980s when Len used to start his talk saying that researchers have finally put "the last nail in the coffin" on this issue. We should all appreciate that in addition to Len, there are many other ISRA presidents who have studied media violence: Kirsti Lagerspetz, Len Berkowitz, Sey Feshbach, Rowell Huesmann, Ed Donnerstein, and our current president Craig Anderson.

With all this impressive background, it seemed obvious that ISRA should step in

and play a leading role in the national controversy. Other professional organizations such as the APA, the California Psychological Association, and the California Psychiatric Association were quick to weigh in and lend support to the law. Living in California and knowing about this case, I corresponded with ISRA media researchers and before long many were eager to support this case. A group of 13 ISRA researchers (Craig Anderson, Bruce Bartholow, Leonard Berkowitz, Jeanne Brockmyer, Brad Bushman, Karen Dill, Ed Donnerstein, Douglas Gentile, Rowell Huesmann, Barbara Krahe, Ingrid Möller, Akira Sakamoto, and Wayne Warburton) agreed on the following statement:

#### **Statement on Video Game Violence**

*"Both the American Psychological Association (APA, 2005) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2009) have issued formal statements stating that scientific research on violent video games clearly shows that such games are causally related to later aggressive behavior in children and adolescents. Extensive research has been conducted over many years using all three major types of research designs (experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal). Numerous original empirical research studies have been conducted on children and adolescents. Overall, the research data lead to the conclusion that exposure to violent video games causes an increase in the likelihood of aggressive behavior. The effects are both immediate and long term. Violent video games have measurable and statistically significant effects on both males and females. Theoretically important effects of violent video games have been confirmed by many empirical studies. The effects have been replicated by researchers in different settings and in numerous countries. The psychological processes underlying such*

*effects are well understood and include: imitation; observational learning; priming of cognitive, emotional and behavioral scripts; physiological arousal; and emotional desensitization. These are general processes that underlie all types of social behavior, not just aggression and violence; they have been confirmed by countless studies outside of the media violence domain. In addition to causally increasing the likelihood of aggressive behavior, violent video games have been found to lead to increases in aggressive thinking, aggressive feelings, physiological desensitization to violence, and to decreases in pro-social behavior.”*

It is important to point out that this statement says nothing about the California law. It is simply a factual statement summarizing scientific literature. The group hoped to obtain the backing of ISRA and get this scientific point of view introduced into the case. The lawyers in the attorney general’s office who were handling the case for the State of California were eager to include this information as an *amicus curiae* brief.

### **ISRA Hesitates**

Unfortunately, we ran into a snag. The ISRA constitution makes it difficult for the society to take public stands. The usual “mechanism” is to wait until the next World Meeting and then have a vote of the membership. This of course would be of little value since the case would be decided by then. The ISRA Constitution states that the only option is for the ISRA president to seek advice and approval from the Council to form a special Commission. This Commission could then issue a public statement, but only in the name of the Commission. The ISRA president at the time was Deborah Richardson. She declined to call a Commission and that ended any

possibility of official ISRA participation in the case.

Reluctance to get involved in public issues is not new to ISRA. As far back as the 1970s some members fought to get United Nations NGO (Non-Governmental Status) for the society. They finally succeeded and David Adams was the ISRA liaison to the UN. But the issue was very divisive and many members (including founding member Saul Rosenzweig) felt that ISRA should have nothing to do with the UN. Another divisive issue came up at the 1987 off-year meeting in Seville, Spain. Some members wrote a statement about the causes of violence and war which became known as the Seville Statement. The statement passed and was later also adopted by UNESCO. The statement argued that there are no biological determinants for war. Many applauded and quoted the statement. Others ridiculed it as science overstepping its boundaries and oversimplifying biological determinism. In any case, some members firmly believed that ISRA had no business making public stands on social issues.

The VGV case is a little different because the statement was not a political declaration but simply a summary of scientific evidence. The evidence is considerable and persuasive and involves decades of published studies by scores of researchers in many countries. The opposition in ISRA came from those who saw this effort as “political” rather than “scientific.” Although no one would say so, some wondered whether there is a gulf between “hard” and “soft” science. Physical scientists use their research all the time to influence public policy, but some might argue that video game research smells more like politics. What seemed to make this case “political” was not the substance of the research but the fact that it would be used in an arena of law, politics, and private industry. The question then shifted to

whether ISRA could ever take a stand on any public issue or whether it wished to remain detached from all social issues. Some argued that true scientists should never make public statements about anything because all public statements are by definition “political”.

Another issue that came up was that some non-Americans did not want to get involved with “an American problem”. And some Americans felt that foreigners had no business sticking their nose into American law. Such arguments got little traction and eventually most people agreed that media violence is a world-wide issue and that a significant amount of research comes from outside the United States.

In recent years, ISRA has struggled with such issues. Menno Kruk (18<sup>th</sup> ISRA president) made many attempts to update and change the society but his efforts were often frustrated. In order to better deal with this issue in the future, the current president Craig Anderson has received Council approval to set up a commission called the ISRA Media Violence Effects Commission charged with issuing public statements about media violence (see also p.3 in this issue.)

### **Scholars Take Sides**

It might have been nice for ISRA to have lots of media exposure over this issue, but without the support of the society the individual researchers went ahead with their joint statement. This was circulated to the membership and several other professional groups asking for support. Eventually an impressive list of 115 scholars and researchers signed on. The statement and the list of supporters became part of the *Amicus Brief* that the State of California sent to the U.S. Supreme Court.

When the opposition discovered the statement and endorsement list, they quickly did the same thing. The video game industry

came up with its own statement which said that “...harm to minors is not supported by any reliable, let alone, substantial evidence”. It went on to state that all the research studies on VGV fail to show either a causal or a correlational link between VGV and harm to minors. Finally, it stated that the California case “...ignored a weighty body of scholarship, undertaken with established and reliable scientific methodologies debunking the claim that the video games California seeks to regulate have harmful effects on minors”.

It is never made clear who authored such statements but they became known as the Ferguson briefs since Texas A&M professor Christopher Ferguson was one of the endorsers and was probably one of the organizers. Ferguson has done some research on the subject but is known mostly for his commentaries and attacks (sometimes personal) on those who report the harmful effects of video game violence. He has argued that VGV helps relieve stress and depression and has no harmful effects on anyone.

The 82 endorsers were a curious mixture of academics (but very few psychologists), students, media pundits, writers, and industry representatives. Some had financial ties to the entertainment industry they sought to protect. Included were Stephen Pinker, Richard Rhodes, Todd Gitlin, Jonathan Friedman, Mark Skorie, John Sherry, Joanne Savage, Cheryl Olson, Tom Grimes, James Anderson, Jeffrey Goldstein, and Stuart Fischhoff. Jeff Goldstein is a former ISRA member who left the society and went into business as a paid consultant for the entertainment industry.

The blatantly unprofessional stance of those involved in the industry case was quite obvious. Deana Pollard Sacks (law professor at Texas Southern University) together with Brad Bushman and Craig

Anderson decided to analyze the “expertise” of both groups since they both claimed to be experts but came to opposite conclusions. They did a detailed analysis of the PsychINFO database (3 million references going back to 1800) to examine the publications of “experts” on both sides. Their study was published in the *Northwestern Law Review* (Colloquy, May 27, 2011) and found that 60% of endorsers of the California law had at least one scientific publication on aggression while only 17% of the entertainment industry endorsers had the same. When it came to research on media violence, those supporting the California case had three times as many publications. And when they used *impact factor* to determine the quality of the journals, those endorsing the California case were 48 times more likely to publish in top-tier journals.

### **The Court Decides**

Now for the case itself. Most Supreme Court decisions are sharply divided between the “liberal” justices (mostly appointed by democratic presidents, and the “conservative” justices (mostly appointed by republican presidents). This case did not split along ideological lines. The majority opinion was written by Justice Scalia who ridiculed the scientific research and called the media industry endorsers “experts”. Justice Scalia likened videogame violence to fairy tales for children which are often scary and gory. Justice Anthony Kennedy signed on to the Scalia opinion as did the so-called liberal justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan.

Justice Alito went along with the majority but sharply disagreed with their reasoning. Here are some excerpts from his opinion:

"Some *amici* who support respondents foresee the day when 'virtual-reality shoot-em-ups' will allow children to 'actually feel the splatting blood from the blown-off head' of a victim. . . . In some of these games, the violence is astounding. Victims by the dozens are killed with every imaginable implement, including machine guns, shotguns, clubs, hammers, axes, swords, and chainsaws. Victims are dismembered, decapitated, disemboweled, set on fire, and chopped into little pieces. They cry out in agony and beg for mercy. Blood gushes, splatters, and pools. Severed body parts and gobs of human remains are graphically shown. In some games, points are awarded based, not only on the number of victims killed, but on the killing technique employed."

Justice Roberts also voted with the majority but went along with Justice Alito in warning that laws regulating video games might be necessary since it is questionable whether new interactive electronic games belong in the same category as traditional “speech”. They left the door open for future consideration of this issue.

The most bizarre opinion came in the dissent of Justice Thomas who gave a long lecture on American history which argued that what we call freedom of speech today is not what was originally intended. His position was that freedom of speech never applied to children. Since children cannot buy alcohol, firearms, pornography, or cigarettes, why not regulate their videogames as well.

The best opinion by far was the dissent of Justice Breyer. He did a thorough analysis of all the issues and even cited sixty research publications in scientific journals to support his opposition to VGV. He cited the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Psychological

Association, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Psychiatric Association, but he did not cite ISRA.... Here is one of his more juicy excerpts:

“What sense does it make to forbid selling to a 13-year-old boy a magazine with an image of a nude woman, while protecting a sale to that 13-year-old of an interactive video game in which he actively, but virtually, binds and gags the woman, then tortures and kills her? What kind of First Amendment would permit the government to protect children by restricting sales of that extremely violent video game *only* when the woman—bound, gagged, tortured, and killed—is also topless?”

### **The Video Game Violence Advocates Swing into Action**

The video game industry was overjoyed. (About 300 million video games were sold in 2009 with revenues of over \$21 billion.) The VGV story was a big news item everywhere for a few weeks, and the pro-VGV group was ready. Within a few days Op-Ed articles appeared in many newspapers throughout the country celebrating the victory and labeling the scientific research as hopelessly flawed. Most major newspapers also ran editorials concluding that it was a triumph for freedom of speech and all those scary studies about media violence have been proved wrong.

On the same day that the decision was announced (June 27) the *NYTimes* published an Op-Ed by Cheryl Olson. Obviously this was pre-arranged and probably written before the decision was made public. Her article was called “It’s Perverse but it’s also Pretend” and she made her usual pitch that media violence is only harmless pretend violence. Olson was quick to use this case to promote her book, *Grand*

*Theft Childhood*. This is a trade book meant for popular audiences rather than for scholars. She professes to be an expert but has only four publications of her own to cite (only one appears to involve actual research). She has worked with Ferguson so her opinions may come from him rather than from research. (An APA journalist reported that she admitted never even reading the lengthy meta-analysis published in *Psych. Bulletin* by Craig Anderson and his colleagues.) I happened to hear Olson in a national radio interview on the Sirius Radio channel called “Doctor Radio”. The cozy chat comforted parents and told them not to worry about media violence. I contacted the producers of this program to ask them to present the other point of view but they didn’t even have the courtesy to answer.

It was no surprise that the *NYTimes* ran Olson’s Op-Ed given their past history of publishing articles presenting only one point of view on this topic. Some will remember a few years back when they published not one but two Op-Ed pieces by free lance writer Richard Rhodes. Rhodes, with no credentials of any kind on this subject, ridiculed scientific research on media violence. At the time I mentioned this to Rowell Huesmann, indeed an expert on this topic. He submitted a fine article but the *Times* refused to publish it.

At the same time, if you looked carefully, there were some signs of restraint. The *New York Times*, for example never editorialized on the topic and some who praised the verdict were careful to add that the video games were disgusting. And the *Times* did publish an Op-Ed article by Joel Bakan “The kids are not all right” (August 22, 2011). Bakan is a law professor who argues that children’s welfare is being trumped by corporate interests. He has written a book *Childhood Under Siege* which has some sections devoted to media violence. Bakan seems to agree with

California state senator Leland Lee who wrote the original California Law. After the decision, Lee was quoted as saying “the Supreme Court once again put the interests of corporate America before the interests of our children.... It is simply wrong that the video game industry can be allowed to put their profit margins over the rights of parents and the well-being of children”.

I wrote Op-Ed articles for the *LATimes*, *San Francisco Examiner*, and *Washington Post*, all rejected. (Brad Bushman told me that some of his submissions were also rejected.) Karen Dill had some success with interviews and commentary as did Douglas Gentile and Craig Anderson. Deana Pollard Sacks had a nice Op-Ed in the *Houston Chronicle* and is working on some articles from the legal point of view. But overall most of the press and the commentary ignored or belittled the scientific research.

### Casualties

There are a lot of victims in this case. The first and foremost of course are the children who will now have free access to the most gruesome videos where killing and torture are presented as fun games. Children can now buy *RapeLay*, a fun-filled game where children will earn points for raping and torturing a mother and her two daughters. Or, kids can go buy *Columbine Massacre* and join in the schoolyard killings! For more fun they can be the assassin and shoot bullets through the head of John F. Kennedy. Who knows what the deranged people in the video industry will come up with now that they have the law on their side?

Another victim is ISRA, the Society. Under “mission statement” on their website it tells everyone about our goals and purposes:

**The International Society for Research on Aggression is the only interdisciplinary and international organization dedicated to the dissemination of information regarding the causes and consequences of, and solution to, aggressive behavior, in all of its forms and contexts.**

ISRA had a grand opportunity but we decided to pass. The outcome may not have been different but the society failed to get recognition for the hard work done by its members. Those who toiled on their own deserve congratulations.

Another casualty in this case is science itself. It is frustrating that highly skilled researchers find many difficulties when trying to communicate with the public and the media. It is disturbing to see lawyers, judges, politicians, newspaper editors/reporters, and the public ignore, misunderstand, and distort scientific research. Perhaps this is part of a broader climate of anti-intellectualism which makes people suspicious of facts or lets them tolerate the manipulation of facts. Why do so many believe in horoscopes but reject facts about evolution or climate change? And why are people so critical of science yet they uncritically accept personal validation as an avenue to truth? How many times have you seen an article ignore the research and instead focuses on someone whose mind is made up because they watched media violence and never ended up in jail?

### What’s Next?

There are still many who think this case could be better handled if it were brought up again. This would mean new legal tactics that avoid challenging the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment directly, and a better presentation of the scientific research. It would mean closer collaboration between scientists and the legal profession, and better media savvy by



both. In the previous rounds, the science was not always well-presented and the case suffered because evidence after 2008 (the first round in the courts) could not be directly introduced. I think the researchers are now better organized and future advocates will do a better job of handling the tactics of the entertainment industry. With two justices already opposed to VGV, three liberal justices perhaps willing to listen, and two justices interested in making a distinction between traditional speech and

interactive electronic media, the case still has possibilities.

I have been in touch with the Chief of Staff for State Senator Leland Lee who is seeking the advice of Justice Breyer. Senator Lee is exploring possibilities with the state attorney general and may wish to set up a meeting with ISRA. If there is a next time, hopefully we will be better organized and better prepared. Stay tuned.

## Conference Announcements

### **The 6th CICA-STR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGGRESSION, VIOLENCE, AND TERRORISM**

will be held at **Burgas, Black Sea Cost (Bulgaria),**  
from **8 to 11 September 2012.**

Call for papers deadline: 30th April 2012  
Early bird registration before 30th May 2012  
see: <http://www.cicainternational.org/CICAinternational>

For more information contact the local organizer:

Prof. Tatyana Dronzina  
Political Science Department  
St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia  
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Please send emails with Cc to:  
[mramirez@med.ucm.es](mailto:mramirez@med.ucm.es)  
[malgorzata.kossowska@uj.edu.pl](mailto:malgorzata.kossowska@uj.edu.pl)

For more information and registration go to the conference website:

<http://www.conference2012-STR.eu/>

## **The corporate takeover of childhood: Who's paying the price? The 3rd Australian Conference on Children and the Media**

**Friday 9 March 2012, 9am - 5pm**  
Telstra 242 Conference Centre  
242 Exhibition Street (cnr Lonsdale St)  
**MELBOURNE**

Our society has many ways of convincing children that their happiness, and their very identity, depend on what they buy and what they own. The evidence shows that consumerism doesn't make children happier or healthier. This raises the question: How can we make sure healthy child development is given due consideration in exploitative commercial environments? This conference will explore the issues, review the research and discuss possible remedies.

- Prof Stephen Kline (author Globesity): Fast Food/Sluggish Kids: Researching media-saturated domesticity
- Jane Caro (the Gruen Planet): Industry perspectives on advertising and marketing to children
- Prof Rob Moodie: Advertising to death: The promotion of unhealthy behaviours
- Prof Elizabeth Handsley: How well does the law protect children from commercialism?
- Prof Douglas Gentile: Recent research on video game addiction; what factors make games more addictive?
- Dr Wayne Warburton (author Growing up fast and furious): What effects do narratives in advertising have on children?
- Commissioner Sarah Court: The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's role in protecting children
- Prof Sharon Beder (author This little kiddy went to market): The corporate capture of childhood
- Dr Wendy Varney: Marketing toys to children
- Dr C Glenn Cupit: How should parents and communities respond?
- Julie Gale (Kf2bK): Being a child in a commercialised world

Chaired by Prof Alan Hayes, Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies

### **Registration:**

Early Bird to Jan 16 - \$220 (ARACY members \$200)

Full registration (Jan 17 to Mar 9) \$275 (ARACY members \$250)

Fulltime Student /Concession \$130 (to obtain this concession contact [admin@youngmedia.org.au](mailto:admin@youngmedia.org.au))

**Book online at <http://www.trybooking.com/BAIY>**

NOTE: ARACY membership is free. Phone 02 6248 2400 to become an ARACY member.

Existing ARACY members should phone this number to obtain the discount promotion code.

For more information, contact [admin@youngmedia.org.au](mailto:admin@youngmedia.org.au) or Phone 08 8376 2111

**HELP SPREAD THE WORD. PLEASE FORWARD THIS NOTICE TO YOUR NETWORKS**

— *Call for Participation* —  
**XVII. Workshop Aggression**  
**University of Luxembourg**  
**July 15 to 17, 2012**



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/lara604/763751384/sizes/o/in/photostream/>

Dear Colleagues,

We proudly announce the **XVII. Workshop Aggression** of German-speaking aggression researchers at the University of Luxembourg from **Sunday, July 15 to Tuesday, July 17, 2012**.

**Scientific Program – Call for Papers**

This year's Workshop will be a pre-conference to the **XX<sup>th</sup> ISRA World Meeting** in Luxembourg (July, 17-21; <http://isra.uni.lu>; see this bulletin). The conference language will be English. The Workshop aims at bringing together scholars from different disciplines involved in aggression research. Starting as an entirely German-speaking event, the Workshop has increasingly attracted international researchers in recent years. Due to the workshop nature of the pre-conference, young researchers are given the unique opportunity to discuss their approaches with experts in the field. This

includes presenting and discussing recent ideas and preliminary findings as well as work-in-progress.

**Main Conference Topic**

The main topic of this year's Workshop Aggression will be "**Aggression and Violence in children and adolescents**". Papers related to the main topic of the workshop are especially welcome. However, we also encourage submissions from all other fields of aggression research.

**Call for Papers – Important Dates**

Abstracts for **symposia, oral presentations** or **posters** may be submitted until

**April 30, 2012**

via the workshop website:

<http://workshop-aggression.uni.lu>.

There will be **special discount rates** for attendees of the Workshop Aggression, who also plan to attend the following ISRA World Meeting! (More information on discount rates coming soon.)

For further questions, please contact the organizing team:

[workshop-aggression@uni.lu](mailto:workshop-aggression@uni.lu)

We are looking forward to welcoming you in Luxembourg in July!

The organizing team:

Prof. Dr. Georges Steffgen  
Dr. André Melzer  
Dr. Sophie Recchia  
Dipl. Psych. Christian Happ

**PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENTS**  
**Books Recently Published by ISRA Members**

J. Martín Ramírez has been the guest editor of two special hot topic issues on aggression:

(1) **Cultural Issues in Research of Aggression.** *The Open Psychology Journal*

ISSN: 1874-3501 (2011)

<http://www.benthamscience.com/open/topsyj/openaccess2.htm>

(2) **Aggression and Crime.** *The Open Criminology Journal* (in press)

This space is reserved for YOU!

**Have you recently published a book?**

**Are you about to launch a new book?**

Why not share this information with all other ISRA members who might be more than interested to read or recommend it to colleagues and students?

If you would like to see an advertisement for your book in the next *Bulletin* in June 2012, please contact Eric Dubow: [edubow@bgsu.edu](mailto:edubow@bgsu.edu)



## THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH ON AGGRESSION

*Founded in 1972*

### ISRA: an Interdisciplinary Society

*ISRA*, the International Society for Research on Aggression, founded in 1972, is an international interdisciplinary, organization dedicated to the study and dissemination of information on the causes and consequences of aggressive behavior and violence in all of its forms and contexts.

### The Social Burden of Violence

The human capacity for aggressiveness and violence inflicts a considerable burden on society. Obviously, it can lead to death and immediate physical injury, but it also creates long-term physical and emotional disabilities. In addition, violence has a profound effect on those who witness it, such as the families and communities of the victims. Moreover, it impairs the ability of communities to address important public health issues, such as infectious diseases, malnutrition, urban decay, and environmental hazards. Violence and aggression often prevents the delivery of critical public services, such as emergency management and education. Such effects on society tend to exacerbate the very adverse social conditions that promote aggression, facilitating a vicious circle, with violence as a crucial factor.

*home page: [www.israsociety.com](http://www.israsociety.com)*

### ISRA's Core Mission

Effectively addressing violence and aggression, whether it be child abuse, domestic violence, homicide, terrorism, sexual violence, or civil wars, requires a sustained focus by international scientists. *ISRA's principal mission* since 1972 is to show that aggression and violence, as well as alternative ways to resolve conflicts, can be successfully studied using scientific methods.

### Members, Meetings and Media

- *ISRA* members gather for *World Meetings* every other year on alternating continents.
- All members receive *Aggressive Behavior* the official journal of ISRA at a discount.
- Members receive the *ISRA E-Bulletin*.

### From Understanding to Solutions

Finding solutions to the pervasive consequences of aggression, requires a multidisciplinary approach. To understand the complex causes, our research addresses brain and other physical processes that underlie the human capacity for violence and the psychological processes that facilitate violent actions. Strategies providing alternatives to violence are studied together with the social factors that serve to promote or prevent violent behavior. Importantly, students of aggression studies are increasingly moving beyond the simple awareness of new results in other disciplines, to develop important research approaches that span multiple disciplines. As a result, novel areas of synergy and convergence between different disciplines and methodologies emerge. *ISRA meetings* and media provide the forum and the multidisciplinary audience.

Join ISRA & Turn page! ►

## A Multidisciplinary Society

**ISRA** is home to virtually all scientific disciplines interested in aggression and violence, such as psychology, neuroscience, anthropology, animal behavior, endocrinology, primatology, psychiatry, genetics, pharmacology, sociology, and criminology. Joining **ISRA** will help you to reach the right audience for your own research. Its meetings provide an optimal forum to learn about novel concepts and advances in other fields. Members enjoy reduced registration fees at **ISRA meetings**.

## Awards

- Each World Meeting the **John Paul Scott Award** is presented to a scientist with a distinguished lifetime contribution to aggression research.
- **Presentation Awards** are granted to young scientists for excellence in presentation of original research to a multidisciplinary audience.

## The ISRA Logo

The ISRA logo reflects our intention to advance the understanding of a deeply rooted behavior. The humanoid figure in the logo was modified from a petrograph called "the warrior" on the Minnesota-Ontario border<sup>1)</sup>. The figure seems to express the ambivalent human attitude towards aggression. The figure faces us, a spear in its left hand, reflecting potential to kill. The tip of the spear points downwards, so the weapon is not about to be thrown. The right hand is up and open, a stop-signal in many cultures, and often a signal of peaceful intent. The heart-shaped body expresses force and human's emotional nature.

<sup>1)</sup> M Furtman, *Magic on the rocks* (2000) ISBN: 0-916691-02-0

Home page: [www.israsociety.com](http://www.israsociety.com)

## Membership

ISRA has four kinds of members:

- **Fellows** are scientists working in any biological, psychological or social science on problems of aggression.
- **Associates** are scientists or professionals supportive of the Society's goals but who are not actively engaged in aggression research.
- **Student members** are graduate students nominated by a Fellow of the Society.
- **Life Fellows** are chosen on a significant lifetime record in aggression research.

## Joining ISRA

In order to join the society, please send a CV to:

Prof Michael Potegal  
Executive Secretary ISRA  
MMC 486  
420 Delaware St SE  
Minneapolis MN 55455

E-Mail: [poteg001@umn.edu](mailto:poteg001@umn.edu)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Office \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Home \_\_\_\_\_

Dues including *Aggressive Behavior* subscription

Fellow 60\$  Associate 60\$  Student 30\$

*These are 2010 rates*

Updated Information see *ISRA home page*.

**Official Journal: *Aggressive Behavior***  
[www.interscience.wiley.com](http://www.interscience.wiley.com)