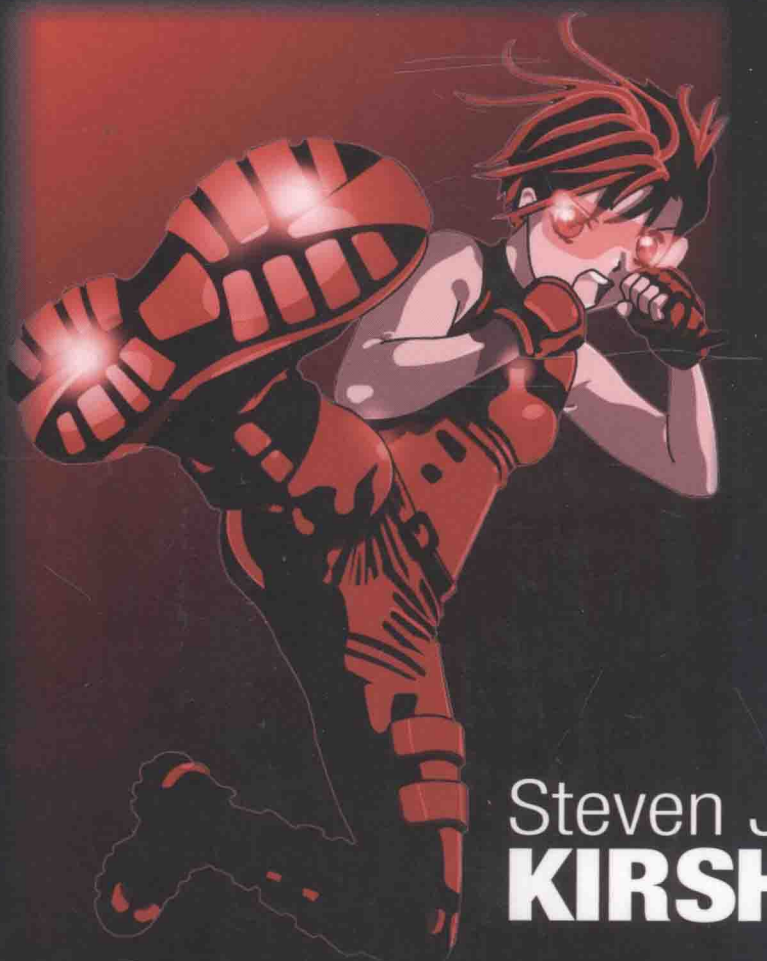
CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, AND MEDIA VIOLENCE

A Critical Look at the Research



Steven J. KIRSH

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A Critical Look at the Research

Steven J.
KIRSH
SUNY - Geneseo

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Sage Publications, Inc.
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Preface

Children, Adolescents and Media Violence: A Critical Look at the Research provides a comprehensive review and critique of the research on media violence as it relates to children and adolescents. Thus, throughout the book, theories and research are evaluated from a developmental perspective. This perspective helps demonstrate the effects of media violence on youth as a function of age. More importantly, a developmental analysis of the research allows for identification of age-related "holes" in the literature. In fact, I think you will be surprised to find that across development, and for certain types of violent media (e.g., video games, music), very little research exists.

In each chapter, methodological and statistical concepts are introduced within the context of research. I do this for several reasons: first, it is my belief that methodological and statistical concepts are easier to grasp when introduced alongside an interesting study. Second, understanding such concepts is crucial in the analytical evaluation and understanding of any given study. Third, the relatively slow introduction of methodological and statistical concepts allows the reader to digest the material and apply the new understanding to studies as they are presented in each chapter. Finally, understanding research methodology so that one can be a *critical* consumer of research is a process that requires repetition.

The book is divided into three major sections: Understanding Aggression, Effects of Specific Forms of Violent Media on Youth, and Media Violence and the Concept of Risk. The first section places media violence in the context of aggression. Here, aggression is defined, theories of aggression are laid out and critiqued, the development of aggressive behavior is described, and the patterns of and reasons for violent media consumption are discussed. The second section begins with a discussion and review of the literature addressing the contention that violent media is actually good for youth. Once this contention has been disavowed, I evaluate the extant body of empirical research addressing the effects of the different types of violent

media (e.g., video games, television) on children and adolescents. The third section addresses violent media consumption from a risk factor perspective. To understand the relative risk associated with violent media consumption, non-media-related risk factors for aggression in youth are reviewed. Subsequently, the relative risk associated with media violence exposure is addressed. Moreover, techniques for reducing the negative effects of violent media consumption are discussed. This section ends with a review and discussion of governmental and self-regulatory policies resulting from the perceived and actual threat of media violence consumption. Finally, because those interested in the effects of violent media on youth may also be interested in the effects of nonviolent media on youth, the last chapter of this book addresses the potential benefits and harm associated with nonviolent media consumption.

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