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March 13, 2018

Video Games and Violence

There is a debate on whether or not playing video games causes violence in children and teenagers. Some people believe that violence in video games causes people to act more violent. On the other hand, there are those that say state video games do not have an effect on someone's personality. It is true that video games do contain more graphic violence, but there is a line between reality and games. Most people can make that distinction and video games do not affect their behavior. Individuals who are violent usually have those tendencies with or without video games. Video games do not cause people to be violent, and the games should not be held responsible if someone commits a violent act. The anti-social behavior usually affects all aspects of a person's life and video games do not cause it. Rather, it is caused by a mental disorder or trauma, and video games are not related to their issues. Video games are just a form of entertainment and do not cause increased aggression because people know the difference between fantasy and reality.

Video games are often the scapegoat for violence because they are associated with anti-social activity. There is a stereotype that people who play video games are not good at socializing, and they tend to isolate themselves from society. Video games consume these people's lives, and they have difficulty living in the real world. While this type of person does exist, it is not the standard rule for people who play video games. Players are mainly extroverted people who casually play video games and whose daily lives are not affected by them. Society

may be looking for a way to explain aggression and anti-social behavior, so they look at video games for an explanation. Video games do bring out a competitive spirit in people, but it is no less as strong that when the feeling is caused by playing sports or trying to get a promotion at work. Another form of aggression can happen when people are not able to play video games. Zoe Kleinman writes "A study released by the Oxford Internet Institute last year suggested frustration at being unable to play a game was more likely to bring out aggressive behaviour than the content of the game itself." Although it is not healthy to get angry for not being able to play a game, the content in the game does not cause violence. Video games are a good channel for getting out negative feelings. People who are feeling angry can use the game to release their emotions instead of taking their aggression out on someone else. Video games are just the latest in a long line of scapegoats to explain violent behavior.

Instead of looking at the internal mental and situation issues that could cause violent behavior, society likes to blame cultural trends. Mental illness has always been treated as taboo, so it was easier for people to blame other factors instead of finding the truth behind the violence. Greg Toppo states the connection between violent media and violent behavior in participants is "like a barnacle clinging to a hull, it's not easily dislodged." He explains that the idea to blame media for maladjusted people dates to the Victorian era, when "educators, tastemakers and clergymen began criticizing what was then a fairly raucous popular culture." In that time, violent and sex-filled dime novels and penny-dreadful magazines were very popular among the public. However, socially upstanding publications, like *Harper's* and the *Atlantic Monthly* denounced these "low-class" media for lowering the moral standards of the public.

Like the penny-dreadful magazines, video games are the modern equivalent for allotting blame when violent acts occur. Society likes to use external factors to explain way aggression or

sexual deviancy. A more reasonable approach would be to explore psychological reasons behind violence and aggression. People are not likely to do this because that would mean people admitting that their child or teenager has a mental illness. Since many of these children isolate themselves from society by playing video games, it is easy to blame violent outbursts on this group of individuals and the games they play. They are not socialized properly and therefore, they are more prone to violence. However, this is only putting a mask over a deeper problem with psychological roots. Video games do have increased violence, but they are not causing aggression.

Popular video games like *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Call of Duty* do contain graphic violence and sex. *Grand Theft Auto*, in particular, glamorizes violence and equates it with power. The video game is rated for mature game players, and it is not advised that young children play the game. Some parents claimed that the violence in the video game was causing their children to act out aggressively. However, a study by Ben DeVane and Kurt D. Squire found that children and teenagers playing the game had less aggressive behavior. The reason is that the violence in the game is not shaping the children, but instead, the children are shaping the game with their personal definitions and standards for conduct. DeVane and Squire state that "Players bring their own experience and knowledge to a game rather than passively receiving the games' images and content" (282). The players are not being influenced by the content in the game because they are in charge of what happens in the game. Furthermore, players are capable of distinguishing between reality and fantasy. Most players realize that stealing a car or hurting someone in real life would lead to serious consequences. Children and teenagers may not always understand the meaning behind the violence, but they understand that it has consequences. Video games are an

outlet for their feelings and a way to live in a fantasy world for a short time. Studies have yet to conclude whether or not video games are harmful to young people.

A weak study by the American Psychological Association conducted a few years ago said that video games did not cause an increase in violence in children. The study caused a backlash and multiple rebuttals from other psychologists. The evidence that was presented did not have solid proof and had weak correlations between video games and violence. More studies are coming out about the issue, and they are finding that it is hard to find a definitive conclusion about the issue. There are too many factors that influence youths that play video games that may have nothing to do with the game itself. According to Cheryl K. Olson, "The finding that many children use games for emotional regulation—to help them relax, to forget problems, or to feel less lonely—deserves further study" (82). The suggestion that further studies are needed is further evidence that there is no proof that video games cause violence. Video games, in general, are good for increasing reasoning and logic skills, reflexes, and creative thinking. They also reduce stress and anxiety levels among adolescents. Video games are not causing increased violence in aggression because most people can distinguish between the game and reality. Multiple studies are not coming up with the evidence that opponents against violence video games need to stop them.

Video games are an easy way to attribute increased aggression and violence among children and teenagers. Historically, external factors have always been to blame for deviant behavior instead of the psychological causes behind these issues. Mental illness has traditionally been taboo, and that attitude has not entirely left society. Various studies have been inconclusive or negative when it comes to proving whether or not video games cause violence. Most adolescent use video games to relax and channel their negative feelings into the game. The

ability of people to know the difference between the game and real-life lessens the influence of video games on people and does not cause increased violence.



Works Cited

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