
The Influence of Video Game Violence on Children

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A topic that has left many in the dark concerning their own children's safety seems to reappear in news tabloids from time to time. Coincidentally, video game violence has been considered as a negative influence concerning childhood development. However, the pendulum swings both ways. On one side of the argument, Cheryl K. Olson of The New York Times reports, "In fact, such games (in moderation) may actually have some positive effects on developing minds" (Olson A23). On the other hand, Karen Becker-Olsen and Patricia Norberg of Journal of Advertising have stated:

Thomas et al. (1977) also suggest that desensitization occurs when an initial arousal to violent stimuli is reduced and thus changes an individual's present internal state. Likewise, systematic desensitization has been shown to reduce avoidance behavior, and when there is no direct adverse consequence of fear-provoking behavior, there is an opportunity for fear extinction (Olsen & Norberg 84)

With no certainty with who may or may not be right, evidence over the negative effects of video game violence outweighs the positive. Desensitization occurs when overexposure to certain stimuli causes the senses to behave the same, regardless of the situation. For example, children who may spend days at a time playing video games containing graphic material, could become affected, where violence in the media or reality does not provoke a response.

Furthermore, Marilyn Larkin discusses negative side effects of violent video game exposure to the amygdala, a gland in the brain responsible for anxiety and responses to fear-inducing situations. She states:

The amygdala is not just there to mediate fear and anxiety, as many people think. It's a fundamental learning device that mediates associations between stimuli and reinforcers, regardless of whether they're nice or nasty, and thereby the impact of these conditioned stimuli on behaviour in the future (Larkin 268)

Not only does the amygdala serve as a receptor to fear and anxiety, but the gland also contributes to conditioned learning patterns as well. Children who fall into a pattern of neglecting homework and daily tasks may hinder their social and educational development over time. Several authors of Nature Reviews Neuroscience have reported:

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At the same time, it should be noted that the daily time spent playing video games in school-age children has been shown to be inversely correlated with academic achievement, arguably because time spent playing video games is time stolen from reading and curriculum-related academic study (Bavelier, Gentile, Green, Han, Merzenich, Renshaw 763)

While some children may find time to balance schoolwork and playing video games, most would rather choose the latter. Moreover, children who have become desensitized to video game violence may choose to neglect other necessities without fear of future repercussions.

In an attempt to counter these arguments, Cheryl K. Olson makes ludicrous statements such as, "Many people assume that video game violence is consistently and unspeakably awful, that little Jacob spends most afternoons torturing victims to death. But these people haven't played many video games" (Olson A23). Nobody has made the assumption that video games containing violent material would cause children to behave in a psychopathic manner. In fact, most psychoses have been genetically predisposed, regardless of the environment one surrounds themselves with. She continues her argument stating:

But more important, the state's case was built on assumptions — that violent games cause children psychological or neurological harm and make them more aggressive and likely to harm other people — that are not supported by evidence. (Olson A23)

As previously stated, numerous studies conducted as far back as the 1970s, have shown that the amygdala does become affected over time. Sure, one could make the choice to turn off the game if he or she feels afflicted, but the choice left to most almost always leads to a continuation of playing the game, regardless of the amount of fear or aggression felt. Also, desensitization towards certain external stimuli over time has been researched and confirmed. Plenty of evidence suggests video game violence negatively affects the personality and social development of children.

Rightfully so, personal debate makes us human. We become passionate about subjects we believe should be defended and stand behind topics based on our own common knowledge and morale. We must not turn a blind eye away from this topic. The controversy will not disappear by itself. However, by interacting with our children more and exposing them to less media-influenced entertainment in an effort to expand what they find as sentimental, we can help reestablish what they find important and morally justified.

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