

The Link Between Violent Video Games and Real World Violence

AP Seminar 2019

Word Count: 2,198

Introduction

In the world today the video game industry has taken over the globe as is especially noticeable in our nation. Currently video games and gaming consoles can be found in homes worldwide with their roots deep in our past. Dating back to 1967 there was the invention of a multi-program video game system to be played on a television known as "The Brown Box" (History). This invention by Ralph Baer was licensed to Magnavox and then sold as the first gaming console in 1972 as the Odyssey (History). This dubbed the name 'Father of Video Games' to Baer as his invention would form the road for all the video game systems that would follow. Eventually as video games evolved so did the violent genre of them. With the implementation of such games welcomes the introduction of a problem. That problem is whether these games directly influence violence in real life. These games have been seen as almost simulations for violent activities therefore criticized and blamed for being a link to violence. But many people believe that this is false causing widespread debate about the topic. There are millions of gamers but not all of them enact violently in the real world. This begs for a solution that breaks the link between entertainment and real world violence.

Social Behavior

Video games has always been known for being influential to avid gamers causing certain social behaviors commonly isolation and being antisocial. But some believe that it can also cause other effects that are more violent. According to Assistant Professor Adrienne Ivory and Associate Professor Christine Kaestle, who both share expertise in social behavior, have looked into the effects of profanity in first- person shooter games and have found interesting results (Ivory & Kaestle). They state that after extensive body research, "...violent video games can

increase aggressive behaviors, thoughts and feelings...” (Ivory & Kaestle). With actual evidential proof this highlights that video games are a problem and not good for our social health. These effects are overlooked because people don’t think that a game can cause people to act in such ways. Also Gwen Dewar who has done research in social learning states that “... kids who spent more time playing violent video games showed fewer prosocial traits...”. This ultimately would therefore lead them to act more hostile to others (Dewar). Once again this reveals negative effects of violent video games and why they are responsible for violent acts. Since these games are played for so long and are in a violent genre these periods of exposure to such violence inevitable formulates a violent mindset. People begin to pick up and hold on to what they are continuously playing. Then according to Catharine Paddock she states that addiction to video games “...appears to lead to poorer grades in school and serious psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, and social phobia...” (Paddock). These effects overall contribute to the fact that video games tarnish one’s social presence. This as stated is due to video game addiction but imagine if it were violent video games. The effects can most likely be foreseen as much more negative.

President Trump

The debate on video games has also been granted attention from the leader of our nation in President Donald Trump. According to Jamie Ducharme who covers all aspects of health states that “...Trump has blamed video games in recent weeks for making kids more violent, as have some of the guests he invited to the meeting.” (Ducharme). This reveals that the leader of our nation views video games as the problem. As our leader he has the power to make many others view it that way as well. With other guests in agreement to his view of video games there

is possibility that there will be change in the video game industry. Also according to Susan Scutti a Health and Medical Writer for CNN she writes that Trump had said "I'm hearing more and more people saying the level of violence on video games is really shaping young people's thoughts..." (Scutti). This statement reinforces Trump's belief that the video game violence and real violence link is present. Since so much of our youth play video games, it's not difficult to see why Trump feels this way. The influences of video games are much stronger on those that are less experienced in life, the youth. They are more susceptible to act out irrational and violent behaviors that the President believes will soon happen. Then according to Maya Salam and Liam Stack both reporters for The New York Times discuss that Trump said "...we have to do something about maybe what they're seeing and how they're seeing it" (Salam & Stack). Trump said this in a gathering a lawmakers shows that he wants something done to better suit the young people. He strongly believes that the influences of violence in video games causes the young to grow into a naturally hostile mindset. This therefore leads to violent attacks that could have been prevented if the suspect wasn't exposed to such violence at a young age.

Anders Breivik

Nowadays video games are becoming more and more realistic. This realism can prove to be negative as these video games can be viewed as simulations of real life actions. An example is a school shooting game discussed by Casey Quackenbush a reporter at Time Magazine. He states that the game "...allowed players to assume the role a school shooter..." and that it "...is being pulled following harsh criticism from families of victims and survivors of mass shootings." (Quackenbush). The simple fact that an idea like this was made into a game is horrifying and disgusting. It is basically asking for someone to play the game and eventually act it out in real

life making it a school shooting trainer. This idea of video game trainers can be seen with the mass murderer Anders Breivik. According to John D. Sutter a Senior Investigative Reporter for CNN he states the Breivik testified that "...he played video games as a way to train for a shooting spree that killed 77 people..." (Sutter). The game that he claimed to have trained on was "Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2" which is a first- person shooting game (Sutter). The ability to train on a game highlights it's realism compared to actual reality. It's no longer a game now it can be classified as a simulation. Even worse was that Breivik had an incurable medical condition. According to Asne Seierstad a Freelance Journalist and Writer of The New York Times she states the Breivik "...was diagnosed with a narcissistic personality disorder (Seierstad)." If he was not able to acquire violent video games he would have not been able to prepare for mass killings. The availability of these games to people that should not have them is need of change, because it is very easy for an ill person to train on a game meant for entertainment currently.

Gaming Can Solve Problems

On the other hand however, many people side with video games as beneficial and can help us advance into the future. A key figure in this belief is Jane McGonigal an American Game Designer and Author that wants to use video games into making a change in the real world. In her TED Talk she asks a very interesting question which was "Games like World of Warcraft give players the means to save worlds, and incentive to learn the habits of heroes. What if we could harness this gamer power to solve real-world problems (McGonigal)?" This question presents video games in a positive way as we've only thought of them as entertainment. This gives video games a different purpose that can prove to be valuable to us and our future. According to Lawrence Susskind a Professor and Ella Kim a PhD Candidate both from

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, they state that "...serious games can prepare citizens and officials to participate in science-based problem-solving (Susskind & Kim)." This then changes the focus from the negative effects of games into how we can make them better or positive. An example is by incorporating real world problems into video games. According to John Tierney an American Journalist and Author for The New York Times he states how McGonigal "...designed Cruel 2 B Kind, a game in which players advance by being nice to strangers in public places, and which has been played in more than 50 cities on 4 continents (Tierney)." A game like this influences more social behavior that helps us interact with one another rather than causing hostility and aggression. If we can get more games like this rather than violent ones, we give actual purpose to our games as well as spread positive behavior.

Economy

If we were to follow through with such a plan however who knows how the economy will be impacted. According to the Entertainment Software Association, which is the trade association of the video game industry in the United States, they state that 9 is the "Number of computer and/or video games sold on average every second of everyday..."(ESA). Numbers like that is what makes entertainment software one of the fastest growing industries in our nation's economy. With games rapidly being created and sold this welcomes the arrival of many jobs for people. According to Chris Morris a CNBC Writer specializing in video games and consumer electronics he states that "...there are more than 32,000 people directly employed by publishers and developers in 34 states (Morris)." With video games holding such a high rank in our economy it's only right for the jobs to match. But the games out currently are what's making all this money, which includes all the violent ones. According to Johnny Wood a Writer for the

World Economic Forum states that “Games like Fortnite, the world’s biggest selling video game, incorporate an addictive mix of action, adventure and lifelike graphics(Wood).” This highlights that if we change the games we make we largely risk the video game industry as it will most likely crash and bring our economy with it. Fortnite which is the best selling video game involves killing others to win in their most popular mode, Battle Royale. Removing all these violent video games with real world substitutes won’t feel as amusing and do more harm than good.

Research Studies

When debates such as ones like this arise it’s only right that people begin to test whether the link is real or not. To do so they begin conducting countless studies to find some kind of proof or evidence to point in the correct direction. According to Ollie Barder, a Gaming and Pop Culture Writer, he states that “...all the counter studies that actually show that playing video games has clear cognitive benefits, so it really is about time that video games were no longer demonized as the cause for all of society’s woes and accepted for what they are(Barder).” Within this study the link is viewed as false. Instead the focus is shifted to why we always decide to blame video games for violence influences and nothing else. Video games are always looked at as a waste of time and not beneficial which isn’t true. We just aren’t willing to see them that way. But studies like this are just like stories, there are two sides. According to Mike Snider a Technology/Business reporter from USA Today says that in an international study “...from 2010 to 2017, found playing violent video games led to increased physical aggression over time (Snider).” Then according to Darcia Narvaez a Professor of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame states that “The greater the experience with violent media, the lower was the

activation of brain areas for thinking, learning, reasoning and emotional control(Narvaez).” Both pieces highlight that the opposite is true. Compared to the previous study these show that violent video games will eventually result in violent behavior. The best way to comprehend it is that the studies aren’t all the same and are all different in a way. Some agree and some disagree meaning that there is no real definite answer based on such studies. The most reasonable conclusion is that we should treat it as a problem so that we eliminate any chance of it being overlooked.

Solution

The big question now is how do we solve this problem. Where do we start on a problem that is part of such a large industry and so easily influential to many people. According to Rebecca Desfosse a Writer specializing in Family and Parenting explains how parents have a role in stopping the link from unfolding (Desfosse). Things like looking for certain cues in behavior, and limiting game time will help kids stay away from growing into a violent nature (Desfosse). But it’s up to the parent to make sure they regulate kids and their video games correctly. Even with that said however, people other than kids play games so what about them. The video game audience is so broad that a solution to fit everyone is difficult to make. They all have flaws such as how not every kid is lucky enough to have a parent or a caring one at that, ultimately leaving the problem still fueled to continue its wrath.

Works Cited

- Barder, Ollie. "New Study Shows That There Is No Link Between Violent Video Games And Aggression In Teenagers." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 16 Feb. 2019, www.forbes.com/sites/olliebarder/2019/02/15/new-study-shows-that-there-is-no-link-between-violent-video-games-and-aggression-in-teenagers/#385264ac328e.
- Desfosse, Rebecca. "How To Handle Violence In Video Games." *Care.com*, 9 June 2017, www.care.com/c/stories/3416/how-to-handle-violence-in-video-games/.
- Dewar, Gwen. "The Effects of Video Games on Social Behavior: Games That Promote Helpfulness." *Parenting Science – The Science of Child-Rearing and Child Development*, www.parentingscience.com/effects-of-video-games-prosocial.html.
- Ducharme, Jamie. "President Trump Has Blamed Video Games for School Shootings. Science Isn't So Sure." *Time.Com*, Mar. 2018, p. 38. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=128410126&site=ehost-live.
- Ivory, AdrienneHolz, and ChristineE. Kaestle. "The Effects of Profanity in Violent Video Games on Players' Hostile Expectations, Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings, and Other Responses." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 57, no. 2, Apr. 2013, pp. 224–241. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/08838151.2013.787078.
- McGonigal, Jane. "Gaming Can Make a Better World." *TED*, www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_gaming_can_make_a_better_world?language=en.
- Morris, Chris. "Video Games Impact the Economy More Than You Think." *CNBC*, CNBC, 10 Aug. 2010, www.cnbc.com/id/38644484.
- Narvaez, Darcia F. "Playing Violent Video Games: Good or Bad?" *Psychology Today*, Sussex

Publishers, 9 Nov. 2010,

www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/moral-landscapes/201011/playing-violent-video-games-good-or-bad.

Paddock, Catharine. "Video Game Addiction Tied To Depression, Social Problems And Poorer Grades In School." *Medical News Today*, MediLexicon International, 17 Jan. 2011, www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/213929.php.

Quackenbush, Casey. "A Video Game Letting Players Simulate a School Shooting Has Been Pulled After Criticism." *Time.Com*, May 2018, p. 1. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=129872772&site=ehost-live.

Salam, Maya, and Liam Stack. "Do Video Games Lead to Mass Shootings? Researchers Say No." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 23 Feb. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/02/23/us/politics/trump-video-games-shootings.html.

Scutti, Susan. "Do Video Games Lead to Violence?" *CNN*, Cable News Network, 22 Feb. 2018, www.cnn.com/2016/07/25/health/video-games-and-violence/index.html.

Seierstad, Asne. "The Anatomy of White Terror." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 18 Mar.2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/03/18/opinion/new-zealand-tarrant-white-supremacist-terror.html.

Snider, Mike. "Study Confirms Link between Violent Video Games and Physical Aggression." *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 2 Oct. 2018, www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2018/10/01/violent-video-games-tie-physical-aggression-confirmed-study/1486188002/.

Susskind, Lawrence, and Ella Kim. "Playing 'Serious Games,' Adults Learn to Solve Thorny

Real-World Problems.” *The Conversation*, 14 Sept. 2018,
theconversation.com/playing-serious-games-adults-learn-to-solve-thorny-real-world-problems-52405.

Sutter, John D. “Norway Mass-Shooting Trial Reopens Debate on Violent Video Games.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 20 Apr. 2012,
www.cnn.com/2012/04/19/tech/gaming-gadgets/games-violence-norway-react/index.html

Tierney, John. “On a Hunt for What Makes Gamers Keep Gaming.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 6 Dec. 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/12/07/science/07tierney.html.

“Video Game History.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 1 Sept. 2017, www.history.com/topics/inventions/history-of-video-games.

“Video Games And The Economy.” *Videogames.procon.org*, Entertainment Software Association, videogames.procon.org/sourcefiles/video-games-and-the-economy.pdf.

Wood, Johnny. “Chart of the Day: US Spending on Video Games Is Now Bigger than the GDP of Bahrain.” *World Economic Forum*,
www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/chart-of-the-day-us-spending-on-video-games-is-now-bigger-than-the-gdp-of-bahrain/.