

The Two Sides of Video Games

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Abstract: With the progress of technology during the 21st century, video games have gradually replaced books and newspapers to become mainstream entertainment for many people. In the face of this emergence, reactions to this type of entertainment vary greatly and opinions surrounding the impacts are often polarized. Many believe that video games impact users negatively, leading to violent behavior and depression. On the contrary, others who support video games believe that players can become averse to violence and reduce stress levels. This research paper elaborates and compares two opposing views through example citation and discussion. The author compares video games to books, illustrates the similarities between the two, and the uniqueness of video games through evidence and demonstration. With supporting evidence, the author suggests that the effects of video game usage are not as negative as some imagine. Moreover, this research paper will illustrate the benefits of playing video games.

Keywords: violence, depression, relaxation, anti-war, impression

Whenever I finish my homework and am ready to reward myself by playing one of my favorite racing games, *Assetto Corsa*, I can hear a slight step outside my bedroom door and realize that I'm about to begin playing another game with my parents called, "cat and mouse." I do not have time to save the record I have just set, and I do not have time to turn off the computer. My parents will walk in and ask very sternly why I am playing video games. I realize that this scenario is not unique to me. I know many teenagers face the same objection to video game use by their parents. Although many of us play only during our spare time to relax after a long day or night of studying, parents are typically unhappy with this activity. Before video games, people read books. For many of those people, video games are viewed to be a negative form of entertainment that can lead to unhealthy psychological effects on its users. Instead of playing games, my parents prefer that I quietly read a book in my bedroom. Reading books are viewed to be a healthy way to relax while learning new information at the same time. Like my parents, many people believe that video games lead to violent behavior or depression. "Beware! Warnings on the link between depression and video game addiction after MRI scans revealed for the first time the potential damage caused to young brains." This was a claim by Charles Hymas, writer for *The Telegraph*. However, are video games so terrible? Many examples and statistics suggest that video games lead to anti-war attitudes and aid in the development of learning. Therefore, how can we employ the benefits of video games to determine their value?

Indeed, it is undeniable that violence exists in some games. According to several researchers, no evidence exists indicating that video games directly cause violent acts. On the contrary, many games can enhance a player's mood or mental health. Because games are a commodity, some extreme game developers will add violent or even anti-human elements to their games for the sake of profit. For example, Philip M. Boffey, a

former deputy editor of the New York Times Editorial Board and a member of two Pulitzer Prize winning teams, has mentioned some examples of violent behavior in games in his article, "Do Violent Video Games Lead to Violence?": "The goal of one game is to rape a mother and her daughter, of another game to rape Native-American women. There is an ethnic cleansing game in which players can choose to gun down African - Americans, Latinos, or Jews." There is no doubt that games like the one in this case are violent and anti-human. When people play games like this, they cannot get anything positive out of the content. According to the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association as Philip M. Boffey demonstrates in his article: "In a policy statement on June 22, 2017, it found "scant evidence" of any causal connection between playing violent video games and actually committing violent activities" and "little evidence" that playing such games "produces violent criminal behavior." In fact, it is difficult for us to conclude that video games are the direct cause of violence, even if extreme violence exists in some games. For example, video games, like movies or cartoons, are visual arts that you can participate in on your own. People learn at an early age to distinguish between art and reality. Some extreme cases do not prove that games cause crime, because a criminal often has many complicated reasons for committing a crime. Average healthy people do not try to imitate The Joker by blowing up hospitals or killing civilians after watching Batman. Therefore, to blame crimes on video game use is to simplify them. Instead, it makes sense to look at other factors such as the living and family environments of the criminals.

Although many people think that video games normalize war, most games keep the content of war within reasonable limits. Within this range, players can enjoy these games while still valuing morality. Moreover, many people become aware of the horrors of war from video games which can lead to opposing war in their subjective consciousness. Through the simulation of war, the games can lead players who have never seen war, to experience how easily war can take away human lives. In many games, players' moral values are cultivated. Keith Stuart, an author and journalist of The Guardian supports this idea by sharing his experience playing Operation Wolf in his article, "Should gamers be accountable for in-game war crimes?" In Operation Wolf, even though Keith plays a soldier whose goal is to kill the enemy, he is still required by the game not to attack civilians. If he shoots civilians instead of enemies, he will eventually kill himself. Many gun-fight games like Operation Wolf have a similar setup; they always keep the content related to killing within reasonable limits. Within this range, players can reduce their pressure, but once beyond the moral scope, players will be severely punished by the game. There is nothing wrong with games taking us through reasonable violence, because human history itself is full of wars. Players are always aware of right and wrong in these shoot-out games within reasonable limits. This is because the rules of the game lead them to a position of ethical rewards. Players will not lose their moral sense in the game but will realize the cruelty of war.

Furthermore, much evidence shows us that games can help people relieve stress. In many games, players can kill monsters for pleasure and gain a sense of achievement. When players kill in a game, it can provide stress relief, rather than promote violence. In the famous Mario Bros series, the goal of the player as Mario is to reach the end and save the princess. In the process, the player must kill many monsters that block the way. As a game for all ages, the killing in Mario Bros is more of an artistic form. When children kill monsters, they do not associate violence with the game. The game is entertaining and relaxing. Similar benefits are found within another popular game, Animal Crossing. As one of the most popular games in 2020, Animal Crossing helps players fulfill the need to socialize during the Coronavirus period. In Animal Crossing, each player will have several neighbors living on the same island. Players can gradually become friends by talking to their animal neighbors daily, or by sharing the fish they catch. After becoming friends, these animal friends will also give back to other players which will lead to a happy and colorful life on the island. Playing games like Animal Crossing is relaxing and can assist in filling the void of social contact caused by the pandemic.

Some studies have indicated that video games may cause mood swings in children. There is no doubt that games as a form of entertainment often contain an element of competition, so children may tend to have some mood swings during the game, and these fluctuations are sometimes negative. Many scientists believe there is a link between gaming and depression. As Charles Hymas, a writer of *The Telegraph*, wrote in his article "Warning over link between depression and video game addiction after MRI scan shows proof": "Dr Louise Theodosiou, a leading adolescent psychiatrist with the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said it was an important study in linking gaming addiction with a rise in depression among the young which has been shown in studies to affect as many as one in four teenagers." It is easy to see why some researchers believe that gaming is a factor in depression. However, is this really the case? In the process of a child becoming an adult, each person will encounter numerous events that trigger their own negative emotions. In the games, children can experience these negative emotions and learn how to control and overcome these negative emotions. According to Peter Gray's article, "Benefits of Play Revealed in Research on Video Gaming", video games can help children better control their negative emotions: "

In play, children learn that they can experience these emotions and can subsequently calm themselves." Although video games can cause some negative mood fluctuations for children, they can better help children adapt to these emotions and overcome them. Games, on the other hand, can act as "emotional teachers" for children.

So far, video game effects are not as negative as some people think. Instead, video games can help people if they are properly screened, just like books. Based on this view, another question naturally arises: Since video games can help people in the right conditions of use, can they be just as beneficial if not more so than reading a book? First, a classic game and a well-reviewed book have one thing in common: they both tell a good story. By carefully observing the people around them and summarizing their own experiences, successful writers can often create a story full of detail. These details give the reader a sense of reality, even if it might be a fantasy novel like, "The Lord of The Rings." Video games, on the other hand, bring people into their stories with their beautiful graphics and immersive background music. For example, in the famous series, *The Witcher*, players can see an almost real world through realistic light and shadow effects and rendering systems. This achievement in graphics gives players a greater sense of immersing themselves in the story and allows *The Witcher* game to reach beyond its original novels globally. Second, based on the story telling, video games can give people more choices in the process of thinking, which is something that people cannot do with books. In the famous PS4 game, *Detroit: Become Human*, the players play the role of an artificial intelligence with an independent personality. In the context of the game, robots, like the players are treated like slaves. They have human intelligence, but not human rights. Players can make different choices to decide the outcome of the game -- surrender to humans or lead a revolution. *Detroit: Become Human* is like a visual novel, except that people can make their own decisions based on the results of their own thinking. By making their own choices, video games can leave a more unique and profound impression on people's minds than books. However, does this mean that video games can replace books? Many video games, such as *Detroit: Become Human*, can spark philosophical thinking among players. With the development of technology, all games will eventually become obsolete. A good game will not be played more than 30 years in most cases. A book may be remembered for ages, even if the author has been dead for thousands of years. When people take notes in the margins of a book, they are contradicting the author's point of view or expressing their approval of the author. These are things that games cannot do.

Although video game effects are still controversial, players can avoid violent content by selecting games reasonably and playing those that promote positive influences. Video games and books come with their own advantages. On the premise of telling a good story, video games can provide players with opportunities to reflect on the content, leaving a deeper impression on them. Overall, if people choose their games reasonably and understand the messaging and rules of each, they will absolutely benefit from playing video games.

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