

Should video game companies take more responsibility for the promotion of violence?

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Introduction

Are the impacts of violent videogames contributing to an increase in aggression and behavioral issues within our youth? The central force of this reflective paper is to examine the positive and negative effects of violence in video games and the ripples they might have on our global communities. I intend to discover what content video game companies are obligated to limit and restrict and determine if more action should be taken. This ethical dilemma is important to me due to the personal experience of my younger brother becoming essentially addicted to violent video games. I have deduced that his behavioral issues might stem from his countless hours of playing video games with violent themes. I believe it is very important to ensure that violent content is being restricted to a certain extent, especially for any immature audiences. My career pathway is STEM which consists of science, technology, engineering, and math. STEM is widely used in the practice of creating and designing video games. This issue is relevant to my career pathway because as a developer of any product, it is important to consider all the ethical results relating to whatever it is that you are producing. Should video game companies take more responsibility for the promotion of violence? The methodology I will use to answer my ethical dilemma will be to research many valid articles and databases to acquire knowledge and perspectives that will allow me to answer and understand my ethical dilemma.

The Issue in Context

A study by Variety indicates that even though this issue is important on a global scale, the effects are most visible in the United States due to the integrated videogame culture with nearly 70% of Americans playing video games, and a vast amount of those people absorbing violent video game content. Another newsletter from Healthline claims, “More than 90 percent of kids play video games, and more than 90 percent of games rated E10+ or above contain violence.” This demonstrates how prevalent videogames are in American society and to what extent they are valued. It is a more significant issue in first world countries since the public have much more access to violent video games.

This issue most concerns videogame consumers, video game companies, and the government due to their role as law passers and rule regulators. Consumers who play violent games will probably be more likely to disagree with the idea that they are being negatively affected by the violent content in video games because they enjoy them. They might be biased towards them because they don't realize how they are being impacted. On the other hand, their observations on how they are affected also have a degree of validity since their first-hand perception hold significance until biased opinions come into play. Video game companies might hold a certain amount of bias towards violent effects of video games since they are profiting off people who buy their games. Companies also want to make the right choice because it leads to growth and innovation, and prosperity in the long run. The government might have difficulty with the ethical issues regarding regulating violence in video games which in turn slows down the process for reform. The government is responsible for making laws and keeping our public safe,

so, it is in their best interest to enforce regulations on violent video game content as need be, but is enough action being taken?

The local, national, and global perspectives are all generally in agreement that violence in video games should be monitored. Although, there is a lot of speculation and disagreement of whether violent material in video games affects its audience. There are countless articles in agreement and disagreement with the idea that video games should be held accountable for the promotion of violence. The same case applies with the idea that there is a relationship between violence in videos and violence in people. No one can seem to find a general agreement about the topic and topics relating to it and there is a lot of discussion and debate until this day.

The Ethical Dilemma

The first stakeholders are video game consumers. The goal of violent video games' consumers, whether they are parents, children, or anyone else is ultimately to be entertained. Consumers who enjoy these games might be less likely to believe there are negative effects to playing them. However, their perspective whether they believe they are being negatively impacted or not, is valid even though it might be biased since they have experienced the impact of playing violent video games themselves. There has been a lot of conflicting research and ongoing debate about whether video games lead to violent behavior in its consumers in the first place. In order to determine if video game companies should take more responsibility for the promotion of violence, there needs to be a reliable consensus of whether video games promote violence. There must also be a supportive amount of evidence to indicate what the promotion of violence leads to within people and society, and what action and measures are being taken to limit violent content in video games.

In the book, *Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents*, Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley demonstrate experimental evidence linking video games to more aggressive behavior. Three studies compared the effects of interactive (video games) versus passive (television and movies) media violence on aggression and violence. In the experiment, findings were that participants who played violent video games would punish other participants on higher levels compared to the participants who played non-violent video games. Frequent exposure to violent media was associated with higher levels of recent violent behavior. Lastly, interactive media violence was more strongly related to violent behavior than exposure to non-interactive media violence. In the second the researchers discovered that playing violent video games indicated increased physically aggressive and violent behavior in the real world in a long-

term context. Finally, the third study's results indicated that children who played more violent video games early in the school year would adopt more aggressive attitudes and behaviors by the end of the year. These changes were noticed by both teachers and peers. (GRODZINSKI).

Although playing violent video games may not necessarily indicate violent or aggressive behavior, it may have an indirect effect on violent behavior by increasing risk factors for it such as bullying. Dr. Olson, an internationally known researcher on video game violence, points out that violent video games may be associated with bullying, which researchers have found to be a risk factor for more serious violent behavior. (GRODZINSKI).

On the other hand, one study suggests aggressive behavior is linked to gamers' experiences of failure and frustration during play—not to a game's violent content. A study administered by Andrew Przybylski and Richard Ryan is the first to look at the player's psychological experience with video games instead of focusing solely on its content. A psychologist at the University of Rochester states, "We saw that in our experiments. If you press someone's competencies, they'll become more aggressive, and our effects held up whether the games were violent or not." These researchers found that difficulty to master a game and its controls led to frustration and aggression, regardless of whether the game was violent or not. The head author Andrew Przybylski, who is a researcher at the Oxford Internet Institute at Oxford University remarked, "Any player who has thrown down a remote control after losing an electronic game can relate to the intense feelings or anger failure can cause." Richard Ryan makes the point that this feeling of frustration, commonly referred to as "rage quitting" is not unique to video games but can be experienced in sports as well. "When people feel they have no control over the outcome of a game, that leads to aggression. We saw that in our experiments. If you press someone's competencies, they'll become more aggressive, and our effects held up

whether the games were violent or not.” Przybylski and Ryan explain how their research offers an important contribution to the debate of the effects of violent video games. Ryan mentions the point that non-violent games like Tetris and Candy crush can leave players feeling just as, or more aggressive than when playing violent video games. (Lopes).

The second stakeholders are video game companies. Video companies want to appeal to their consumers so that they can profit off them. On the other hand, they are also obligated to follow the law and any infringement of the regulations already in place, or they will lose profit or face serious consequences. Are video game companies taking enough measures to adhere to policies of limiting violent content in their games? Currently, there is the ESRB System is used to regulate content and who can consume it. They must rate all the video games according to the ESRB system which allow companies to decide who they can market a game towards and what type of limits or restrictions they will have because of it. This allows them to express their content more freely in what they are trying to portray. If they want to include mature themes with extremely violent content, they can use the R rating so that the public will know it's directed towards people who are 18+. Even so, the youth can still get their hands on it if their parents buy it for them or through other methods, and everyone who does consume the material may be affected negatively if there are in fact detrimental effects of playing.

The third stakeholder is government. The government's responsibility is to protect the general welfare of its citizens, so if there are negative effects, they're duty is to discover them and restrict whatever is causing them. On the contrary, sometimes if there is high economic profit in a company's product, there might be corruption since the government will benefit from the profit as well. They must enforce the ESRB system as well as research into the harmful effects of violent video games in the public to see if they do in fact exist and decide if the issue

requires additional research and attention. One view from an NFL player, Ted Johnson is that TV ratings system fail to protect children from violent and mature content. He brings up the point that in 2009 that not one parental control technology available today works across all media platforms. Recently, a report by the Parents Television Council implies that networks have inconsistently and inaccurately applied the TV ratings system, letting harmful content slip through seemingly just to drive ratings. Barack Obama, the former president of the united states, called for a proposal to ask Congress to provide \$10 million to the Centers for Disease Control to "conduct further research, including investigating the relationship between videogames, media images and violence."

In the article, "Countries that play more violent video games such as Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty have FEWER murders" the information appears to be purely observational. The psychologists who wrote this might benefit from the attention they receive. They may also be ignoring evidence that oppose their claim that violent video games have a positive social impact. It is possible that they are only using data that will support their claim, also known as "Cherry picking."

Cultural Implications

Violent video games aren't a topic that is only prevalent in America. This form of media is consumed globally in various countries; therefore, their effects may be present globally. The concerns of the effects of violence in video games is widespread and relevant to any country who partakes in distributing this media. Even if detrimental effects of violent video games cannot be proven or better yet agreed upon, they still raise many concerns to government and consumers universally. Some countries are very concerned about violent video games effects on culture. Thailand took it upon themselves to regulate violent video game consumption, and particularly a popular game known as Grand Theft Auto. After a copycat murder inspired by the game by a teen who allegedly intended to replicate murder and robbery as seen in the game, Thailand decided to ban it entirely due to its obscene content. Ruangsak Jaritake, a police spokesman stated, "The police are empowered to immediately arrest shopkeepers if they find any GTA (Grand Theft Auto) games on sale," It is clear that not only Thailand, or America, but a large global scale of countries is concerned about the violent impacts of video games. These countries want to protect the general welfare of their population, and to do that, they must regulate their laws accordingly. Some countries and their enforcement of their laws regarding violent video game country might be perceived by some as too strict or unreasonable, while others might perceive them as not enough regulation.

According to Kate Edwards who was the executive director of the International Game Developers Association, video game designers are very aware of the violence portrayed in their content. She suggests the idea that violence in video games should not be regulated because they are an expression of art. Edwards states, "The role of violence in storytelling is as old as human history and has long served a purpose in conveying values of honesty, courage, confidence and

perseverance.” Storytelling has been around ancient times and many stories depict many violent scenarios as seen in Greek mythology. One example of is when Cronus cannibalizes his children but there are many more instances of violence in Greek mythology. In Edward’s view point, sometimes violence is necessary to express oneself and to tell stories. She claims, "I think in the broader context most people would agree that they have to be true to their artistic vision as part of a broader creative expression of our culture.” She emphasizes the concept that even if there is violence in a video game, there are regulations in place and a consumer can decide if they want to consume the violent content or not. She continues, "The decision to accept or reject that artistic content is at the discretion of a consumer's own preferences, or if they're young, at the discretion of their parents to decide what is appropriate." According to her, violent content in videos are often expressions of art and required to portray stories that the creator wants to tell.

Reflections

Throughout this reflective process, I became very knowledgeable about what it takes to write a well-written and introspective yet factual research paper. I faced many challenges that drew me back, but ultimately, I pushed myself to face them the best I can. I learned, adapted, and overcame many struggles of writing a research paper which ultimately led me to become a better inquirer. These struggles included difficulty finding both trustworthy and informational sources online. It took a lot of time and effort, but eventually I was able to find valid sources, but it did take an extreme amount of perseverance. Another challenge I faced was excluding any biased opinions within my paper. I didn't realize I was including bias in my writing until my advisor pointed it out, but after that I was very cautious and careful not to let that happen again. In my stem related career field, it is important understand the importance of researching the impacts of any technology I use or create. I became a better researcher throughout this process which is a skill I can carry with me not only in the STEM related pathway, but countless others as well. Before this project, I blindly believed videogames had a huge negative effect on people and society without doing any research. During and by the end of the project, I realized how I cannot be certain of anything since there is no absolute concrete evidence of videogames having a gaping negative effect on people. Even so, I believe it is an issue that deserves further research and should be continued to be monitored because you can never be too careful. I realized that many countries are trying their best to regulate violence in videos and that some countries believe it is more of an issue than others.

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