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Violence in Video Games

One of the most concerning issues American society is facing today is that of mass shootings. One of such recent events happened at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut when a twenty-year-old opened gunfire at the school after killing his own mother. People have blamed such tragedies on many factors including gun control, parenting, and even violent videogames. While the former two reasons can be valid, videogames should not be blamed for acts of violence in the real world, because rather than causing aggression in players, videogames help people to vent their frustrations through a non-destructive medium.

A strong viewpoint of the majority of the American public is that videogame violence is the leading cause of school shootings, and the American Psychological Association published a review suggesting a link between playing violent videogames and aggression: "'...researchers need to… conduct studies that look at the effects of videogame play in people at risk for aggression or violence due to a combination of risk factors. For example, how do depression or delinquency interact with violent video

game use?" Over the years, there have been several attempts to censor or even ban videogames. The idea that playing violent videogames will transition to people committing acts of violence in real life is one of the most common assumptions people make. Eric Roberts, an author on Discuss Much, has a lot to say about videogames corrupting the young generation. For example, he says, "So, like a drug addict chasing a high, these children develop violent tendencies in order to create that feeling in the real world. This is a contributing factor to school shootings being on the rise, as well as teenage sex and rape, and drug use, and violence in general. It all has its roots in violent video games." A lot of videogames nowadays are getting more and more violent, so it would make sense for people to believe that things like gun violence are caused by videogames. However, author Maria Konnikova published an article in The New Yorker referring to a study done to analyze causes of gun violence. This article says that "The number who committed a violent act that year, he found, was thirteen per cent. But the likelihood was dependent on whether they were unemployed, poor, living in disadvantaged communities, using drugs or alcohol, and had suffered from "violent victimization" during a part of their lives." None of the causes that the study concluded were significant, were associated with videogames violence. Hence, it is nothing more than a myth that videogames, as a whole, result in violent behaviour.

Although it might be true that there are a few cases of games which have been known to cause issues among players, I think that such widespread stereotyping of an

entire genre of games is not only demeaning to the people who like playing violent games, but it is more so to the developers who create such products. Big companies- whose games are usually the ones who are under fire- spend thousands of man hours doing research and creating the game. One focus of the research is whether the gameplay is going to have any ill effects on the players. After all, videogame companies are businesses and the last thing any business wants is to have a bad reputation that will lose them potential customers.

An article by Cognoscenti Author, Ethan Gilsdorf, wrote an article about videogames actually being the opposite of destructive. He argues that playing videogames is letting people vent out their anger in a non-harmful way by releasing their frustrations in a virtual world. "violent video games aren't only 'not so bad,' but actually help keep the real-world killings where they belong — in our imaginations, as harmless fantasies," he says while referring to Rock and roll, heavy metal, rap music and comic books, which are things that we find normal today but have also received the same criticism that videogames are receiving right now.

In an experiment done by Psychology Today, a sample of people was asked to do lexical decision tasks before and after they play a violent videogame. A lexical decision task is a task where a participant is given a string of letters and is asked if those letters make a word. For this study, the participants were given words related to aggression, for example, 'FIST', and random words related to non-aggression. Half of

the sample was asked to play the videogame normally, and the other half was asked to play it for the purpose of venting anger. When the lexical decision test was done after playing videogames, the study found that the people who played to vent out their anger took a lot longer to respond to aggressive words than the people who played the game normally, which meant that they had less aggression in them. "This study suggests that if you have the goal to vent your anger, then playing a violent video game can actually help you to achieve that goal. However, if you play a video game when angry without the goal to vent your anger, then playing the game helps you to think about being aggressive." -Art Markman (Psychology Today). Although the study suggests that people who casually play videogames get increasingly aggressive, the reality is that that statistic is getting smaller and smaller every day. A study done at the Massachusetts General Hospital finds that more and more people are playing videogames for the purpose of dealing with their anger. Ciara O'Brien from The Register summarizes the article. "According to the Massachusetts General Hospital's (MGH) Centre for Mental Health and Media, many young people play video games to manage their feelings, such as stress and anger, and those who play violent video games are among those more likely to play to deal with their anger."

I can attest to Ethan's argument and the studies because I have gone through similar experiences in my past. When I was a kid, I frequently used to have anger management issues. I used to often have violent outbursts, which would sometimes

result in harm to others around me. That started to change when I came across a game called Prince of Persia. Among intricate puzzles and complex boss fights, this game let the player chop through hordes of enemies with swords. Playing this game, even if for a while, helped me calm down, and killing the monsters let me release my anger in a way that wouldn't cause any damage to others.

A website called procon.org released statistics regarding videogame consumption and violence levels for that past few years. Their charts show that over the past decade while videogame sales have increased by more than five hundred percent, the total number of violent crimes has gone down by thirty-six percent. Many people have opposing views regarding videogame violence. However, the controversy is strictly opinion based. The facts state that the correlation between playing videogames and aggression leading to violent behaviour is simply nonexistent.

Citations:

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