

Jessica Knox

Lynn Taylor

English 1010

14 November 2010

Rise of the machines

The good, the bad, and the video game. It can seem like every where we turn there is a video game. They are in stores, schools, churches, hospital waiting rooms, and for a lot of us there is a console connected to our very own TV. Yet there is so much controversy that surrounds playing video games. We hear how they will turn us into lazy, obese, aggressive, violent members of society, and how we need to limit play and force our children outside. Then there is the side that say's there is so much learning that can be achieved by playing video games that they are the next generation of teaching.

The video games of today have been in the making for over 60 years. According to Wikipedia the first video game was patented in 1948; named the Cathode-Ray Tube Amusement Device. It consisted of "eight vacuum tubes to simulate missiles firing at a target and knobs to control the curve and trajectory of the missile"(1). There were many different attempts made over the next few years mostly running on computers, however it wasn't until 1972 that Magnavox released "the first home console" named the "Magnavox Odyssey". It was sold with "plastic overlays to put on your TV to simulate color graphics, dice, poker chips and a score sheet to help keep score" (Gaming 1). Today you can do just about anything in video games, you can build and run cities, fight wars, jack someone's car, kill monsters, learn how to cook a new meal, and even learn your ABC's and 123's, your possibilities are endless. We have access to games on consoles, computers, hand held devises and our phones. We have remotes, paddles,

touch screens, and motion detectors to play our games. They can be played one player or with many players, and our games now come in 3D and with interactive play. Everywhere you turn new games and consoles are being marketed, they are in magazines, on billboards, TV commercials, and in the movies we watch. “65% of US households play computer and video games, and 38% own a video console” (Heffinger 1). Having stated this, my question would now be; does the good that can come from playing video games outweigh the bad?

It is said over and over again that too much of anything can be bad for you, and yes that can even mean video games. The risk of playing too much video game’s is that you will become addicted, antisocial, be in poor health, and have increased aggression and thoughts of violent behavior.

Increased aggression and violent behavior is defiantly what comes up most when people are looking to discredit playing video games. On the website raisesmartkids.com it is stated that people who spend their time engaged in “violent video games” are at an increased risk of developing signs of “aggressive thoughts and behavior”, especially when “repetition and rewards” are known to increase “learning”. In violent video games you not only repeat the same “violence” over and over again, but you are consistently “rewarded” for you violent behavior, most of the time the “more violent” the behavior the bigger the “reward” (6). Some of those rewards being access to new levels, longer life, and higher points which can help purchase more weapons. These games are said to “teach the wrong values, portray woman as weaker or sexually provocative, and confuse reality with fantasy “(6). There have even been several very violent acts over the years where the suspects have been known for playing violent video games.

In April 1999 two teenage boys killed 12 students and a teacher in the Columbine High School Massacre. The two boys were allegedly obsessed with the video game Doom, In February 2003 a 16 year old boy was charged with aggravated murder and made an insanity defense that he was 'obsessed' with Grand Theft Auto III, in June 2003 two step brothers aged 14 and 16 used a rifle to fire at vehicles on interstate 40 in Tennessee, killing a man and wounding a woman. The two shooters told investigators they were inspired by Grand Theft Auto III, and in January 2003 6 boys went on a 10 week killing, spree killing 5. They were also charged with 2 attempted murders and 18 robberies. The gang told police they were imitating scenes from Grand Theft Auto III" (Donahue 1).

Stories like these go on and on with increasing acts of violence by people of all ages and where in many cases the suspect/suspects were exhibiting signs of addiction to video games.

The website videogameaddiction.org says that, "Studies estimate between 10-15% of gamers' exhibit signs that meet the World Health Organization criteria for addiction" (1), and that it is considered to be addictive behavior when: playing the game itself "starts to interfere" with everyday life, you no longer have time for friends and family so your "relationships" start to fall apart, you lose track or interest in "goals" you have set for yourself in school, work or life in general (3-4). Symptoms of video game addiction include,

falling asleep in school/work because of game play the night before, most non school/work hours being spent playing video games, falling behind on important assignments to play, lying about game use, choosing to play video games rather than see friends or family, dropping out of social groups because they are

interfering with time playing the games, and showing signs of irritation when unable to play (3).

Game developers want their games to be something you continue to come back to. The more popular their game the more money they are making. So they have “hooks” inside the game to keep bringing you back. Some of the “hooks” they use are the “high score” - something you are sure to keep trying to beat each time you play, “beating the game” - which is the ultimate goal, “role playing” - by creating characters and living out fantasies, “discovery” - finding hidden objects or rooms, secret codes or keys and hidden access to new levels. Then there is the fact that there are people that are just more likely to become addicted than others (6). Addiction to anything including video game playing is never a good thing and ultimately leads to bigger issues.

Another issue that causes a lot of attention is poor health. Some signs of poor health that is related to playing video games include, “obesity, video induced seizures, postural, muscular and skeletal disorders such as tendonitis, nerve compression and carpal tunnel syndrome, sleep disturbances, dry eyes, failure to eat regularly, and neglecting personal hygiene” (“Addiction” 9) (“kids” 6). BBC News reported findings from the Center for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) where they surveyed “500 adults aged 19-90” of which “45%” claimed they “played video games” on a regular basis. Of the “500” surveyed the “video game players” were found to have a “lower health status” than “non-gamers” (1).

“Tests have also shown that a majority of gamers have a powerful physical response when playing violent video games. Their heart rate increases, their blood pressure increases, their testosterone and adrenaline levels soar. Their body and

mind are in the same heightened state as someone in actual physical peril" (Linnea 2).

With all the bad that is said to come from playing video games it sometimes makes me wonder why do we even buy these things for our children? Well, there is also a lot of good that can come from playing video games. Research on video games and their players is becoming more and more popular, and with every study they are finding new ways that playing video games improve health and increase learning.

Research has found that "players of violent video games have a marked increase in their visual abilities. They can see, focus on and process what is happening around them 30% to 50% better than non gamers" (Linnea 1). "Action" games are proving to be far more useful in "curing lazy eye" than previous methods used (Barthelemy 1). "Patients" with "Parkinsons" have found that "Nintendo's Wii fit and Wii sports" games greatly "improved static balance". Reasearchers stated "...consoles like these could help slow down the decline of functional disabilities" (Barthelemy 3). There have also been studies that have proven video games to be helpful in pain management and with children going through chemotherapy.

Often when I think of video games that last thing on my mind is how they may contribute to my children sight, or how they maybe teaching my children things other than how to operate a gun and use foul language. Unless of coarse it is a game specifically designed for teaching. However research done on video games finds that they are learning far more than we can begin to imagine. Even in violent video games are children are learning a number of things like;

Following instructions; problem solving and logic; hand eye coordination; fine motor skills; resource management and logistics; multitasking; fast

analysis and decision making; strategy and anticipation; developing reading and math skills; perseverance; pattern recognition; estimating skills; inductive reasoning and hypothesis testing; mapping; memory; reasoned judgments; teamwork-when playing multi player; introduction to technology and the online world (“kids” 1)

A “study” conducted on “surgeons” found that those who “play video games” had fewer “mistakes” and “performed tasks faster than” non gaming “colleagues” (Barthelemy 5). “Pilots” that are “trained” on “flight simulators” have access to “software” that can “simulate” real life “emergencies” to prepare the pilot for many different scenarios (“sim” 1). Video games are becoming recognized as tools for learning. With more and more games coming out on the market designed specifically for teaching, it makes me wonder how long before our teachers are being forced to incorporate them into the classrooms.

Works cited

- Addiction, Video Game. Video Game Addiction When video games become more than just games. Web October 2010
- Adultlearn. Video games in education. 1998-2010. Web October 2010
- Barthelemy, Claire. Are video games good for our health? 27 October 2009. Web 11 November 2010
- cnet, News. Video game sales drop 10 percent in August. 9 September 2010. Web 11 November 2010 .
- Donahue, Beth. Psycholglical Evidence used to restrict video-game violence. September 2009. Web October 2010
- Gaming, Cassic. Classic Gaming Museum. 1996-2010. 20 Web November 2010
- Heffinger, Mark. Survey: Average US gamer age is 35, and 40% are women. 17 July 2008. Web October 2010
- kids, Raise smart. The good and bad effects of video games. 2005-2010. Web October 2010
- Linnea, Sharon. Video-game values. Web October 2010
- News, BBC. Video gamers older than thought. 17 08 2009. Web October 2010
- Prensky, Marc. ""Don't bother me mom-I'm learning!"". Paragon House, 2006
- Sim, Flight pro. Flight simulation training benefits. 15 January 2010. Web 14 November 2010
- Wikipedia. History of video games. 2010 Web 11 November 2010