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Videogames and their Impact Socially

Since the creation of video games there has been endless talk about the psychological positives and negatives that they can provide. The majority of popular media originally criticized video games for only the negative outcomes they believed it provided. As the years went on and people who have had experiences with video games moved into positions that could show the other side of the story the positives about playing began to surface as well. This discussion is made relevant by the constant studies highlighting the pros and cons that come from playing a large amount of games every week. A study by Jeffrey Graham directly talks about these psychological pros and cons that videogames have when it comes to impacting children as they continue into adulthood. The study went over many different things including the largely debated topic about whether or not video games truly have an impact on an individuals social skills depending on the amount of time they end up putting into video games. Throughout the first section of the book it talks about how there was a positive relationship between frequency that an individual played video games and antisocial behavior but this went almost completely unaffected when it came to adding in gender or race as another variable in the study. Jeffrey directly talks about previous studies that provide a bias for all studies made after it called the General Aggression Model. The GAM requires the user to partake in a session playing a violent video-game and then have the user interact with an inanimate object and judges their interactions to determine any aggressive nature that they partake in. The GAM study focuses specifically on violent video-games and doesn’t use non-violent video-games to also test this which means that the video-game is a static variable in this experiment and may end up having no effect on the individual’s psychological state after they partake in playing the game. The study continues to build off this first section by going into depth about certain video games that promote physical activity, which it likes to call exergaming. The one game their experiment specifically used is Dance Dance Revolution (DDR). The experiment involved having grade school students participate in extra exercise each week on top of their gym class and then activity levels were monitored in comparison to their gym experiences. On top of this participation was also measured as a way to better allow the experiment to be unbiased if one student was participating and just ended up not being in the mood to play the game during one specific session. Exergaming is the less common form of gaming that is continuing to grow more and more popular through applications such as the Nintendo consoles and VR systems made by a variety of companies. The study found that there was a positive correlation for activity in the game in comparison to the person’s motivation to play the game which also resulted in them working harder because the basis of the game is that exercising harder will generally result in you doing better. The only other correlation the study found is that females tended to be in the sedentary state less frequently than males when it came to exergaming. The next subject the book talks about is the effect gaming has on academic performance in students.

Video games have been previously studied in the past to test whether or not they can improve an individual’s cognitive functions and some game developers and have even released games that only had the goal of working to improve those cognitive functions that studies have shown before improve through gaming. Due to the fact that there is a variety of information that has already been studied on this subject Jeffrey decided to run three different experiments to get a better idea of exactly what may cause this improved cognitive ability. The first of the three experiments proved that there was a positive correlation between the actual video games test groups and doing well on the math portion of the exam that were given after performing their groups assigned activity. The second experiment aimed to do nearly the same thing but included a very popular new age game *New Super Mario Bros*. The deductions made from this second experiment showed that the only group that ended up performing better on average was the group that played the new age game. By doing this comparison it also brought up the question of whether or not educational games are even the best way to improve an individual’s cognitive abilities if a regular game that didn’t advertise itself as educational was able to do a better job. The last experiment aimed to directly compare the use of video games to actual perform on exams that an individual would be receiving in class. This last experiment showed that the main positive result that came from playing video games was an increased capacity for doing math. The other two subjects tested were history and geography which provided mixed results depending on the video game that was played. These three different studies covered a lot of different things but one thing that Graham didn’t really factor in is the pros and cons that violent games could of had on the results of each of these different studies. Violent games, as previously stated, are generally only seen for their negative impacts and even though some of these studies involved younger participants such as the DDR one violent games could’ve easily been factored into the other two experiments. By comparing not only popular games such as Mario games along with violent video games we could’ve easily seen a contrast in the benefits and negatives that each game had to offer, especially when it came to the last experiment in the third study where they ended up testing each group with actual school exams. Another variable that was glazed over was the fact that a variety of school based skills weren’t also tested such as a student’s english abilities and their science capabilities. Understandably, Graham probably didn’t have enough time to give exams on both of these subjects as well seeing as he was already giving exams for three other subjects but these two other exams probably would’ve been a better fit for the last experiment. Both History and Geography are memorization based classes so obviously their results were going to be very similar as proven by the exam results. Had one of these two been switched with an english exam for example we could’ve seen a massive change in results. If this was combined with an experiment that tested a violent story based video game the results could’ve also ended up being overwhelmingly positive because people tend to learn way more on something that interests them, such as a violent video game with subtitles that give proper sentence structure and use a variety of larger words to increase the video games depth as a whole. Overall, not including the variables that the studies didn’t really factor in, these three different studies that Graham initiated highlight a variety of positives such as increased physical activity with the motivation to participate along with increased mathematics abilities but also lead to cons as well such as the increase in antisocial behavior that correlated to increased gaming time. This can very easily be linked back to the simple explanation of how our left and right sides of our brains function and what parts of our thinking are generally attributed to either hemisphere of our brain. The left side is known for taking care of the more logical thoughts that we have on a day to day basis such as problem-solving which generally ends up being 99% of what videogames are good at teaching while the right side of our brain focuses more on the creative thinking that our brain endures which attributes more towards the social interactions that we have on a day to day basis. With this knowledge readily available to us through various research done over the past decades it’s clear to see the reasoning behind the results of Graham’s case study. Video games are almost always a logical thinking type of problem-solving whether it be puzzle-solving games or first person shooters the majority of games rely solely on your ability to quickly think analytically and make a decision through this that provides the best outcome. The tests that Graham directly talks about doing such as the one analyzing academic performance through the use of a popular mario game highlights this correlation exponentially. Mario itself seems like an inherently simple game but when broken down into simple terms your are constantly measuring jumps along with speed and abilities all while doing this under a time restriction. Factoring all of these things just continues to force your brain to lean more heavily on the left sides capabilities and less on the right side which after extensive use can easily define why people who play a larger amount of video games typically end up being more antisocial than people who play a lot less frequently.

By making the majority of video games a left brain based process the world has essentially made video games a way for us to enhance our left brain and turn many of us into those individuals known as “book smart” in our in class texts which is the group that mainly uses their left brain to function in day to day life making logical decisions instead of creative ones. An article created by the site NewsWise also talks about the positive educational abilities that games have in the ever developing scene of video games. The beginning of the article talks about how on average there is a 60% chance that one person in every household plays video games on a consistent basis. A point previously discussed is the fact that many of the people talking about the negatives of video games in the past had no actual experience to base their bias off of. This wasn’t the case for Dr. Von Gillern when he wrote this article he stated that he had years of experience playing games which gives him a more factual standpoint as the subject of video games as a whole. Gillern highlights the ability for games, like Minecraft, that can give the students learning experience in studies such as Sciences and Mathematics and how certain other games that have a more story based setting can even help improve an individual’s language art skills. The increasing availability of game development software over the years has lead to an increasing amount of games of all kinds being developed leading us to the point we are at today where there is entire games that only have the focus of improving these skills such as Luminosity have been made in hopes to directly do what video games have indirectly been doing over the past few decades. As time progresses we may even start to see articles from knowledgeable writers, such as Gillern, that tackle the pros and cons of violent games but as of now the mainstream media is heavily focused on one view specifically, the negative view, which they believe is the only view that one could have on games like these. A factor that may cause articles about these more graphic games is the fact that the word violent itself is inherently negative. By associating these graphic games with any word that has a negative context like violent you are already putting any positive review at a disadvantage. If these games were tailored to be more easily presentable to the general public in the future it may entice more journalists to take a stab at talking positively about the variety of different graphic games that we see on the market today. An article written by Lisa Bowen also goes over the impact multiple studies have found that takes place after an individual's have played some of the violent video games that many people despise because of the negative influence they believe it will have on their child’s development. Bowen aimed to take in the small amount of knowledge received through the short list of previous studies that have been done previously on violent games and aimed to compile all of this information to get a better understanding of the true effects that violent games have on children. Many horrible things have been attributed to these games in the past such as school shootings and disrespectful behaviors. These correlations have never been proven and seem to be a kind of shield to protect people and their children from the larger notion that it may be the way the parents raising their children in an authoritarian way that may be playing a major factor on their children acting out in one way or another in school. Bullying is something that isn’t typically glazed over when it comes to the darker acts that kids partake in at school but if violent games are even mentioned mainstream media then ends up clinging to this as it generally ends up prolonging the length that their story is talked about and discussed between people in the general public.These studies that Lisa summarizes talk about how the first person shooters actually had a variety of positive effects on the individuals in the study such as “a range of cognitive skills such as spatial navigation, reasoning, memory and perception,” (pg.10, Lisa Bowen). This goes against the social stereotype that many violent games have had since the first violent game was ever released but it supports that research done by Graham where he goes over the variety of left brain positives that come from playing video games. All of this can be summarized simply by thinking about the previous left and right brain discussions we have had through the lectures and reading we have had up to this point in the class. Many people are either put into one of two categories either “street smart” or “book smart” and typically if one was to do a case study analyzing the video game experience along with in-game skill level held by each group there would be a clear difference found between these two groups. The “book smart” group would end up being the more frequent gaming group on average while also factoring that if the population was found to have an even distribution of play time that they would at least end up having a higher overall skill ceiling in comparison to the “street smart” group. This is because the analytical group has done more activities that rely heavily on their left brain, such as gaming, which is what ended up benefiting them and molding them into more of a “book smart” individual instead of a “street smart” one.

The original question of whether an individual is negatively affected by playing games is both true and false. In terms of certain skills such as social skills and memorization video games have been found to provide a negative influence to the average individual. On the positive side, video games have also been found to improve a variety of skills ranging from logical to cognitive functions such as motor skills. Weighing out the pros and cons compared to one another is tough with all of the extensive research done on this subject but based on the few articles discussed above, it's clear to see that, just like any other activity you can participate in, video games aren’t simply something that ends up having a negative effect on the person who ends up partaking in them.

Sources:

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