

## The Psychological Effect of Violent Video Games on Children

Acts of violence can be seen in the news on an almost daily basis. One of the biggest industries in entertainment, video games, is often put up to blame. It is said to have begun back in 1999 with the Columbine shooting. “After the shooting, the media pushed the narrative that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's inclinations for violent video games... were partly to blame for the horrific incident” (Park). As a result, legislations were proposed in order to keep children from being influenced by the violent games. These legislations included taxation on violent games and age restrictions for consumers (Park). At young ages, it is important to keep children from being impacted by violence. Younger children are very impressionable due to their current psychological development.

Developmental psychology is the study of physical, cognitive, and social changes over the lifespan of a person. When a child is young, their brains are still developing and maturing. When someone is developing from 6 to 13 years old, they are gaining enriched thinking, language, and memory skills. When at this age, they are at Stage 4 in their psychosocial development pattern. Stage 4 is when children begin to learn about the concepts of industry vs. inferiority (Cherry). If children are commended by their actions, they begin to hold a better confidence in themselves to complete tasks and challenges.

An example that pertains to the topic of video games: killing other players or non-player-characters in video games rewards points or bonuses to the player; the game rewards players for completing violent actions. Children who are in Stage 4 in the process of psychosocial development can obtain an incorrect perception of right and wrong actions when playing violent video games. If children are rewarded for being violent while they are having they fun playing a game, they can be manipulated into thinking that being violent in real life will also be rewarding.

These children are also in the stage of forming an identity. At this point, children need someone to look up to; someone that they want to someday identify as. If the heroes of these children are violent video game characters, it is possible that they may obtain the violent tendencies of their heroes (Konijn).

In Konijn's article, *I Wish I Were a Warrior: The Role of Wishful Identification in the Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggression in Adolescent Boys*, she identifies possible factors that can impact the effect a video game may have on an adolescent boy. A male protagonist in a video game, even though he may be violent, shows confidence and independence. The boys who play this game may strive to be like him due to his strong (tough/aggressive) qualities. "Adolescence is a time of increased risk taking and novelty seeking" (Konijn), and young players may attach themselves to a risk-taking character to vicariously obtain satisfaction (Konijn).

A study was performed to test if violent games would result in violent behavior. 112 boys would play a randomly assigned video game; some violent and others nonviolent. After playing, the boys would then compete against another ostensible opponent in a reaction time test. The winner of the test could play noise in the loser's headphones, in which they could control the volume of the noise. It was predicted that violent game players would blast louder noises in their opponent's ears, as a measure of aggression. The participants were informed that they could potentially cause permanent hearing damage to the other person. The results showed that participants who played violent games were measured as more aggressive than nonviolent game players. "Participants who strongly identified with violent video game characters exceeded Level 8 noise, even though they were told that noise Levels 8–10 could possibly damage their "partner's" ears" (Konijn).

This study provides a lot of insight and backs up the hypothesis that developing humans are easily impressionable. If children can attach themselves to a violent main character in a video game, it is likely they will adopt similar violent tendencies. It is very important to regulate the consumption of violent media in developing children. Video games are a very important form of media and entertainment. The industry should not be hindered by the effects it has on people, because these effects are preventable. The game industry can grow and prosper if consumers are smarter about their consumption, and especially their child's consumption. Many parents will buy violent games for their children, but they don't realize that the game can impact the psychosocial development of their child.

Bringing more awareness to this issue may make a difference. Having parents understand how children develop can help parents make better decisions for their children. Video games are an amazing form of art, and can be very beneficial to the people who play them. When players take a game to an extreme level, such as playing them for extended periods of time, or bringing violent character actions into the real world, video games will have a negative effect on the player. Otherwise, video games can help players better understand themselves or their environment, either through gameplay or good narrative. When raising a growing child, it is better to focus on how a parent can influence the psychological development of their child in positive ways. Playing puzzle games, open-world exploration games, or sandbox games can help a child better understand their world and how it works. Parents must encourage positive brain development, but don't disregard the good and bad effects that games can have on a child.

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