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### Is Fortnite Damaging Our Children?

*Fortnite* is an extremely popular video game that reached stardom seemingly overnight. The mastermind creator company, Epic Games, intelligently marketed and designed the video game so well that it has made the developers and lucky basement gamers millionaires. Anyone can find *Fortnite* nearly everywhere – on television, online, in conversation, in advertisements, and boasted by famous artists and athletes. During a live pro soccer game, after a famous German soccer player, Julian Brandt, scored a goal, he started imitating *Fortnite* gameplay (Dator, 4). Although the game is largely viewed in a positive perspective, *Fortnite* is not all rainbows and butterflies; the game has become so popular that parents and teachers are voicing their concerns about their children and students becoming addicted to the game. Teachers cannot keep their students' attention away from the easily accessible battle-royal; they frequently demand that students put away their mobile *Fortnite* devices with no avail (Hernandez, 3). In an especially severe case - parents sent their young daughter to rehab after she would rather defecate herself rather than break away from the game (Barbour, 5). *Fortnite* is popular because it is easily accessible, and several collaborative corporations and media outlets are funneling and sharing traffic. Also, the game is not damaging to children, but beneficial for their cognitive growth.

Because of the cultural phenomenon (bandwagon effect or widespread popularity) that *Fortnite* has become, children are directly influenced by the game in many different aspects. In the past this has happened many times with other video games and movies alike. For example,

when the movies for *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* were released, people started expressing their love for the franchises by dressing as their favorite characters. The same can be said for *Fortnite*, people love it, and of course children are going to join in with the majority of people, especially when their favorite artist Drake plays the game religiously with their favorite streamer, Ninja, raking in 230,000 concurrent viewers on stream regularly (Statt, 1).

So, how has *Fortnite* become a phenomenon in the first place? Tyler Belvins, the number one Twitch streamer - better known as “Ninja”, believes the credit is owed to Epic Games and their incredible publicity stunts. During an interview with *CNBC* news he claims that Epic Games is “just hitting every single mark perfectly” (Squawk). He goes more in depth by explaining that the game is very accessible - anyone can install the game, for free, available on IOS, Android, Xbox, PS4, PC, and Nintendo Switch. Recently, Epic Games released a new program called support a creator. The new feature allows players to select a content creator they enjoy, like Tyler, and that creator will receive commission on any in game purchases done by the player. Tyler also mentioned that Amazon and Twitch formed a partnership that allowed content creators to gather even more revenue (Squawk). By allowing content creators to gather more revenue, they are encouraging creators to create more content. This content gathers even more publicity for *Fortnite*, Twitch, Amazon, and any social media outlet involved. These huge corporations are all accruing more income and traffic by just the involvement with the phenomenon *Fortnite*, but *Fortnite* also benefits from all the publicity. Although *Fortnite* is getting a lot of attention, it has rightfully earned the hype through its attractive gameplay.

“Every time that bus cruises over the island, a hundred narratives unfold. Some of them are as forgettable as “I opened the door to a house and someone blew me apart with a shotgun.”

Others are more textured. When I achieved my first Victory Royale, I couldn't stop myself from recounting the whole story to my entire family.”

(Campbell)

Aside from the brilliant narratives Campbell describes, the gameplay specifically requires players to strategically create structures to protect themselves from others in order to not take damage. It also teaches players to keep track of their surroundings and rewards gamers with better hindsight. The gamer who knows to move towards a hill for better coverage and height advantage will nearly always win versus the player who stands in the open exposing themselves. The battle-royal genre is not exactly new either, and it was already extremely popular amongst gamers. The initial battle-royal and another popular video game, *PUGG (PlayerUnknown's BattleGrounds)*, dominated Twitch led by streamer Dr. Disrespect, hitting 350,000 concurrent views at once. This was record breaking at the time, and more than Twitch was capable of supporting back then. When Dr. Disrespect launched his stream, eventually it caused a complete crash of the Twitch platform (Gordon, 3). This record did not last long before *Fortnite* stole the spotlight when Drake played with streamer Tyler, hitting 635,000 concurrent viewers on their first stream together (Gordon, 2). The major differences between the two games are outlined above – accessibility and gameplay - perhaps the free-to-play availability of *Fortnite* was enough for it to skyrocket to a victory royal over *PUGG*. Personally, the uniqueness that *Fortnite* brought to the genre (not just another first-person shooter) did it for me.

*Fortnite* is popular, without a doubt, but because of how largely appreciated and known the game is, children are becoming overly addicted to playing and seeking their next victory over opponents. It is reasonable for parents to be concerned that their child may be playing the game

too much, and while I do agree that without moderation anything can become problematic; playing Fortnite offers a range of benefits that overcome concerns of social dissonance and completely disregards the worry of children developing mental health disorders. Multiple studies show that gaming actually improves cognitive growth and not the latter (Grey, 3). Aside from cognitive growth, Ph. D holder and psychologist Peter Gray claims that gaming provides creativity, motivation, emotional, and social benefits as well. “For the most part, children can no longer go outdoors and find others to play with, freely, away from adults, as they once did; but many of them can and do go onto computers and play video games” (Grey, 3). And this is typically a good thing, instead of children going out into the world finding trouble or having dumb fun, they are safe at home playing a video game that sparks their brains in a positive way, under parent supervision. It is normal for people to occupy their time in one way or another and cope with the stresses of everyday life through means such as our sociological subgroups, like being a part of your school’s baseball program, and sometimes these subgroups can become a part of those stresses themselves. To provide clarity, think of your workforce as a subgroup. Fortnite provides a positive outlet to cope and relieve these stresses. We all know first-hand that life can be stressful, and just because a person is young, that does not mean they are not handling situations that may put them under a lot of distress. Video games can be a typical coping mechanism that allows children to relieve their stress away from damaging factors such as drugs. One study shows that when people are stripped away from *Fortnite* in particular, they cope with it in other ways like pornographic usage (Castro-Calvo). Whether its drugs or pornography, *Fortnite* is child friendly and a much better outlet.

Overall *Fortnite* is an incredible game in many aspects. The publicity is owed to the many content creators and corporations that feed off the enjoyment and appreciation people find

by playing the game. Concerned parents are rightfully worried about their children becoming addicted and potentially developing some sort of disorder, but the reality of the situation can provide enlightenment. Playing *Fortnite* does not provoke any real danger but promotes cognitive growth overall. Parents can also relate to their children's interests through previous phenomena that existed in the past, such as *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*, and they can find closure by knowing that their children are not out in the world getting into any real trouble.

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