MEDIA INFLUENCE: ARGUMENTS ABOUT VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES

COPYCAT BEHAVIOUR

ARGUMENT

Audiences will copy or imitate what they see in violent video games.

EVIDENCE

Copycat behaviour is often substantiated using isolated incidents such as the Mortal Kombat killer or the boy who shot his grandmother after playing GTA.

Social learning theory is an extension of this idea. Developed by Albert Bandura and Richard Waters in 1962, it suggests that people learn by observing others. People learn rules and strategies for different types of behaviour from the media. A 1988 study titled 'Effects of Playing Video Games on Children's Aggressive and Other Behaviours' took a random sample of thirty-one children were asked to either play a violent karate video game or a non-violent jungle swing video game. Those who played the violent video game showed more aggression during play.

The General Aggression Model suggests playing violent video games results in the learning, rehearsal and reinforcement of aggressive knowledge structures. It cultivates aggressive beliefs and attitudes, perception, expectations, behaviour scripts and desensitises, leading to aggressive personalities and violence.

DESENSITISATION

ARGUMENT

Repeated and prolonged exposure to violent video games will desensitise audiences to violence.

EVIDENCE

In a 2006 study called "The effect of video game violence on physiological desensitization to real-life violence", Carnagey, Anderson and Bushman found that participants exposed to violent video games had a lower heart rate and lower galvanic skin response than those who were not.

Speaking at a conference called 'Media, minds and neuroscience' Dr Wayne Warburton discussed that brain imaging has revealed that cumulative exposure to violent video games limits the development of the pre-frontal cortex, the region of the brain responsible for impulse control. Warburton told ABC's PM that this leads to a "loss of empathy".

Subjects were split into two groups, those with a lot of exposure to violent video games and those without. Those accustomed to violent video games had very little response to violent images, some studies demonstrating an "active suppression of the emotion centres of the brain." This research didn't involve exposing subjects to real world violence.

VULNERABLE AUDIENCES

ARGUMENT

Certain audiences, such as children or people with mental health issues, are more susceptible to violent video games.

EVIDENCE

It is commonly argued that children more vulnerable to the influence of violent video games. The Australian Attorney General's review of violent video game research reported that Craig Anderson's 2010 meta-analysis showed "no evidence that younger participants were more affected than older participants." This suggests that the effect is the same for adults and children.

According to the same report, a 2007 Australian study found that violent video games were not linked with aggressive emotions. Players with non-aggressive personalities didn't experience a change in emotion. Those with aggressive personalities experienced an increase in anger. If they were angry beforehand, however, playing a violent video game tended to decrease aggression.

In 2010, a study by Markey and Markey found that people with psychotic personality traits were more susceptible to the effect of violent video games on aggression. According to the report, most other personality types were unaffected.

INTERACTIVITY

ARGUMENT

Because they are interactive, violent video games are more likely to cause violence and aggression compared to other media.

EVIDENCE

Former military psychologist David Grossman argues that because the military uses video games to train its troops, violent video games are training young people to become violent and aggressive in the real world. As Henry Jenkins points out in 'Reality Bytes: Eight Myths About Video Games Debunked', this assumes that audiences don't think critically about what they are consuming and it is assumed that people will "unwittingly apply" what they learn in a fantasy game to the real world.

In a study titled 'Do video games exert stronger effects on aggression than film?', Jih-Hsuan Lin examined the responses of 102 male college students to a violent video game, recorded game play and a violent movie. The study found that the interactive video game caused an increase in short term aggressive responses when compared to the other forms of media.

CATHARSIS

ARGUMENT

Violent video games are an outlet for aggressive thoughts and violent tendencies.

EVIDENCE

The idea of catharsis stretches back to Aristotle who suggested that emotions could be purged through art.

The notion of catharsis has not been extensively tested. While there has been a great deal of research into social learning theory, which has demonstrated small or weak effects, researchers don't often examine how violent video games might be used to purge negative emotions.

In 'The Role of Violent Video Game Content in Adolescent Development: Boys' Perspectives', which was published in Journal of Adolescent Research, the researchers behind the paper reveals that some teenage boys use violent video games to channel anger and relieve stress. A 2003 report by Flammer and Schaffner found that teenagers use video games and music to cope with negative moods. The report acknowledge, however, that further study is required to see if using violent media to regulate emotions is beneficial or harmful.

Further study and revision: What other evidence exists to support these arguments about violent video games?

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MORAL PANIC

UBIQUITY

ARGUMENT

Claims about the influence of violent video games are part of a moral panic surrounding new media.

Almost everyone plays video games - so why aren't we all aggressive and violent?

EVIDENCE

The development of new media is often accompanied by anxiety about its effect on society. Around 400BC classical Greek philosopher Socrates was concerned that the advent of writing would create forgetfulness and people would generally know nothing. In the 1860s, British politicians blamed popular culture for delinquent behavior. One argued that "cheap publications" and theatre performances of an "immoral character" would lead children to life of dishonesty and vice. In the 1950s, American psychiatrist Dr Fredric Wertham published a book called The Seduction of the Innocent claiming comic books were a danger to children.

Christopher J Ferguson claims that the discussion of violent video games has the hallmarks of a moral panic, compelling scientists to act in an unscientific way: "There is a huge gap between the effects of violent video games as presented by some social scientists and the actual scientific data on the effects of violent video games. This gap between social science and reality has led to a moral panic regarding the effects of violent video games on youths.

According to the Entertainment Software Association, United States consumers spent $22.41 billion on video games in 2014 They also reported that 155 million Americans play video games. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, violent crime in America has been declining since 1994.

In 2014, Christopher J Ferguson published a paper in the Journal of Communication titled 'Does media violence predict societal violence'? The study found an inverse relationship between youth violence and the consumption of violent video games. As Ferguson notes in the study: "Data comparing video game violence consumption to youth violence in society demonstrate an inverse relationship, at least for the years 1996 through 2011 when both sets of data were available. This relationship appears to be remarkably strong. However, it is important to point out that this is not an indication of causality."

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