Sample argumentative essay on video games cause less violence than other forms of...

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The video gaming industry is undoubtedly one of the main scapegoats of our time. Computer and console games are being publicly labeled as cruel, violent and unacceptable by numerous politicians and social activists. Each time there is a spree shooter emerging somewhere in the US or abroad, there are various speculations concerning factors which contributed to the outburst of violence, and video games are being often perceived as a major one. On the other hand, it is a large and rapidly developing industry, and accusations of such nature may lead to loss of profits for shareholders and lots of jobs for professionals. The situation with violence in video games is therefore highly important and goes far beyond a commonplace argument. In order to get deeper into the topic and try to perform impartial and detailed analysis of the issue, it would be reasonable to ask several logical questions. First of all, what is the nature and definition of violence per se? What is the reason that violence is present in video games? What are the mechanisms of limitation of access to violent content in video games? Is there a correlation and causation between gaming violence and real-life violence? And finally, are video games actually more violent than other forms of media?

While answering these questions and working on respective hypotheses, it would be also kept in mind that certain mistakes and logical loopholes should be avoided, otherwise the clarity of the research may be considerably compromised. First of all, it must be noticed that video games are not a passive source of media. One does not simply turn on a TV and get access to violent (or non-violent) games. The purchase of the game as well as playing

it is a conscious act of will. Secondly, it must be noticed that the problem is not just about the fact of existence of violence in video games, but rather about limiting access to such for certain categories of users. Thirdly, it is logical to assume that games developers have only limited liability concerning subsequent usage of their products and are not responsible for potential abuse knowingly caused by certain users.

In this regard I would propose three primary hypotheses and use respective factual basis to assess them:

- There is not enough scientifically proven data concerning causation of real-life violence by exposure to virtual violence in video games;
- Video games do not provide more violence to customers in comparison to other forms of media;
- Perception of violence in video games depends on factors of personal and social nature for users.

Now let's address each of these issues separately using solid scientific data.

It is not uncommon that researchers refer to results of various surveys in order to demonstrate significance of the issue of violence in video games. Rhodes, for instance, mentions various statistical surveys concerning the presence and impact of violence in media on the public (p. 55), Anderson even mentions specific video games oriented long-lasting transcontinental research on the correlation between violence in video games and exposure to aggressive behavior among minors (p. 22). While assessing this kind of information, several critical points should be kept in mind. First of all, specific

surveys concerning violence in video games were and still are relatively rare. This is true due to the fact that most researchers do not bother to distinguish the issue of violence in video games from violence in other forms of media. And even in this case survey results may be surprising – Rhodes mentions some results according to which there was a positive correlation between watching characters like Elmo from the " Sesame Street" and real-life expression of aggression among the youngest viewers. Besides, there is one more logical factor that successfully refutes results of even the most precise and video games oriented research. A few people can see the vast, yet unobvious, difference between correlation and causation. It may be said, for example, that all people who died in the past years have slept for at least several hours a day, but it would be preposterous to claim that their deaths were caused by sleeping. Same is true about violence in video games. People may be playing games with certain elements of violence and express aggression in daily life, but the causation here is yet to be proved. Rhodes refers to this paradox using the " mean world" theory (p. 56) – these two phenomena coexist, but are not necessarily related in terms of direct or reverse causation.

Now let's have a look at the issue of prominence of video games compared to other forms of media in terms of bringing elements of violence to the customer. It is commonly acknowledged that violence in various shapes surrounds people 24/7. While we are watching news we see revolts, civil unrests, nature calamities day and night. We read newspapers, read books about wars and conspiracies, we claim heroes and evildoers of the past and present to be cultural icons. And this is hundred percent passive perception

of violence. People cannot influence what they see on TV or read on the Web. Gaming provides a decent response to that. According to Anderson (p. 21), video games provide the feeling of autonomy and competence to users, i. e. allow them to make decisions and solve problems by themselves, even in a virtual world. Violence is only one of the mechanisms of problem solving in games, and normally it is a responsive measure towards protection. Besides, there is a concept of the " catharsis theory" (Gentile, p. 22), according to which successful neutralization of threats in the virtual world allows users to prevent an outburst of aggression in reality.

Finally, there are millions of copies of video games with elements of violence sold worldwide every day, while just a small proportion of buyers demonstrate aggressive behavior. There is a logical explanation to this issue provided by both Rhodes (p. 56) and Gentile (p. 21). The point is that in order to become violent in reality people should normally be exposed to cruel and aggressive behavior of others in reality as well. Social outcasts, people with unstable mentality may utilize video games as a way of practicing their counter-productive and anti-social skills, but they can use other methods (e. g. military or paramilitary service) as well. Besides, no matter how realistic computer shooters can be, they still differ considerably from reality both in terms of physics and plot.

It is true that violence in video games has not been properly explored in terms of causation of violence in real life. In order to evaluate even the possibility of such causation, further strictly impartial and goal-oriented research should be conducted. Such research has to be free from political and ideological components in order to determine the truth rather than pour

more water on the mill of activists and politicians. The first hypothesis is therefore correct.

Hypotheses number two may also be considered more or less justified. The situation in which a person is capable of responding to the emerging threats and protecting her- or himself (even in the form of a virtual avatar) is quite different from the position of a hopelessly passive viewer of news broadcasts. Video games provide a chance for every person to either avoid violence or minimize it according to personal preferences. Besides that, there are currently effective mechanisms of protection of minors from violent gaming content (the system of ratings would be a fit example here).

The last hypothesis, although strongly subjective by nature, in my opinion also has a right to exist. Those parents and governmental officials who dramatize the impact of violence in video games on the youth tend to neglect the simple fact that they bear personal responsibility for the minors. Although it is extremely tempting (and potentially profitable) to accuse captains of the gaming industry of making money at the expense of the younger generations, it still remains a direct duty of every parent to restrict access to the content which is considered inappropriate to their children. Violence in video games is of course an important issue to be considered by all categories of stakeholders. However it would be premature and unprofessional to perceive it the root of evil. While people try to blame the video gaming industry of specific, real life outbursts of aggression and violence, they tend to forget that the virtual world appears to be a mirror of reality. Violence got so deep into the cultural code of modern society that the public gets shocked when it is revealed through video games. The

inconvenient truth is that the issue has to be solved by overall and continuous improvement of the society rather than getting rid of the indicator of the problem.

References:

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