The effects of violent video games on adolescents

Sociology, Violence

The Effects of Violent Video Games on Adolescents Kacy Romero University of Louisiana at Lafayette Abstract In this paper, the effects that violent video games have on adolescents will be discussed. Mentioned throughout this paper will be results from specific studies that both support and oppose the theory that violent video games increase aggression in adolescents. The theory that violent video games do encourage aggression will be the main focus, specifically supported the study conducted by Weber, Ritterfeld, and Mathiak in 2006. Evidence from their studies will be used to prove this point by discussing the physical and neurological effects of exposure to violent media. Results from other related studies will also be discussed to support this theory, such as the study done by Barlett, Branch, Rodeheffer, and Harris on the short-term effects of video games, and the study by Carnagey and Anderson, which examines the effects on adolescents of rewards and punishments of violent behavior in video games. Studies that support the opposing theory will be criticized for their vague results and lack of concrete evidence. The Controversial Issue of Video Game Effects on Adolescents Video games have become and increasingly popular pastime since the late twentieth century among adolescents. Violence in video games tends to be very common, and it presents certain political issues. Whether or not violence in the media has an effect on teenagers has been a consistent controversial topic in modern society. Certain studies tend to show positive correlation between the aggression levels of teenagers who play violent video games, while other studies do not. Supporters of the theory that violent video games increase aggression in adolescents use results from studies that show these trends. People who disagree with this idea would say

that these studies are circumstantial or simply coincidental. Although this type of research cannot be proven entirely, enough studies show that violent video game exposure increases aggression in teenagers. Research has been done to determine a relationship between aggression and violence in adolescents. Many experiments simply provide measurements of the levels of aggressive behavior or cognition before and after playing such video games. While these studies are great examples of direct correlation, the study I find to be most convincing is that of Weber, Ritterfield, and Mathiak. In their research, they look at the different areas of the brain and note the activity present while participants are involved in video game play. Their results are intriguing and are concrete evidence as to why violence in the media has a negative impact on society. In Weber, Ritterfield, and Mathiak's experiment, thirteen German males participated in playing the violent video game " Tactical Ops: Assault on Terror. " While playing, areas of the brain were measured with an fMRI to detect an increase in cognitive activity. They discovered that exposure to virtual violence causes an increase in variations of the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, lessened activity in the rostral anterior cingulate cortex, and lessened activity in the amygdala (Weber et al., 2006). Since these areas of the brain deal with emotions and feelings, this cross-sectional study represents a solid idea of what goes on in the brain during video game play. When violence was absent in the game, the activity of the amygdala could not be observed. This study supports the theory that violent media does affect a person's cognitive activity and could potentially estimate long-term effects due to the presence of dopamine during video game play (Weber et al., 2006). The lack of activity in the amygdala during

video game play tells us that there is a lack of fear. Consistent exposure could eventually lead to the absence of fear and emotion within a person. The mental emotional deficit is dangerous as it alters the brain from a general feeling of warmth and sensitivity to apathy or violence. Carnagey and Anderson also conducted experiments in order to examine the effects of violent video games on adolescents. Their experiments were successful at proving that violent video games increase aggression more than nonviolent video games. It also proved that violence-rewarding games could increase aggressive thought (Carnagey et al., 2005). These results are important because the goal of most violent video games is to attack, wound, or kill. Being rewarded for this type of behavior in a fantasy world could create a sense of confusion. Adolescents' brains are not fully developed, therefore if society is teaching them that violence is not acceptable, but these video games are telling them that violence is necessary, their brain is experiencing a major contradiction. If exposed to this fantasy world too much, the constant rewarding of violent behavior could erase the realistic views on violence. Barlett, Branch, Rodeheffer, and Harris conducted an experiment which focused on the how long the effects of violent video games last on adolescents. In their first study, they expected that four minutes after violent video game play, there would be heightened aggressive feelings, thoughts, and physiological arousal among the participants. After nine minutes, they predicted that these levels would significantly decrease. They hypothesized for their second study that each of these three variables, aggressive feelings, aggressive thoughts, and physiological arousal, were required to be internally present in the participants previously to have a significant effect

on the results of the first study (Barlett et al., 2009). Ninety-one mostly male undergraduate freshmen were selected as participants. The experiment required participants to play either a violent or nonviolent video game for fifteen minutes and then mix hot sauce into a person’s meal either four or nine minutes later. Results showed an increase in aggressive feelings, thoughts, and physiological arousal in those playing violent video games compared to those who had played nonviolent video games. Results also showed that increases in aggressive thoughts and feelings after playing a violent video game did not last longer than about four minutes, while increased heart rate lasted between four and nine minutes. Although internal aggressive feelings, thoughts, and physiological arousal all proved to be a main indication of the effects of violent video games on adolescents, aggressive thoughts were shown to have the biggest impact on the relationship between playing violent video games and having aggressive behavior (Barlett et al., 2009). Adolescents who play video games often get carried away. They will play for hours at a time. The constant exposure to violence could eventually result in long-lasting violent effects. If playing for fifteen minutes results in increased violence for four minutes after, then the prediction of how long the effects would last on someone who plays excessively is scary. Unsworth, Devilly, and Ward conducted an experiment regarding the effects of violent video games on adolescents. Their results actually opposed the popular belief that violent video games increase aggression in young adults. In this study, 107 adolescents were instructed to play the violent video game “ Quake II" for five minutes and then speak into a microphone about their thoughts for fifteen minutes. Results showed that

while some players show a short-term tendency of increased anger, most of the players reflect no change in their anger level. Some participants' anger levels even decreased after playing the game. (Unsworth et al., 2007). However, this study would be considered more valid if proven over a long period of time rather than measuring the short-term effects of game play. Konijn, Bijvank, and Bushman conducted an experiment aimed at further explaining the effects of violent video games on adolescents. The results of this experiment proved that those who wished to be more like the violent character in the video game was affected more by playing the game. Their aggression levels were higher than those who had no desire to be like the character (Konijn et al., 2007). This experiment presents a new idea that people from low SES are more likely to become immersed in the games and therefore be negatively affected by the violence it portrays. This is interesting because it acknowledges the issues of circumstance. Obviously, not every person who plays violent video games is guaranteed to exhibit violent behavior or aggression. However, the amount of people in today's society who are already emotionally unstable is high. This means that if a large number of adolescents are looking for someone to look up to, and violent video games provide them with this, then the negative effects could be significant. It has been proven by numerous researchers that aggression increased after being involved in raging video games. However, this controversial issue cannot easily be solved in the United States. Attempts at restricting the sale of violent video games have been found to be unconstitutional. According to the authors, reasons for this include the legislation's comparison of violent content with sexual content, lack of

sufficient evidence that violent video games cause criminal behavior, and the vague, overly restrictive means (Collier et al., 2008). Generally, too much exposure of any type of negative behavior will eventually cause some degree of emotional and mental damage. Many scientists have studied the effects of participating in violent games, and their results are convincing. Levels of aggression increase during and after violent video game play. The brain is physically affected and the heart rate increases during such activity. Mental and physical behavior during and after has also been proven to change. Although these are short-term results on the body, repetition of this could be potentially influential regarding the psychological development of adolescents. However, the controversial issue of whether or not these theories are accurate continues to exist. Even while the majority of research suggests violent video games are harmful to the teenage population, preventing sales of such games presents certain constitutional issues. More substantial evidence and enough serious reasoning would be necessary in order for the authorities to create a realistic solution. References Bartlett, C., Branch, O., Rodeheffer, C., & Harris, R. (2009). How Long Do the Short-Term Violent Video Game Effects Last?. Collier, J., Liddell, P., & Liddell, G. (2008). Exposure of Violent Video Games to Children and Public Policy Implications. Unsworth, G., Devilly, G., & Ward, T. (2007). The Effect of Playing Violent Video Games on Adolescents: Should Parents be Quaking in Their Boots?. Weber, R., Ritterfeld, U., & Mathiak, K. (2006). Does Playing Violent Video Games Induce Aggression? Empirical Evidence of a Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Study. Carnagey, N., and Anderson, C. (2005). The Effects of Reward and Punishment in Violent Video Games on Aggressive

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