

An Unexpected Consequence of Playing Video Games

Video games of every description and imagination possible now seem to be a part of the life of nearly every family in the country. I have spoken with family after family who use video games as a baby sitter, similar to the way they use TV.

Arguably, the creativity that continues to give rise to this form of entertainment could be directed to products and programs that would have a more beneficial effect on the personal, social, emotional and educational lives of our children.

However, this industry exists solely for financial gain. Altruistic motives do not enter the picture. Recently, I spoke with a fellow mental health professional about the effects of playing video games. He defended this activity, speaking about the beneficial effects of “improving hand-eye coordination”. How “improving hand-eye coordination”, even if playing video games does this, can benefit learning, improve reading or enhances social skills continues to remain unclear to me.

I remarked that we become, to a large extent, what we see, what we hear and what we eat and we become like the people who surround us. He agreed, somewhat reluctantly, that the content of the video game could stimulate aggressiveness and make acting out a greater possibility for the child who does not have well-developed personal restraints.

I then brought up another point. Success in playing a video game, in some if not most phases of the game, rewards quickness of responding. So the quicker a player is trained to respond, the more successful they are, the more levels they achieve, etc. Apart from the addictive nature of the game, it appears that unless quickness of responding is achieved, there can be little if any success.

Impulsivity is acting before thinking, or conversely, not thinking before acting. It really is not a great stretch to see that being trained to be quicker in responding could easily foster further impulsivity in children who already are having difficulty with impulse control.

My colleague pondered this briefly, then said, “You know, I never really thought about it in that way. But it does make sense”.

I’ve also discussed this with parents who want to do what is best for their children. Without exception, this possible unexpected consequence of playing video games has been well received with statements such as, “that does make sense”. If understanding and acceptance are the first steps to begin the process of change, then just maybe we’ll see a problematic situation no longer being made worse.

So does playing video games result in more impulsivity? I think so, especially for the child who already has problems with impulse control.

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