



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2005

I13 Video Games and Violence: Is There a Connection?

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain knowledge of violence depicted in popular video games by learning the impact of violence on children and juveniles exposed to video games, the use of exposure to violence in video games as a defense in criminal responsibility cases, and the liability of the video game industry in civil cases in context of certain violent incidents.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating the importance of considering impact of violence in video games in context of violent incidents, reviewing the legal issues related to use of violence in video game as defense in criminal cases, and studying the liability of video game industry in civil cases.

Some attorneys have tried to use impact of violence in media to excuse criminal responsibility in cases of murder and other crimes. In a similar vein, recently, violence in video games has raised the possibility of using it as the cause of a certain violent acts.

The school killings at Columbine brought this issue to the forefront when the two shooters, were found to be obsessed with a violent video game called "Doom." Some speculated that this obsession with video games was responsible for the shootings.

Recently Britain's biggest electronics chain, Dixons, has pulled the violent video game "Manhunt" from its shops after claims that it sparked the murder of a 14-year-old boy by a friend. Censorship officials in New Zealand banned the game six months prior. This has sparked debate throughout Britain's press as to whether violent video games can influence behavior, and thus whether they should be controlled, or even banned.

To this day, academicians and researchers debate about whether video games make children and adolescents more aggressive. The debate reflects a divide in the way people perceive games. Are games harmless, perhaps even cathartic, as many people who grew up playing them believe? Or are they teaching kids to be more aggressive, and in extreme cases, to kill?

The presentation will include depiction of violence in video games and its impact on adolescents and young children. Various aspects of psychiatric evaluation in a forensic setting of an individual with exposure to violent video games will be delineated.

It will discuss the available data including recent studies that found that video games can increase aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behavior because they are interactive and engrossing. Additionally, other contradicting theories including that these studies confuse cause with effect and that aggressive children may simply prefer violent games. Furthermore, research that these games are beneficial in increasing hand-eye coordination, faster reflexes, and learning skills will be reviewed.

It will try to answer the following questions: Do these games which reward points for brutally murdering their victims send the wrong message and desensitizes them to violence? Does it suggest that violent behavior is acceptable and reinforces evil killings? Are these beneficial in venting out some anger and aggression in a harmless way and preventing real violent acts?

The presentation will also include the description of the video game industry's five ratings for games - adult only, mature, teen, everyone, and early childhood and how a psychiatrist in clinical settings can educate parents and young patients to find games with suitable content.

Finally, it will address whether the age of the child matters when considering the impact of the violence in video games. Research has shown that younger children are more suggestible and impressionable.

The presentation will end with a conclusion whether these can be solely responsible for a criminal act or these should be considered as a part of a violent society where aggression is so commonplace we don't even think about it any more.

Video Games, Violence, Juvenile