NOKIA 3310
ARE FEATURE PHONES BETTER FOR KIDS?

3D MAGIC
3D PRINTING FOR KIDS

TECH & NATURE
HOW THE TWO CAN GO HAND IN HAND

INTERNET OF THINGS
TOO MUCH CONNECTION?

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GAMING & CHILD DEVELOPMENT:
THE FOGGY LINK

LEARNING OUTDOORS
ARE **FOREST SCHOOLS** A GLIMPSE INTO **THE FUTURE?**

GAMING & CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

THE FOGGY LINK

BY **STEVE W. NZIOKI**

As parents, we are naturally wired to limit – or even deny – gaming time for our kids. Many of us who grew up in the 80s and 90s remember the gaming limitations our folks used to set for one reason or another. I remember my dad being strict with video games around the house, especially after my grades went south during the Nintendo craze in the 80s. But, as research and scientific studies would show years later, video games had little to do with academic and social underperformance.

On the contrary, some prominent studies have even shown that gaming might be good for childhood development. In 2016, researchers published a study that found kids who played video games for a minimum of 5 hours weekly performed better in school, both socially and academically. The study, conducted in Europe with over 3,000 kids aged between 6 and 11, also found kid gamers were less likely to develop psychological problems compared with non-gaming kids.

Another Australian study published in the International Journal of Communication found that 15-year-old gamers tested higher in reading, maths, and science when compared to the average scores. These kids scored 15 and 17 points above average for math and science tests respectively. Teenagers with the above-average test scores were online gamers who logged in to play at least once every day.

There are tonnes of such studies globally that show the benefits of video games for school-going kids. Some even advocate for inclusion of non-violent video games in school syllabi to help with instruction.

Still, many parents hold on to their guns (forgive the pun) when it comes to video games. Parents restrict kids' pastime options to either the outdoors or a book and forget that the right video games also contribute to the development of their kids.

"...researchers published a study that found kids who played video games for a minimum of 5 hours weekly performed better in school..."

Debunking The Video Game Myth

In 2016, an 18-year old gunman went on a killing rampage in Munich, Germany, that claimed the lives of nine people. It was later revealed that the gunman was an avid gamer and loved first-person shooter titles like Counter Strike. For a long time, such events have formed the basis on which hard-line parents won't even talk about video games in their homes.

Reports and policy statements by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) often highlight strong links between violent video games and aggressive behaviour among kids.

However, like many of the real-life examples and studies that informed the hard-line positions of anti-gaming parents, it's never enough to analyse video games and kids exclusively. There are many other biological and environmental factors that should be considered before blaming the ills of the world on video games.

> There is a widespread notion that video games help cultivate violent aggression in children. However that has been some extensive research that in fact the opposite may be overall true.

Factors like family relations, gender, and genetics can play significant roles in shaping the mind of a violent kid or one who is a social and academic underachiever. So, before carting away your kid's Xbox or PlayStation after a fight at school or poor grades, it's always best to dig deeper to find the root cause of their problems.

Games Are Not All Call Of Duty

Another common misconception amongst non-gamers are that all games are your typical shoot everything in sight, ultra violent Rambo style affairs. This does a great disservice to many games that actually strive to tell you a story which affects you on an emotional level, like a good movie or book would.

In 2013 a game called 'Papers, Please' was released where players play the role of an immigration inspector in a fictional communist state. It's ultimate goal was to make players feel more empathy towards immigrants. Quite apt in today's climate.

Another game called 'Journey' has a player take control of a character through breathtaking scenery in a narrative that, despite up to interpretation, seems to follow an afterlife allegory. There are many stories of people having an almost spiritual experience with this (yes, in a video game!), some of whom claim that it helped them deal with the loss of a loved one.

There are a multitude of different types of games from AAA (the 'blockbuster' games) RPGs that teach new words or concepts such as inventory and buying or selling, to more indie games which purely revolve around player choice that impacts the narrative. And it's the choice of the player that can make games unique from watching a movie, as it means revealing a little about yourself rather than just seeing an action being carried out. It's akin to the father who gave his young son the moral dilemma of a toy train heading towards a fork in the track with one person tied on one path, and many people tied on
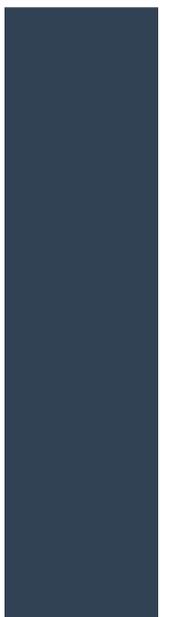
the other- who should he save?

Others strive to have social commentary, and their immersive nature means that players have to think about the decisions they make and face the consequences of them, or simply ponder about the actions characters have taken. There are real world lessons that can be learnt in a safe environment and can have a positive impact. For example, the eco themes of 'Final Fantasy VII' have inspired some to become environmentalists. Nintendo's 'Animal Crossing' has reportedly enhanced kids' reading levels well above their level due to the amount of written communication with the game's characters. At the same time it enforces the idea of community. So no, not all video games are violent, and a fair few can affect development in a more obviously positive way.

Psychology with extensive research on the effects of violent video games. They argue that there is in fact no link with real world violence and studies to 'prove' this are unreliable in their bias. *Read an except on the following page.*

Bottom Line

At the end of the day, being an involved parent almost always guarantees that your kids will become productive members of the society, even when they sneak in an R-rated version of Mortal Kombat. Try and broaden the scope of games that they play and you might be surprised at the lessons and messages some of them have to offer. Always keep in mind that a healthy childhood is all about creating the perfect balance between screen time, school, and outdoor activities. ●

Moral Combat

A recently released book entitled 'Moral Combat' tackles this stigma of violent games and their influences. It is written by Patrick M. Markey, PHD and Christopher J. Ferguson, PHD, both Professors of

(Left) 'Journey' takes the idea of online play turns it on its head. You may or may not come across other players but when you do, you can only communicate through chirps. You can also either share the whole journey with just one player, or different parts of it with different players.

About the author

Steve is a dedicated writer, dad, and husband who spends much of his time writing whilst trying to keep his son off the keyboard. He has written dozens of articles on PC and console gaming. When he is not writing Steve loves enjoying the outdoors with family and appreciating the small things in nature..

WHY THE WAR ON VIOLENT
VIDEO GAMES IS WRONG

MORAL COMBAT

PATRICK M. MARKEY, PHD, AND
CHRISTOPHER J. FERGUSON, PHD
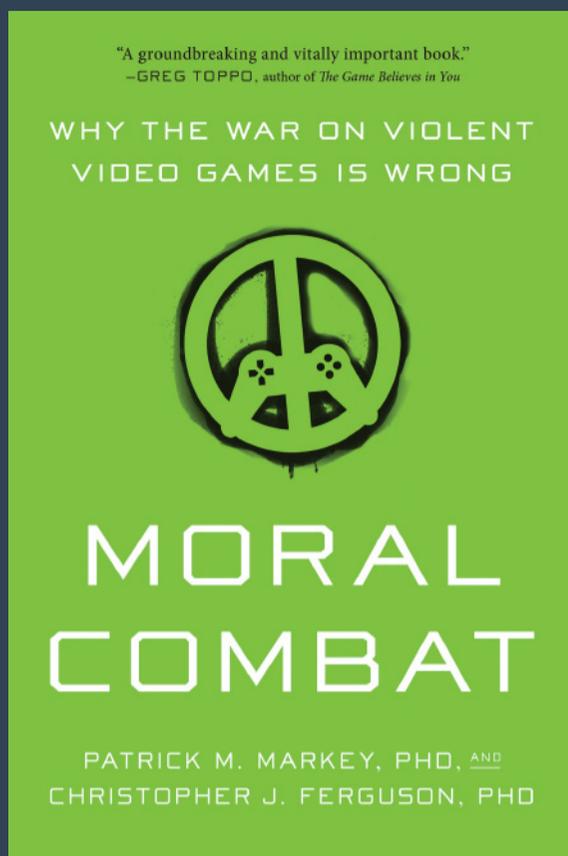
What does it talk about?

- Blame the game: main reasons for bias in video game research.
- Contrary to popular belief: the positive effects of gaming no one is talking about.
- How gaming can help keep young boys out of trouble.
- Does playing video games-especially violent ones- lead players to become less morally sensitive?
- Video game addiction: myths and how to know if someone has a problem.
- The Grand Theft fallacy.
- And much more!

Below is an excerpt taken from the 9th Chapter: 'A Strategy Guide For Parents'.

> " The old adage, "fear sells," is true. Fear sells books (we'll see how this one does, since we're basically telling you everything's OK), drives clicks, gets grant money, gives politicians an easy way to win support, and the list goes on. Anti-media watchdog groups, politicians, the news media, and a vocal minority of scholars actively frighten, shame, and guilt parents into a panic over video games. This isn't science, nor is it good medical advice; it is simple moral advocacy. Groups like the American Psychological Association and American Academy of Pediatrics are essentially professional guilds, and identifying problems for their members to rush in and solve is just good business. Fear is arguably an integral part of their business model. Anti-media watchdog groups like Parents Television Council and Common Sense Media survive on donations—donations generated by scaring parents about the supposed dangers of violent video games. The Parents Television Council even has a helpful webpage where you can learn how to donate a car, stocks, or bequeath them money in your will! The financial motives of such organizations are arguably not much purer than those of the video game industry itself.
>
> By this point in the book, it should be clear that society has nothing to fear from violent video games. These games are not responsible for real-world violence, and there is no reason for Veronica's mother to be worried that playing World of Warcraft is going to turn her daughter into a criminal or make her less sensitive toward the suffering of others. That is not only the conclusion of this book—it is a conclusion endorsed by the majority of scientists who study the effects of media. In fact, one recent survey by an anti–video game researcher

found that only 35 percent of scientists agreed with his belief that media violence poses a danger. Other surveys of scholars and clinicians have produced similar findings, suggesting that only a trivial number of scientists (as low as 11 percent) actually believe that video games are a problem for society.

The fact that most scientists discount the notion that violent media causes real-world violence is a relatively new phenomenon. Surveys of media scholars conducted thirty years ago revealed that 90 percent of psychologists felt that media violence was among the primary causes of behavioral aggression. This change in scientific opinion clearly indicates that the moral panic around violent video games, at least among scientists, has started to dissipate. One reason for this change is simple: during the past three decades, many older researchers have retired, replaced by younger scientists who grew up playing video games. In the past thirty years, as more and more research has been done on the effects of violent media, fewer and fewer scholars believe video game violence is something we should fear.

A note of caution: the fact that violent video games do not con- tribute to violent behavior does not mean that kindergarteners should be playing Grand Theft Auto. Parents might want to shield their children from such games for other valid reasons, including to prevent nightmares, help them avoid negative attitudes and outlooks and reduce anxiety, and to encourage them to feel that the world is a safe place. Adults themselves may choose to avoid violent games for similar reasons. Kids and adults alike are individuals, with individual sensitivities and personalities. Deciding at what age a child can play a certain game is going to be different for every family and every child. Parents ultimately hold the responsibility for making choices that are right for them and for their children.

Luckily, these choices aren't a matter of life or death—not even close. Deciding on appropriate media usage is well below the importance of other decisions such as "Should I vaccinate?" (yes), or "Should I spend more time with my kids or at work finishing a big project?" (choose the kids). When it comes to media in general and video games in particular, it's OK for parents to give a decision a try, see how it works out, talk with their kids about the experience, and readjust if necessary. As long as a child has a warm, structured, intellectually challenging home, things are most likely going to be OK. Even the worst video games can't pierce that particular armor. It may not always feel this way, but parents have a lot more influence on their children than the media ever will. Parents should have confidence in their decisions, but they must also give themselves permission to make mistakes—because, inevitably, we all do. ”

'Moral Combat: Why the War on Violent Video Games Is Wrong' is now avaliable worldwide wherever books are sold, and can also be read on Amazon Kindle.