Are violent video games bad for me? [1]

Dear Alice,

I've always loved video games, but I feel like there's a lot of stuff in the media saying that video games lead to violent or sociopathic personalities. Is there any evidence to suggest that violent video games are bad for emotional health?

Answer

Dear Reader,

You're right?there's no shortage of media buzz around this topic, especially in the wake of a horrific act of violence. Simply put, there's no evidence to suggest that a person will commit violent acts solely based on her/his gaming habits. Now, do violent video games affect your emotional health? Probably. How much so depends on a variety of factors including the game, the person, and the amount of time spent playing [2].

A number of research studies have documented at least a relationship between video games and aggressive behaviors. For example, one study found a link between violence desensitization (reduced responsiveness to actual violence based on exposure to violence in the media) and increased aggression in participants who were exposed to violent video games. Another study found that when sexual objectification and violence against women were part of the game, male participants experienced increased negative attitudes toward women. Separate research suggests a link between negative attitudes towards women and violence against women. Becoming desensitized to violence or holding negative attitudes, however, doesn't mean you?ll become a violent sociopath.

It may be helpful to think of the amount, content, context, structure, and mechanics of the games you love to play. Are you playing for many hours each day or a few hours each week? Are you only playing violent games or do you sometimes play other types? Are you playing single or multiplayer games? Is the game realistic or does it have 2D dimensional representations? Thinking about each of these questions can help you understand the potential effects video games can have on your emotional health.

You could also consider changing up the games you play every now and again. Some researchers have investigated how games featuring characters that help and support each other can actually increase pro-social behaviors. Some video games even help people get off the couch and get moving [3]! That's pretty cool stuff. Be mindful of the media you consume and how it affects your mood?you'll be better suited to make choices about what you play,
watch, or read.

Alice!
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