**The Detrimental Effects of Video Games**

**UOIT-Youth Cultures**

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**Introduction**

Technology has become a popular avenue for youth to express their individuality, as well as providing an exit to escape reality. There are numerous outlets that youth can choose from such as facebook, myspace, twitter, hulu and MSN in addition to more “traditional” methods such as television, movies and video games. Newer online networking sites such as facebook and myspace may be popular now, but like a lot of other social networking sites, their popularity dwindles as time passes. One popular technological system that has been somewhat overlooked in the last few years would have to be video games. Video games are a past-time that has become immensely popular over the past few years. One of the problems with this however is that the negative aspects to this hobby have been glorified over the past few years. One example of this would be the case of Brandon Crisp. Brandon Crisp was a seemingly regular 15 year old kid, who had become heavily addicted to a popular online game (Toronto Star, 2008). His playing time had become out of control and his parents had no other choice than to confiscate his game. Due to having his game taken away, Brandon became enraged and threatened to runaway. His parents did not take this threat seriously and even helped him pack his bag (Toronto Star, 2008). This story ended tragically however, as Brandon’s body was found dead in a field not too far away from his home (Toronto Star, 2008). This is only one example of how video games are becoming a problem with many of today’s youth. This problem is one that is becoming increasingly dangerous, considering that video games have been available for well over 30 years.

Video games have been around since pong was released in 1972. However, for the first 20 years that they were in circulation, video games lacked any sort of realism that gamers are now blessed with. Early systems such as Atari, Coleco and the original Nintendo produced graphics that pale in comparison to current platforms. In those earlier days, many games consisted of simple 8 or 16 bit graphics which vaguely resembled the real life objects that they were modelled after. Online gaming was years away and video games were more of a social practice as gaming was often done in many arcades around the world.

Today, gaming is handled in a totally different manner. Not only have the graphics been improved by leaps and bounds, but online gaming has created a whole new level of immersion. People can now play against anyone from all over the world, increasing the competitive desire. Not only has the online element changed gaming, but the graphics have become so realistic that you can really immerse yourself in the experience. The visceral experience of killing someone has also become increasingly realistic with the life like graphics of today’s games. The youth are becoming desensitized to violence because of this immersive experience (Carnagey et al, 2007). Also, games such as World of Warcraft have created a whole new life for many people (Toronto, 2007). Online games allow people to create a new identity and assist them in dealing with social disorder problems they might have (Toronto, 2007). There have been numerous cases of people becoming heavily addicted and neglecting their social life and personal health in order to keep playing. An example of this would be two World of Warcraft users who died while playing the game, because they failed to eat or sleep properly (Ivanov, 2005). Is this what society is becoming? Many people suggest that youth are the future. If youth are truly responsible for what happens in the future than we as a society may be in trouble. Many youth are becoming increasingly dependent on technology, more specifically video games. This paper will seek to discuss a few of the problems that are plaguing our youth, and discuss the possible consequences to their actions.

**Research Question**

Video games have become a popular past time for a lot of society’s youth. The problem with this is that many of these youth are experiencing serious side effects including addiction issues. This is becoming a social issue that will eventually have to be dealt with. Why are video games becoming a social issue? More specifically, what are the negative aspects of video gaming? This will be explored in how it increases aggression among youths, has a negative impact on health and how video game addiction can drastically decrease an individual’s quality of life.

**Methodology**

The subject of video game addiction will be examined with the use of academic journals. These journals have been taken from social science journals, as well as from criminal justice publications. The reason for this is to examine how video gaming has an effect on youth through the criminal element, in addition to examining how this has an effect on their everyday life. The use of newspaper and internet articles will also be applied. It would only be appropriate that a paper based on technology would use sources found from the internet. The basis for using newspaper and website article would be to provide examples and case studies of individuals who have been severely affected by their gaming habits.

**Research Paper**

When speaking of the negative effects that video games has on youth, the first problem would be dealing with the increased aggression that youth exhibit. Olson, Kutner and Warner (2008) believed that the reason behind this increased aggression is that upon witnessing various violent acts, youth become desensitized to the violence they witness. They become used to these acts, and assume acting in a violent fashion is a normal behaviour. According to a 2005 survey, 77% of boys between grades 7-12 had at least play one game in the grand theft auto series of games (which happen to be very violent) (Olson et al, 2008). This demonstrates that not only are youth playing violent games, but they are playing games rated for mature audiences (meaning those people 17 years of age and older). There are various reasons why youth chose to play these violent games. Olson et al determined that there are five reasons for playing violent games, they are as follows; fantasies of power and fame, challenge, exploration, and mastery, emotional regulation, especially coping with anger and stress, sociability (cooperation, competition, and status seeking) and learning new skills (2008). A subsequent research article by Kutner, Olson, Warner and Hertzog (2008) found that only 16% of parents checked the parental rating of video games, as opposed to 46% of parents who had rules regulation TV usage. This is a staggering difference. There are indeed many violent programs that children should not be watching, however, video games can be as violent if not more violent than programs aired on TV. This compounded with the fact that video games are an interactive experience, would only heighten the idea that that video game use should be more closely monitored.

Why should video games be more closely monitored? It’s meant as a form of entertainment, correct? This sounds novel in theory, but in practice excessive video game exposure can relate to very violent behaviour. According to Olson et al (2008), “policy makers...have cited anecdotal reports linking violent video games to highly publicized violent crimes such as school shootings”. Some examples used by these policy makers were the Malvo “sniper” murders in Washington, where his defence lawyer stated that violent video game exposure had an effect on why Malvo decided to commit these crimes (Olson et al, 2008). If people truly believe that video games contributed to the death of someone, then there is a very serious issue here. In addition to the Malvo case was the Daniel Petric story, which could be considered even more horrifying. Daniel Petric at the time of the murders was a 17 year old who lived in Wellington Ohio (Times Online, 2009). Daniel’s parents had become disturbed by the time he had spent playing a popular Xbox game. They took away the game as punishment for spending too much time playing it. Daniel’s father had locked the game away in a lock box along with this gun, so that Daniel would not be able to play it (Times Online, 2009). Upon finding the key to this box, Daniel retrieved the game, as well as his fathers’ hand gun. He then proceeded to find his parents, which is when the crime occurred. Daniel requested that both his parents close their eyes, as he had a surprise for them (Times Online, 2009). Once their eyes were closed, he shot both of them in the head, killing his mother and severely wounding his father (Times Online, 2009). All of this took place because they removed his prize possession, a copy of Halo 3. The judge found that there was enough evidence suggesting Daniel planned this murder well in advance and also suggesting that playing the game for so long resulted in physical and psychological changes in the youth’s brain (similar to the withdraw symptoms a drug addict would experience) (Times Online, 2009). This is a prime example in illustrating that having an addiction problem with video games can result in severe consequences. Had Daniel’s parents noticed this problem a lot earlier, perhaps things would have ended up with a more agreeable solution.

Video games can cause a youth to become more aggressive due to the excessive violence, however an increased amount of game time can also be detrimental to one’s health. Ballard, Gray, Reilly and Noggle (2009) conducted an interesting study involving video game usage and a person’s physical health. Their hypothesis was that there is a correlation between video game play time and obesity, with the correlation meaning that increased time consuming media such as video games would equal a higher body mass index (Ballard et al, 2009). In addition to that correlation, increased video game use would also correlate into increased use of other forms of media (tv, movies...etc) (Ballard et al, 2009). One of the reasons for this correlation would have to be that by playing more video games, one would be restricting themselves from physical activity. Their conclusions were supported in specific genres of gaming. For example, it was found that users who played online role playing games (such as World of Warcraft) had a higher BMI (Ballard et al, 2009). To take a direct quote from their research, it was found that “MMORPG play was more strongly correlated with both higher body mass and lower levels of exercise than other types of game play” (Ballard et al, 2009). This is a very serious conclusion, due to the fact that over 11.5 million people play WoW (Cavalli, 2008). If even 25% of those users consider themselves to be heavy gamers that would leave close to 3 million users being subject to a higher BMI and obesity simply because they spent too much time gaming. One of the reasons suggested for the phenomenon was that users who played online games tended to spend more hours gaming than those who did not (Ballard et al, 2009). Spending a lot of time online would not leave much time for work and having an active life such as going to the gym, playing sports or taking part in other forms of exercise. One of the reasons why North America’s youth is becoming increasingly obese can be attributed to playing an excessive amount of video games. As illustrated in the previous study, increased video game play, especially when playing online, has drastic effects when it comes to one’s health. In addition to becoming over weight due to over gaming, “gaming addicts willingly forgo sleep, food, and real human contact just to experience more time in the virtual world” (Young, 2009). Sleep and food deprivation can cause serious health concerns, such as death. As earlier stated in this paper, there have been numerous cases of users dying while gaming, with the example being the two World of Warcraft gamers who ignored food and sleep to play more, which did result in death. One solution to the health problem would be to have parents force their children into having some physical activity. If a child were required to join a sports team, or go outside and play for every few hours they game, then the rates of obesity could decline without and further drastic measures. As far as social concerns, parents should monitor their child’s game time to ensure that this is not adversely affected their social life and well being.

There are a few ways to describe how excessive video gaming can adversely affect the lives of youth. Two of the ways in which video gaming can be a detriment is in how it negatively impacts social and educational habits. Kimberley Young had an interesting article on how gaming addictions affected many young people. In some of her case studies she used parents or their children’s recollections of their gaming habits. In one mother’s own words “my son... played Varsity on his high school team until he discovered X-Box Live. His grades plummeted after he discovered the game...I knew that something seriously wrong. He won a baseball scholarship for college and dreamed about playing professionally. Now, nothing else matters to him except the game” (Young, 2009). This is a startling account of how gaming addiction affected her son. Not only did his grades become greatly affected because of his gaming habits, but his social life has also drastically deteriorated due to gaming. Many youth become socially withdrawn once they become addicted to video gaming. This is due to the fact that certain games require that a person be online for a certain amount of time in order for their character to advance. They neglect their health and social obligations because they believe that having their character become advanced is more important than their well being (Young, 2009). Another way in which a gamer’s life is affected is through psychological withdrawal. This is when a gamer has become adversely affected by not playing a game. Similar to drug or alcohol withdrawals, these gamers can become anxious, angry, irritable or severely depressed if they do not have access to the game (Young, 2009). They become bitter towards people in the outside world and resent them for keeping them away from the game (Young, 2009). This is a terrible way to live one’s life, by finding enjoyment only by being in front of a screen. Many young people develop poor social skills due to playing games excessively as a young adult or teenager. These negative traits they develop while they are young stay with them onto adulthood, which causes a decline in their overall quality of life.

**Conclusion**

Technology has become both a blessing and a hindrance to the youth of society. On one hand, video games allow youth to relieve their daily stresses, immerse themselves in a virtual world where they can chose to be whomever they want and make new friends without having to worry about human interactions. On the other hand, video games can cause an increase in aggression, provide many health problems and create an overall decline in their standard of living. For the youth of society to truly benefit from video games and new technologies, they must find a balance with time spent on these devices, and time spent in the “real” world. As children are susceptible to addiction problems, parents must be the ones who regulate game time and must make sure their children live healthy lives outside of their game world. In reality, the parents are the only ones who can control the habits of their children. If they fail to properly control and regular their children’s gaming behaviours, this could create serious health and psychological problems that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

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