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Excluding the author and researchers cited, names have been changed to respect others' privacy.

Video Games Don't Rot Your Brains

My dining room looked like an exhibit from the American Museum of Natural History. Plastic sheets with masonry designs were taped to the walls, covering windows and blocking out the natural lighting. The darkness was alleviated by lamps in which I had installed orange flame-like bulbs. Their light was feeble but sufficient. It caused the shadows to dance about the room in an eerie manner. Small pyramids, Canopic jars, and statues of Egyptian deities lay on every available surface like artifacts extricated from millennia-old ruins. Resting against one corner, a sarcophagus constructed out of cardboard stood watch over the entire scene.

I gathered up the note cards and character descriptions splayed all over the table, carefully placing them in order with a growing sense of pride. These were my babies—the products of hours of research, brainstorming, designing, and writing. Jane, a close friend of the family, stood next to me, her eyes wide with shock as she drank in my decorated dining room.

"How on earth did you make your own mystery role-playing game?"

Shrugging, I replied, "I dunno, I like nerdy stuff. I guess it just seems more like fun than work." It reminded me of playing my favorite online games after all.

"I can't imagine. I wouldn't have the patience for that. I'm not really…" Jane glanced upward, searching for the term. "…creativity-oriented."

"Hey, does your little boy play video games? I have a few I don't play anymore that I'd love to give him."

Her expression turned grim. A ton of worry entered her voice as she responded, "No, he doesn't. Video games aren't allowed in my home—they're unhealthy for your mind."

I kept my mouth shut for a moment. I knew the truth. Here was yet another person who had fallen hopelessly victim to a popular claim that is notoriously unsupported by research. After a few seconds, I cautiously said, "You know it's not quite that simple. Research has uncovered a lot of interesting findings about the effects video games have on people."

Jane looked skeptical but curious. "Like what?"

"Allow me to explain."

As the gaming industry continues to grow with newer, better consoles releasing almost every year, parental concern is often an issue. Researchers have put copious time into studying the long-term effects of this popular pastime and the results are intriguing—to some, unexpected. Studies support that players in the young adolescent age group display trends of heightened imagination[1].

"What about the type of video game?" Jane interrupted. "Surely that makes a difference."

"There are some individual differences," I replied. "But overall, the answer is no."

[1] Linda Jackson et al., "Information Technology use and Creativity: Findings from the Children and Technology Project." (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier, 2012) 5.

Whether it is fighting, role-playing, puzzle-solving, or simulation, the genre of game does not tend to affect children's levels of creativity. Likewise, the gender and race of young players do not seem to make a difference in imagination. Experiments at institutions such as Michigan State University have discovered these effects by analyzing the artistic products of children who play video games. Using samples of hundreds of middle schoolers, the tests suggest that gamers scored higher on measurements designed to test artistic ability[2].

Jane bit her lip for a moment, appearing to ponder my argument. She said, "If that's the only benefit, I'm not sure it's worth it." She raised her eyebrows when a jack o' lantern grin spread across my face. "What?"

Psychologists specializing in game design point out several benefits that video games bring about as a result of their influence on dopamine—a neurotransmitter heavily involved in the brain's reward system[3]. One researcher, Jane McGonigal, found that the heightened dopamine levels that arise from playing stimulating games help to boost a player's energy. This heightened motivation can then prepare the brain to take on other taxing activities, thus making video game breaks a mentally helpful pastime[4]. McGonical also explains that, contrary to the claims of the popular press, gaming can help individuals to develop practical skills in leadership and goal-directed activities[5]. This is due to the fact that countless games have an element of taking charge and pursuing objectives—skills that are vital in everyday life.

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[2] Linda Jackson, 5-6

[3] Marla Tabaka, "How Video Games Can Train You Brain to be More Creative and Productive," Inc. 12 Oct. 2015, Inc.com, Web, 30 Oct. 30 2017

[4] Marla Tabaka, "How Video Games Can Train Your Brain to be More Creative and Productive"

[5] Marla Tabaka, "How Video Games Can Train Your Brain to be More Creative and Productive"

Jane was studying me closely. “How do you think it’s affected you? Don’t you feel drained after you’ve been sitting in from of the TV blowing stuff up?”

I chuckled. “I have to agree with the research. There’s nothing quite like the feeling of beating a really tough level on a game. It’s a rush—you can practically feel your dopamine levels skyrocketing. That’s why we can play for hours. The rush makes you want to keep going—to keep challenging yourself to get better and proceed farther. But, just like psychologists point out, you can use this motivation boost to go do something productive when you’re done playing. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve played a video game and then gone off to clean my whole house or work on a paper or create something. It really does help.” I gestured to the decorated room surrounding us. “How do you think I came up with all of this in just a few weeks? I’ve had so much practice making characters, learning about storylines, completing goals…”

The concerned mother seemed at a loss for words. It was clear that she found the results I’d described interesting; yet, she still harbored understandable doubts. “Here’s the bottom line,” I said. “Technology-based entertainment is what kids do nowadays. I’m not saying we should let our kids sit in front of a screen for days at a time but it’s important to stay updated on the statistics.”

More specifically, statistics suggest that 90% of children partake in video games and about 70% of gamers are around 33 years old. These are intriguing percentages described by researcher Daphne Bavalier. With the number of gamers in the world constantly rising, researchers are striving to find ways to debunk misconceptions like the following: Video gamers have bad eyesight. Video gamers cannot concentrate. All screen-based media have the same effects. Contradictory to these common statements, scientists have uncovered evidence that, in some cases, suggests the exact opposite. Test results reveal that gamers tend to show enhanced

abilities in vision and attention—for example, they are able to read tiny font and focus on individual stimuli amid distracting stimuli. In fact, gamers can track approximately 7 stimuli at one time[6]. This ability, according to Bavalier's studies, is not extended to other forms of technology such as Facebook and general internet activity. To be exact, her experiments suggest that multitasking in this fashion result in low levels of multitasking ability compared to a gamer's multitasking[7].

All of this information leads to one specific point—video games have copious potential and should be further investigated by credible researchers. We can then use these findings to educate the general public, putting irrational fears to rest and helping parents understand the line between healthy and unhealthy when it comes to their children's mental abilities.

Jane laughed and turned her palms upward in surrender. "Alright, I guess I'll look into it. But I have no idea where to start."

I grinned triumphantly. "I have a pretty large game collection. Might I suggest a few?"

[6] TED, dir. "Your Brain on Video Games" YouTube. 19 Nov. 2012. Web. 31 Oct. 2017.
[7] TED, "Your Brain on Video Games"

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