

Assassination Generation

Video Games, Aggression, and the Psychology of Killing

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman

My learning curve for the material in this book could not have been any steeper. The science is there, the research has been done, the stats are in, the conclusions unarguable — indisputably proven. Author Col. Grossman shows how violent video games can warp the mind and end with mass murders.

The fact that violence in the media causes violence in our streets is nothing new. The link between media violence and *actual* violence in our society is undeniable. “The conclusion of the public health community, based on over 30 years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children. Its effects are measurable and long-lasting. Moreover, prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward violence in real life.”¹ With this said, one could be excused for a “Duh...” reaction. But although the evidence is in and is conclusive, the debate is not over. As Grossman points out, our enemy here is **denial**. He notes that denial kills us twice — the first time with physical violence and the second psychologically, when we realize we could have done something about it and didn’t.

It is of profound importance to note that reporting by the media on this research is “extraordinarily rare.” Rather, we have been lobbied into thinking that there is nothing we can do and distracted by deceptive excuses. Lobbyists have spent millions of dollars on *misinformation* campaigns, even using smear tactics to discredit researchers.

The Psychology of Killing

“In a single slice of ‘entertainment,’ the video game industry both gives our children world-class weapons training and psychologically primes them to murder one another. That the industry is making billions serving this toxic cocktail of deadly physical skills and dark, insidious thinking is precisely what this book hopes to drag out of the shadows and into the harsh light of day.”²

The Virus of Violence

“We have created the most violent generation in history. The kids who do nothing but play the sickest video games and watch the sickest movies are very, very sick indeed. The responsibility for their horrific acts should be placed directly at the doorstep of the industry that markets these violent products to children. A trail of blood leads directly to this industry which has fought all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court for the ‘right’ to market its products to children without any restraints, regulations or third-party control whatsoever.”³

It’s Worse Than It Looks

Col. Grossman points out that the video industry uses this excuse: people buy it, so we’re going to keep selling it. His reaction: “Of course violence sells! It’s a human fascination. Nobody can deny that, but this line of reasoning is drug dealer logic. Does a drug dealer know that he is hurting people? Yes. Does he care? No. In the same vein, the companies behind violent video games know better than anyone that commercials, product placement, and subtle cues will modify our behavior, and yet they go beyond drug dealer logic by deliberately marketing to children regardless of the dangers.”⁴

¹ *Assassination Generation*, Col. Dave Grossman

² *Ibid.*, p. 17

³ *Ibid.*, p. 27

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41

Col. Grossman offers us this insight which might contradict popular thought: “Escalating rates of violent crime exist worldwide, and it’s not just gun crime. My books *On Killing* and *On Combat* have been translated into Japanese, Korean, and Chinese, and in all these nations I hear from readers and fellow experts that juvenile violent crime is skyrocketing.”⁵

The Beginning of Brutality

“The desensitization process starts during our children’s youngest years, as they eat their meals in front of the TV. Then they snack as they play violent video games and watch violent movies. Quickly, these children learn that violence is fun and human death and suffering make for great entertainment. They sit in a theater or around their video game consoles with their friends and watch the most horrific depictions of human death and suffering imaginable. They laugh. They cheer. They eat... The kids watching horror movies and playing brutal games have been taught to associate the death and suffering they see with their popcorn, candy bars, sodas, and the scent of their girlfriends’ perfumes. We have millions of children who have been classically conditioned from their youngest days to take pleasure from human death and suffering. To them, at a deep, primal level, human death and suffering are a source of pleasure.”⁶

How Violence Warps the Brain

“Serious biochemical, stress-related factors are at work when children witness violence in real life or on a screen. The brains of children who have been exposed to high levels of violent visual imagery don’t work like the brains of other children. It’s as if the violence-saturated children are aliens among us. They look the same on the outside, but on the inside they are wired differently.”⁷

Some of us needed X-ray comparisons of smokers’ lungs vs. healthy lungs to convince us that smoking was deadly, but X-rays put an end to that debate. Brain-scan research can do the same re: violence! Note: “The violent visual imagery inflicted upon these children caused stress, which in turn prompted the release of fight-or-flight hormones, as if their brains were responding to real-life crises. The forebrain, which controls everything that makes us human, shuts down, leaving the midbrain in charge. When we see the midbrains take over in these brain scans, we believe it shows that the human brain has gone into survival mode. The violent video game consumers in the study also showed a catastrophic breakdown of left-brain processing when given a simple, logical, predictive reasoning exercise.”⁸

Minds Warped by Media They Consume

Which is to say that media violence stunts or “retards” brain development, causing disruptive brain disorder. There is also lasting impact of stunted social skills and lack of self-restraint. When the games are removed from a child’s life, a “detox” process can flush out some of the problems, but the side effects of the trauma can last into adult life. An important element here is not only the fears and phobias the kids develop but also the good skills and habits which they *fail* to develop.

The plotlines incorporated into these games can lead to twisted thinking and a twisted worldview, i.e. the law of the jungle, victims “deserving” bad things, a “mean world syndrome.” A specific example is a study of some 22 years which concluded that those who watched more violent TV as children were more likely as adults to commit serious crimes and to use violence to punish their own children.⁹

⁵ Ibid., pp. 42,3

⁶ Ibid., pp. 54, 5

⁷ Ibid., pp 62, 3

⁸ Ibid., p. 66

⁹ Eron and Huesmann longitudinal study following 875 boys and girls for 22 years.

“Without investing time in reading, mathematics, and other activities that boost activity in the frontal lobe, children will be less able to control their behavior... There is a problem we will have with a new generation of children who play computer games that we have never seen before... The implications are very serious for an increasingly violent society, and these students will be doing more and more bad things if they are playing games and not doing other things like reading aloud or learning arithmetic.”¹⁰

What Were We Thinking?!

Col. Grossman emphasizes that if we have convinced our children that violence is good and necessary but have not taught them discipline, we have created a generation of killers — homegrown sociopaths. As Sherlock Holmes might have said, “It is elementary, my dear Watson.” What children see in the media is real to them. Blood, gore and carnage teach children that the world works in brutal ways and that to survive, they must match that brutality.

This is where my learning curve became very, very steep. Frankly, I had no idea... The games are named in the book — some of them would fall under the category “Simulated Murder.” Do you know that there is a *game* called School Shooter?! I can hardly comprehend that anyone can come away from *playing* these and even be halfway normal. “Based on the availability of games like *Manhunt 2*, the overwhelming popularity of ‘hack and slash’ online video games like *World of Warcraft*, and the success of the *Hunger Games* series of movies (with very little gun violence but high levels of stabbing, puncturing, hacking, and beating violence), I have been predicting to my law enforcement audiences that we will see an increase in these kinds of behaviors in violent crime.”¹¹

When Fiction and Reality Blur

A fascinating and terrifying definitive profile of a school killer has revealed two things in common with all school killers: 1) refusal to participate in disciplined activities or sports, and 2) obsession with media violence.¹² “Violence is learned behavior. Not all children who play violent video games will become mass murderers. Many will become either fearful or callous and desensitized to human death and suffering. Not all children who immerse themselves in violent entertainment will become school killers. But all the school killers were products of a lifetime of exposure to and engagement with media violence.”¹³

There is a general rule borne out by the research that the more you play, the more aggressive you become. (And media violence also affects children in terms of depression and other mental health issues.) Grossman asks repeatedly why so many children are being abused or killed and why the number is increasing. Horrifyingly, *parents* who play violent video games are reacting with violence and aggression toward their own children.

To give an idea of the scale of these games: “Grand Theft Auto V made more money in 2013 than the entire global music industry. Just that one game made more money than every rock star, CD, and concert on the planet!”¹⁴

Teaching Our Kids to Kill

I was absolutely stunned to find that it is often the parents who buy their kids these games! Grossman points out that most parents have *no idea* of the content of these games nor of the violence. (Even *reading* about the content is greatly disturbing.) There are now thousands of media research studies documenting the harmful effects of this violence on young people, but of course the media have not given this much press.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 68, 9

¹¹ *Assassination Generation*, p 87

¹² Dr. James McGee, psychologist and FBI consultant

¹³ *Assassination Generation*, p. 98

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 98

The video industry actually makes use of current military tactics such as operant conditioning and others that enable and facilitate soldiers in killing.

Immersed in Violence

As Grossman says, we need to fully grasp the magnitude of what these video games are teaching our kids. They are being *immersed* in violence, *playing* at crimes that are so inhuman, so diabolical that they seem like fiction. They are spending time with animated gruesome violence. You get good at what you practice, even violence! When exposed to violence at a young age, one can become hooked.

Our Kids Stand Slack-Jawed but Intent Behind Machine Guns at Arcades

Col. Grossman enlightens us with his reaction to those who advocate the solution of just turning the games off (the off-switch defense). “Wouldn’t it be great if the problem were that easy to fix? I consider this to be the most morally bankrupt of all the arguments used to justify selling death and violence to our kids in the form of violent video games. Would the proponents of this argument tell it to the parents of all the victims in Jonesboro, Columbine, and Newtown? The parents of the victims could have all banned violent video games, movies, and television from their homes and it wouldn’t have done any good when the neighbor’s kid came to massacre their children at school.”¹⁵

Games ?! They are far more than that. They are **tools, programs, tutors** in a type of mindset and world view that celebrates violence. They give new meaning to the term “game changer.” They change and warp the brain. (The author notes repeatedly that not all children watching violent video games will commit violent acts, but a small percentage will. Our children and grandchildren may be the victims of their aggression.)

Blood Money

As the author sums up: “Now is the time. We must do better. We must rewrite the ending of this story, which we’ve all heard too many times.”¹⁶ We should **know** that sick fictional stories which form the basis of violent video games will become our tragic reality. We used to caution against certain actions as debauchery. Now we have an industry selling these ideas to our children.

“The industry is fueled by blood money made by selling violence and death to children.”¹⁷ An even harder truth to stomach is that if we allow our children to watch violent movies and play these violent games, we have blood on our hands. Without a shadow of doubt playing violent video games is a major risk factor for violence.

Respectfully submitted
Barbara Buzzard

Addendum - Short list of violent videos warned about in book.

Manhunt

Manhunt 2

Grand Theft Auto V

World of Warcraft

Warcraft II

Hunger Games

Postal 1

¹⁵ Ibid., 45

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 142

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 98

Postal 2
Postal 3
Dark Souls
Modern Warfare
Modern Warfare 2
Bully
Halo
Conkers Bad Fur Day
Diablo II
Counter-Strike
Battlefield 4
Doom