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Parents, It's OK to Be Worried About Video Games

👤 **Libe Ackerman**   Monday, April 2nd, 2018 8:45 am

Games are often used as a political bogeyman, but we're here to help sort fact from fiction.

"We don't benefit from ignorance, we don't benefit from not knowing the science of this epidemic of violence…Congress should fund research into the effects that video games have on young minds."

"We have to do something about maybe what they're seeing and how they're seeing it. I'm hearing more and more people say the level of violence on video games is really shaping young people's thoughts."

These are quotes about video games from two American presidents, both of them made to the press after tragic school shootings. The first is from President Obama, speaking at a 2013 press conference after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, and the second from President Trump after the February 2018 high school shooting in Parkland, Florida.

The contexts around these two quotes are radically different, and yet there is a common thread running through both of them. Politicians and the constituents they represent, many of them parents, are still not quite sure what to make of video games, and how they shapes their kids' minds.

The broad scientific consensus, backed up by research, shows that there is no link between violent video games and a desire to commit the kind of mass murder witnessed at Sandy Hook and Parkland. Some examples are here, here, and here.

That's a relief, considering that the Entertainment Software Association says 155 million Americans play video games, and four out of five households own a device that plays games. "Video games are ingrained in our culture," ESA President and CEO Mike Gallagher says.

But as much as the video game industry points to the studies that games don't cause people to act violent, there are other studies that say games can cause some forms of aggression.There's a lot of noise from both sides — and public opinion on the negative effects of games reflects and amplifies the confusion. A Pew study from 2015 found that "the public is closely split on some other major debates surrounding the content of games and their impact on users."

Parents are conducting their own research with their own kids on a daily basis, watching them have total meltdowns when it's time to turn off the games and do something else. They see their kids not listening or acting negatively while playing games. Then they see kids pumped up — and, yes, maybe even a little aggressive — after playing an exciting action game. And while it may not be turning those kids into mass shooters, both real life experience and science show us that video games still have some kind of effect on our children.

Look at the bigger picture for a moment — parents witnessing this behavior at home are also working full time jobs, performing daily household tasks, shepherding their kids to sports games and afterschool activities, plus dealing with all the other things life throws at them. Then put video games into that mix. There are umpteen gaming platforms with literally hundreds of games on each. Video game ratings are helpful, but parents still have to spend time and effort to translate these ratings by reviewing the games' content and then determining if it's OK for their individual kids. It's overwhelming. No wonder there are so many mixed views on video games.

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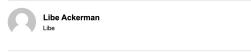

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So while the government will occasionally taken a closer look at games — often without drawing any larger conclusions — it serves as a reminder that people, especially parents, need help understanding video games. That conversation needs to be happening consistently, not just behind closed doors in a governmental meeting.

There are so many great games that are educational, inspirational or just plain fun for all ages. But, it's also perfectly reasonable for parents to be concerned about finding the right ones, and avoiding the ones clearly meant for grownups only, even if your child is playing the peer pressure card and claiming that "everyone is playing" whatever the latest M-rated game is.

That's our goal here at SuperParent — to help facilitate conversations about video games with parents, and help parents manage games — now more ubiquitous than ever — for their own families, in their own homes.

If you have an idea about how we can better help, or burning questions we can answer, email me at hello@superparent.com. I'd love to hear from you.

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