

Are Video Games or Films a Better Medium for Promoting the
Development of Compassion and Morals in Society?
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Abstract: Although video games have been seen as a meaningless pastime, more and more studies are being done on their effects, bringing them closer to movies. I want to conduct research on the emotional effects of films and video games, particularly looking to compare how well they evoke feelings of compassion in order to determine which medium is best for developing a strong set of morals in society. I plan on conducting this research by having participants play a video game and watch a movie, afterwards engaging in staged situations to gauge their moralities. Based on whether or not they helped and to what extent they helped, I will be able to see which one is stronger at improving one's morals, which I expect will be video games given how much longer they are.

Introduction:

As both an avid video game player and film production student, I have interacted at great lengths with both video games and movies. These media have become an increasingly larger part of our lives with the help of advances in both computer and camera technology. Given this large presence in our lives, it is important for people to understand how both films and video games affect them in order to have greater control over their lives. Although both media have countless interesting parts, whether it is the action, gameplay, or story, what I value most is how they make me feel. As many studies and claims over time have already proven, films are a medium capable of evoking various emotions (Zupan, 2017), as seen in some movies like *The Imitation Game* and *Schindler's List*. Although many people dismiss video games as worthless to society and a waste of time, more and more studies are proving that video games also can evoke strong emotions in people (Minassian, 2018), like with certain games such as *Red Dead Redemption 2* and *Rime*. Based on my own experiences with these media, I have begun to wonder how they compare in terms of their powers of evoking emotions. In particular, I am interested in their abilities to evoke compassion and empathy, seeing as it has already been observed that they both evoke those emotions (Jerrett, 2020; Common Sense, 2020). In essence, I want to conduct research on the emotional effects of films and video games, particularly looking to compare how well they evoke feelings of compassion and promote moral decisions in order to determine which medium is best for developing a strong set of morals in society through long-term exposure, although this study only looks at the short-term.

Background:

As stated, my experience with both video games and films has made me interested in their relative emotional effects on people. Although a great deal of research has been done on this topic and both of these forms of media have become larger and larger parts of daily life, previous research hasn't touched upon their relative powers in evoking compassion and causing moral actions. For films, some research has demonstrated that movies holistically evoke emotions, as well as individual components such as characters' costumes (Zupan, 2017; Jelena, 2020). Other studies have looked at the relative power of film to evoke positive emotions compared to negative ones, largely suggesting a stronger evocation of negative emotions (Fernández, 2019). While some studies have demonstrated movies' ability to promote positive emotions like empathy, work in this area is largely anecdotal, with various organizations claiming certain films can "help kids learn empathy" (Common Sense, 2020). On the video games side, it has been proven through scientific research that they definitely have the ability to evoke a wide variety of emotions (Minassian, 2018; Video Games, 2016). Researchers have also looked at video games' ability to evoke and promote the development of empathy, noting various games that fit this category and demonstrating physiological effects to support their claims (Jerrett, 2020; Kral, 2018). Some research has also been done into films and video games' compared powers to evoke various emotions, particularly finding that video games can evoke a stronger emotional response when depicting cancer cases and portraying violent actions

(Navarrete-Cardero, 2019; Lin, 2013). To bridge the gap between emotional responses as a result of exposure to these forms of media and physical moral decisions, there are some recent studies that dive into the effects of playing video games and watching movies on people's morality. Researchers have discovered a connection between making moral decisions in video games and making moral decisions in reality (Iten, 2018), as well as between watching extremely violent movies and exhibiting immoral behavior (Njoku, 2016). So all together, this past research demonstrates A) that films and video games can evoke emotions, B) that films and video games can evoke feelings of empathy, and C) that films and video games can affect real-life moral decisions. However, there is still no research done directly comparing the effects of the consumption of video games and movies on people's moral decisions.

Methods:

In order to compare the changes in moral decision-making caused by exposure to films and video games, I will first need a diverse pool of participants, gathering them from different means of recruitment such as sending out an online invitation and putting up flyers around campus. While the goal is to get as diverse a group of participants as possible, ultimately they will all be college students. Once the participants consent to the study, I will have them physically come to a location set up for the study. After checking in at a waiting room with one of my research assistants, the participant will fill out a questionnaire about their current emotions and state of mind. While completing the questionnaire, another research assistant, pretending to be another participant, will cause a scene in the waiting room to the effect that they would benefit from help, such as dropping something or having trouble reading the sign-in sheet. I will then observe the participant's behavior, noting whether or not they help the researcher and to what extent. After the staged situation is over and the participant turns in their questionnaire, they will come with me into another room with a computer and large monitor in it. Once I dim the lights and have the participant mute and put away their cell phone, I will either play a roughly 2 hour long film or open a video game that they will then play for about 4 hours. Although one might argue it would be better to have participants watch a movie and play a video game for an equal amount of time, part of video games' supposed strength is their length, which can range anywhere from 5 hours to over 100 hours. Some of the selected films for watching are *Schindler's List*, *The Imitation Game*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Inside Out*. Some of the selected video games for playing are *Rime*, *Red Dead Redemption 2*, *Firewatch*, and *The Division*. To achieve a more equitable experience among video games, I will start participants' gameplay at the same chronological spot in the game, resetting their progress after each session. However, it is important to note that there are some uncontrolled variables in this experiment that might affect the data, such as how one's background, ability, and level of fatigue might affect their reactions to various films and video games. After being exposed to either a film or video game, participants will then exit into the waiting room and complete another questionnaire, also engaging in another staged situation with a research assistant. Next, the participant will come back into the media room and get exposed to the form of media they did not just consume.

Again, after watching a 2 hour long film or playing a video game for 4 hours, the participant will complete one last scenario and participate in one last staged situation for me to observe.

Expected Results:

After conducting the physical research with participants and collecting their questionnaires, I will then be able to compile the data and see which medium, films or video games, have a stronger effect on promoting morality, which will depend on how often and to what extent participants helped the researcher. Once I determine which medium is better in this regard, I will then suggest that society uses that particular medium more often to develop and promote a stronger set of morals, especially with children, as the lessons learned in their childhood influence their behavior over the course of their lifetime. Personally, I hypothesize that video games will be stronger than films in evoking compassion and promoting morality largely because of their relatively far greater lengths and interactivity. As proven already, due to how people can physically control their characters in video games, they are much more interactive, allowing players to connect more with the characters in video games compared to those in films (Navarrete-Cardero, 2019).

Conclusion:

In essence, as many people believe that video games are useless yet films have some merit in helping society, I want to research comparatively how well films and video games evoke compassion and promote moral behavior. Although there is already research into how both media evoke emotions and how they both compare in regards to particular emotions like aggression, I care most about which medium can have a greater benefit on society. By exposing participants to various selected films and video games and putting them through situations in which one needs to make a decision representative of their morals, I will be able to determine which medium best promotes a strong set of morals in society. With this information, which I hypothesize will deem video games as the stronger medium, I intend on sharing it with society in order to convince people to use that particular medium as a way of aiding in the development of morals during childhood.

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Budget

#	Expense	Quantity	Single Cost	Total Cost
1	Research Assistants for 1 month	2	\$1000	\$2000
2	Lodgings for Myself for 1 month	1	\$1500	\$1500
3	Payment for Research Participants	20	\$30	\$600
4	Refreshments for Research Participants	20	\$5	\$100
	Subtotal			\$4200
5	Research Room Rental for 1 month (F&A Rate of 43.8%)	1	\$1500	\$1840
	Total	-	-	\$6040

Timeline

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