

A Critique of “Violent Media Is Good for Kids”

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We have all heard that violent media is a root cause for modern day violence within our society. That grotesque over-the-top violence shown in media, such as movies and video games, can lead to violent behavior desensitizing and influencing the young and impressionable minds that are consuming it. We have all heard it, but do we all believe it? Gerard Jones penned the essay “Violent Media Is Good for Kids,” to show that he is a non-believer of this popular opinion. In his essay, Jones argues that violent media has very positive impacts on the development of children. This media allows kids to gain confidence, courage, and strength. It also allows kids to “explore the inescapable feelings that they’ve been taught to deny,” so they can reconstruct those feelings into a “more whole, more complex, more resilient selfhood.” (P.7) I would argue that Jones’ emotional appeal is effective, the evidence is insufficient, and the assumptions are questionable.

The emotional appeal used by Jones is effective as it creates strong sympathy within the reader. I felt this sympathy because I, and probably many others, experienced the same lack of confidence and fear as a child that Jones did. I found that, at times, I didn’t relate to others so I “withdrew into passivity and loneliness,” like Jones. (P.1) Many people struggle to find their confidence. A common way this confidence is discovered is through characters that are portrayed in violent media. These characters have the strength, courage and confidence that many kids are, not only lacking, but searching for. Jones claims that the strength of the characters in violent media inspire children to find that strength within themselves. These characters are used by these

kids as a “fantasy self” to lead them to a life of greater courage and confidence. (P.3) For Jones, there was one character that “caught [him], and freed [him];” This character was the Hulk. (P.3) Jones saw him as the perfect conduit to carry his “stifled rage and buried desire for power.” (P.3) His use of emotional appeal is very strong as I greatly sympathize with the search for a “fantasy self” when I undertook my search for self-confidence. (P.3) When I was young I used Luke Skywalker from Star Wars as my inspiration. I thought of how a regular farm boy became the greatest Jedi who could slash through scores of Stormtroopers with his Lightsaber; This thought allowed me to believe that I can do great things as well. Luke helped me find that confidence within myself that I had been searching for. I, along with countless other children, have found this inspiring character in the search of a life of greater strength.

The Evidence given by Jones is insufficient as it only works in favour of his argument as opposed to giving evidence that shows both sides. There are only two types of evidence used by Jones in his essay. These being anecdotal and appeal to authority. He does not use statistical or representative evidence. The use of anecdotal evidence is heavy throughout “Violent Media Is Good for Kids.” This evidence is used to create a very personal feeling which works well for the emotional appeal aspect of the essay. However, as evidence, it is not always reliable because it is coming from one person who will have biases. Anecdotal evidence can help strengthen an argument. In this case however, Jones uses it too heavily leading me to believe that he thinks that his opinion on this argument is right no matter what. The story of Jones’ childhood and how “[he] followed [Hulk]” to better things has a strong emotional effect, but it does not provide representative evidence as he only talks about what happened to him. (P.4) The other type of evidence used in this essay is the appeal to authority. This type of evidence is using the opinion of an expert to help strengthen a side of a debate. Jones relies heavily on this type of evidence

with the hopes of legitimizing his argument. Some of the uses of appeal to authority are used to great effect when it comes to helping the dispute. Jones uses “Melanie Moore, Ph.D., a psychologist who works with urban teens” as significant support in favour of his argument. (P.7) This appeal to authority works well because Dr. Moore agrees with Jones and the reader knows she’s an expert on the matter. Despite this strong use of evidence, Jones does not go without fault for this aspect. His use of appeal to authority is very biased. When he should be recognizing experts that don’t agree with him, he instead barely pays attention to them. Jones tries to take away from those who don’t agree with his argument by labelling them as “pop psychologists,” to discredit their claims. (P.6) When the authority figure agrees with him, Jones gives them full credit. However, when they don’t agree, he attempts to make their opinion seem unreliable to the reader. This biased use of authority damages Jones’ credibility along with his argument.

The assumptions made in Jones’ essay are problematic as they are weak in the first place, or the evidence is lacking. The two types of assumptions are stated and unstated. Not all of Jones’ assumptions are questionable. I would argue that the first stated assumption is strong because I think it is true for the world we live in. This assumption states that “children [need to] learn [how] to push back a modern culture that...teaches dependency.” (P.9) Jones believes violent media will allow children to find their identity. It is very important to learn to be independent in a world where dependency is becoming more and more common. It is essential to know independence because without it, one would not make it far in life. The next stated assumption is weak especially in the claim it is making. Jones’ argues in favour of rage, and how it can bring good things to our lives. Jones describes how “rage can be an energizing emotion... [that allows us to] take more control, than we ever thought we could.” (P.10) I do not agree with this assumption because rage does the opposite of what Jones claims it does. Rage causes people

to lose control, as their emotions get the better of their rational thinking. Rage can cause harm to oneself or others in significant ways. It is a very strong emotion that can lead people to inflict serious harm or even kill others. To say it allows one to take greater control of oneself is false. Jones makes an unstated assumption in his essay. He assumes that violent media is the best way to achieve confidence. This is a weak assumption as there are much greater ways for achieving this goal. Playing sports, team sports especially, is one of the best ways to gain independence, cooperation, and confidence. School and work are also very great ways to find confidence in oneself. These examples allow you to work on yourself, and with others, with great results. Using violent media can lead to further isolation if you focus too much on it. It is important to learn to work with others as lots of confidence is gained through interaction.

In conclusion, the strongest part of “Violent Media Is Good for kids” is the emotional appeal as it successfully inspires sympathy within the reader. The evidence and assumptions are weaker as they were plagued with bias from Jones. Overall, Jones’ argument really suffered as a result of his strong bias and unwavering belief that his argument is fact and could never be wrong. Jones may believe that “Violent Media Is Good for Kids” but he failed to prove it to the readers. The argument could also be made that this essay was nothing but an advertisement as Jones ended up writing lots of violent media stories. He could have used this essay to instill the urge to buy violent media in order to gain what he claims he gained from it.