GRAND THEFT INNOCENCE

An in depth study on the development of violent video games and media and it's possible implications on children and adolescents.

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Introduction

The topic I have chosen for my Personal Interest Project is an in-depth look at violent video games and violence within the media, and the possible implications this may have on socialisation. My topic however also focuses upon media activities by children and adolescents and how this has changed over time, as well as societal perceptions of violence.

I originally became interested in this topic after listening to a radio broadcast discussing the federal government's initiative to introduce an R18+ category in the National Classification Scheme's rating for video games. This struck me as a surprise, and I was concerned that there was even a need for video games, which are commonly played by children to contain content that could ensue an R18+ rating. I then resolved to undertake my PIP in regard to violence within the media and games, predominately focusing upon children and adolescents as I was particularly concerned about how violence in the media could possibly affect their interaction with society as well as their socialisation process.

It also interested me about the way this may differ between males and females, as females are usually socialised in a more passive manner and through my own micro world I have noted that females are usually less likely to engage in violent game play. Thus, I decided gender would be my cross-cultural component to examine whether this was in fact the case, and to explore how gender constructs can affect how violence is perceived and interpreted. For my continuity and change aspect however, I focused upon changes in popular culture including developments in technology as well as changes in societal norms that may have facilitated an increase in violence within the media/games.

My three methodologies will include questionnaires, a content analysis and an interview. Questionnaires will allow me to gather both qualitative and quantitative results on person's media activities and their perceptions on violence, and how this has changed over time across different age groups. A content analysis would allow me to quantitatively measure the extent of violence within the media and games, while a face-to-face interview with a psychologist would enable me to gain qualitative expert advice on how exposure to violence in games and media could possibly affect a person's socialisation.

In my PIP I am looking at how the rise in communication technologies throughout the past decades, has meant popular culture such as that of games and media have become entrenched in many Western societies. I am particularly interested in violence and how violence in popular culture has become a cultural norm, and the possible implications of this upon a person's socialisation and identity, and how this may differ between genders. Through my topic I hope to gain a better understanding of the social and cultural world through looking at how violence is becoming an increasingly common feature in many aspects of popular culture and how macro influences such as the media, can impact upon the micro world of children and adolescents and their sense of identity.

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After deciding on my PIP topic, I first decided to undertake my secondary research through making a trip to the State Library. I began then synthesising information in journals that were applicable to my topic – making sure to cite each journal as I went. After finding an array of secondary research, I started writing around 1500-2000 words of my PIP, purely based upon secondary research and thus would become the foundational basis for which to formulate my primary research.

I started formulate my primary research, I first undertook devising my questionnaires as I realised they would be the most time consuming part of my research. These questionnaires were able to provide me with qualitative and quantitative data. I ensured it was made clear on the surveys for participants not to include their name as the surveys would remain anonymous and that they were not obliged to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with to make sure I conducted all my research in an ethical manner.

I first conducted a pilot study of my questionnaires whereby I administered 10 questionnaires to both parents and children, using both personal contacts and e-mail. This was fairly successful, as I had an 86% return rate. However, it was here that I realised that just administering my questionnaires to parents and children was very limiting in me measuring my change over time component, and I then formulated questionnaires for persons in an 'in between' group (in the 20-30 age bracket).

I began then to conduct my content analysis, using this to investigate the violent content found within both free to air television and the top 30 most popularly purchased video games in EB games. I was able to synthesise the violent content by organising how the violence was depicted in several categories by which I was able to derive quantitative results.

Throughout May to June, I administered my final questionnaires by means of e-mail and personal contacts; I used quota sampling and aimed to gain consistent results to obtain 40 questionnaires of each age demographic, with 20 of these being female and 20 male to ensure consistency. Quota sampling proved difficult, as I never was able to derive a complete even number of all age groups/genders. I too found synthesising these statistics in these questionnaires as a difficult and time-consuming task.

I then needed to conduct my last primary research methodology in which I sought to conduct an interview to gain qualitative results on the psychological perspective on my topic. This proved difficult, but finally however a psychologist from a university agreed, which was an important methodology in my reinforcing the overall focus of my PIP.

I began drafting central material, and by the end of July I had formulated my first draft. After what seemed a million of drafts later, I started to compile my introduction and conclusion in which I reflected upon what I had learnt amongst the PIP process, while it was challenging in some regard I no doubt found the experience a rewarding one.

Chapter 1: Games and media activities amongst children and adolescents

Violence has been continuity as an entertainment device since ancient times, demonstrated in such mediums as ancient Greek and Shakespearean theatre. However, with the rise of mass communication media throughout the 20th century the accessibility of children and young persons to violent media has increased. The advent of the television in the 1950s, which became a common feature of many Australian homes throughout the 1960s has facilitated a rise in mass communication. A particular focus of concern to many however, has been the emergence of video games since the 1980s. The 1980s became a time of challenging what society would accept in the content of these games and throughout the 1990s, violence within video games became prevalent. Throughout this time fighting games such as Double Dragon[1] and Mortal Kombat[2] began to push the boundaries in regard to violent content and became best-sellers – indicating to marketers that games sold better if they contained violent material. [3]

While it is clear that technology and mass media have a strong influence on Gen Y and Gen Z, the question remains on how much the rise of mass media and gaming since the 1960s has influenced the activities of children and young people. According to my primary research, the below figures reveal an increase in television becoming the most time consuming activity over time, while activities such as 'playing outside' have declined rapidly across each age demographic. However, activities such as 'doing schoolwork/chores' have remained a continuity across each generation. [4]

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[1] 'Double Dragon' (1987). Kishimoto, Y. Taito Corporation, Japan
[2] 'Mortal Kombat' (1992). Boon. E, Tobias. J. Midway entertainment. USA.
[3] Anderson, C., Gentile, D. & Buckley, K. (2007) Violent video game effects on children and adolescents. Oxford University Press, New York.
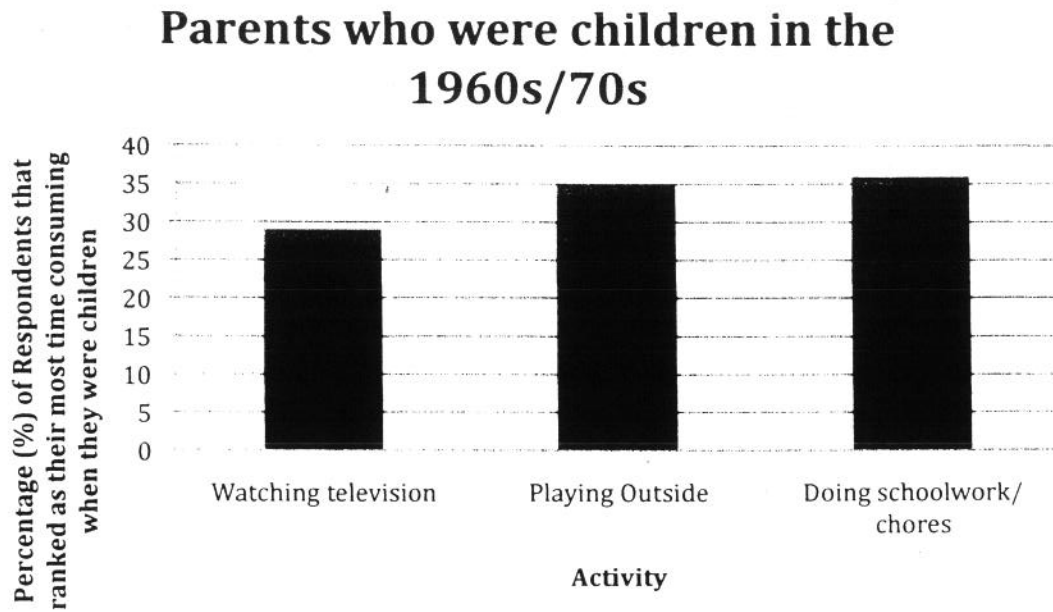[4] Primary Research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May -19 June 2010

Parents who were children in the 1960s/70s

Figure 1.1

Persons aged 30-39 who were children in the 1970/80s
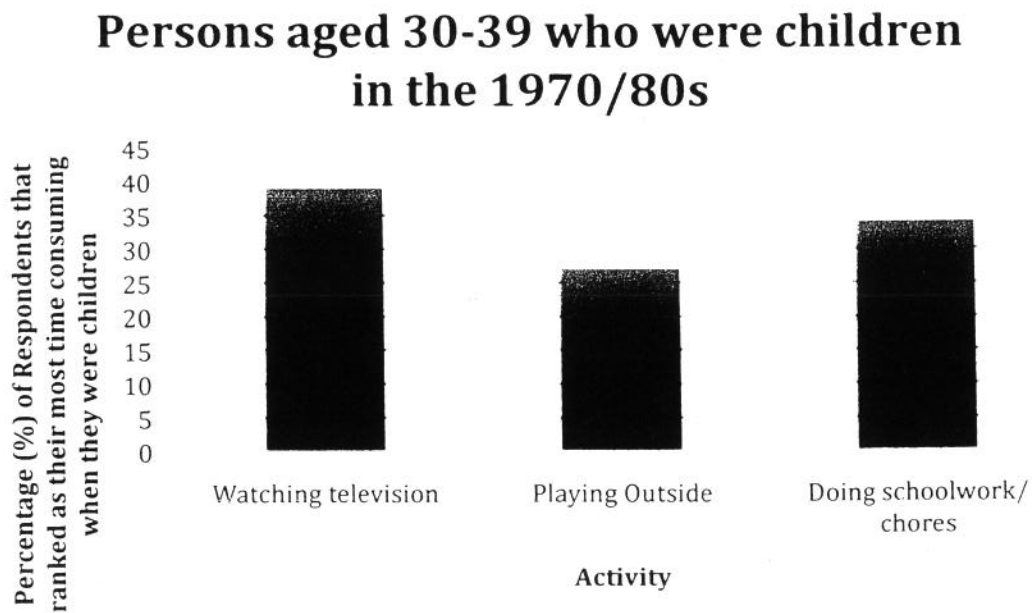

Figure 1.2

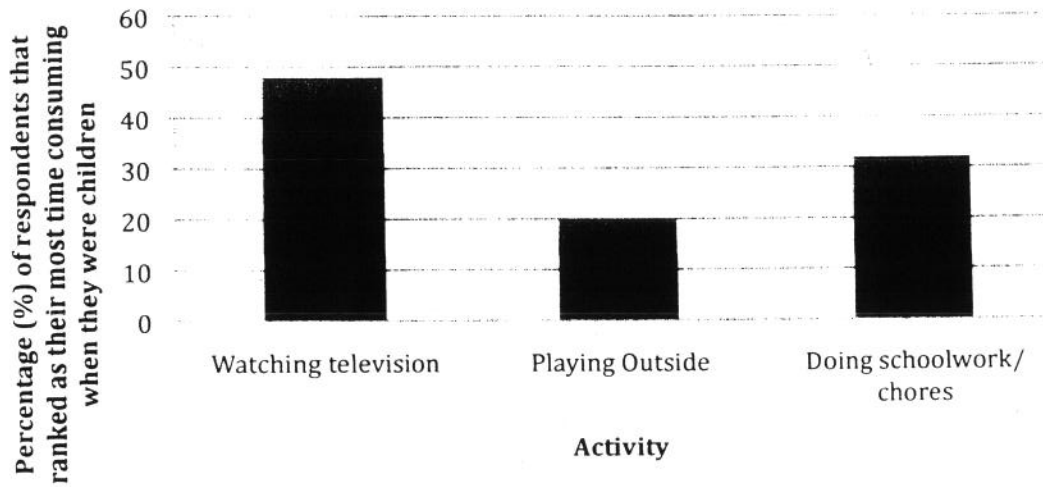# Persons aged 20-29 who were children in the 1980/90s

Figure 1.3
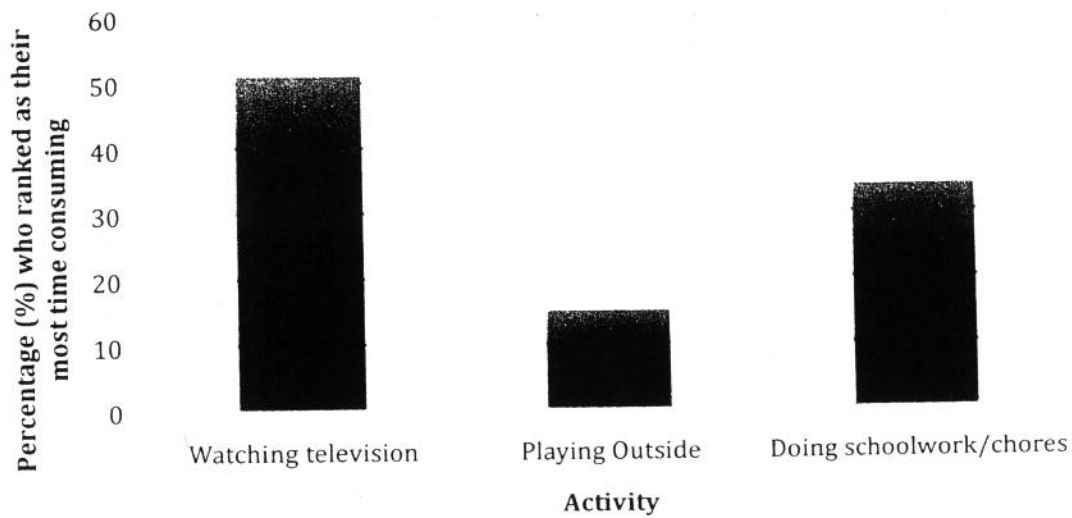
Children aged 8-17 today

Figure 1.4

A review by the Media and Communications Authority Australia in 2006 that examined trends in media communication, revealed watching television is the communication activity that takes up the largest amount of time for young people

aged 8-17 years - with 88% of persons ranking it as their most used technology.[5] This was fairly consistent with my primary research as 51% of my questionnaire respondents aged 8-17 ranked television as their most time consuming technology independent of their age or sex.[6] However, there were discrepancies when analysing the amount of time children and adolescents spent on playing video games, including clear gender differences. According to the Media and Communication Authority, 82% of boys had played video games in the last 3 days, compared to 52% of girls - with the predominate age for both boys and girls to play video games being 11[7]. My studies contradicted this however, demonstrating that the percentage of girls playing video games was in fact much lower, with only 31% of girls admitting to playing video games on a regular basis.[8] As the percentage of boys remained fairly consistent, amongst my primary research with 79% of boys admitting they had played video games in the last three days, this may be reflective of my demographic, which is predominately middle class and conservative. The report also stated that in teenage years, gaming amongst teenage girls declines significantly, while social networking technologies such as messaging and Facebook increased dramatically. However, video game use amongst boys in adolescence remained fairly consistent.[9] My primary research confirmed these statistics, finding that while 44% of girls in the 8-9 and 10-11 age group said they played video games on a regular basis, this statistic declined to 13% amongst the 12-17 age bracket.[10]

While it is clear that gaming is a dominant technology that many young people and children engage in today, the question remains of the extent of children' accessibility to violent games. The government executive department that oversees classification is the National Classification Scheme Australia. Currently, war-zone and violent games are usually classified with an MA15+ rating while an R18+ censorship law for Australia has not yet been legislated. However, as Michael Atkinson revealed in a recent radio broadcast, game shops are far less likely to enforce these laws compared

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[5] Rutherford, L. & Bittman, M. (2007) Media and Communications in Australian Families. *Australian Communications and Media Authority*, pp. 267
[6] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010
[7] Rutherford, L. & Bittmann M. op. cit.
[8] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010
[9] Rutherford L. & Bittmann M. op cit.
[10] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010

to video shops/cinemas, meaning parental responsibility is fundamental in determining children's access to these games. [11] Studies of parental attitudes show that most Australian parents are aware of and use game ratings and are confident about their ability to manage their child's access to violent games.[12] This was consistent with my primary research, with parents claiming to be confident in their ability to control and manage children's access to both games and media. Some 82% of parents said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' about feeling confident in their ability to control their children's access to games/media for children amongst the younger age demographic (8-13).[13] However, when asked what measures they undertook to achieve this – they were fairly unrestrictive including 'checking up' on their children while watching television and 'not allowing them to watch/play MA15+ games/movies/television.' Interestingly, when children in this age group (8-13) were asked whether their parents exercised discretion when controlling what games they engaged in, only 69% of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'. [14] This indicates that while parents may think they exercise control over the media and games their child engages in, the limited nature of these control measures and the failure to implement them may not prevent children's access to violent games.

While the media impacts significantly on the violent content that children are exposed to, the difference between violent media and gaming is that gaming allows for children to simulate repetitive violent acts. Durkin suggests the appeal of most video games is to gain the ability to control outcomes, to develop better strategies for the task at hand and then to be subsequently rewarded. These are important motivational features, and according to Durkin learning to solve problems by violence may be a major issue for children. [15]

In a study by Fromme, he found that amongst children and young persons, boys will opt for action, shooting or sport games, while girls will opt for 'platform games' or

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[11] SA AG on Games for Over 18s (2010), podcast radio programme, ABC Radio, 5 February <http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/triplej/hack/saag.mp3>.
[12] Durkin, K. 1995. Computer Games: their effect on young people, Office of Film & Literature Classification, Sydney
[13] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010
[14] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010
[15] Durkin, K. op. cit., p.

'thinking games'.[16] Prior studies suggest that the reason for the decline in female game-play during adolescence was thought to be linked with the violent and competitive nature present within most games. Fromme states that females are more likely to be socialised in a passive manner, and studies have demonstrated that females prefer games and technologies involving social interaction. [17] Prior studies have also suggested that this may be correlated to the decline of female game-play during adolescence. However, increases in computer games such as The Sims, which create 'synthetic worlds', have attracted a more gender-neutral audience. [18]

These studies corresponded with my primary research, as the number one game played by females were 'synthetic world' type games such as The Sims – followed closely by Puzzle games such as 'Tetris', and music games such as 'Guitar Hero' or 'Singstar'.[19] These games were most frequently played by females between 8-13 years while game-play tended to decline greatly within the older age bracket (14-17 years). While some females still played these games in adolescence, the hours played weekly declined dramatically – as persons within the 13-17 age demographic ranked activities such as 'spending time with friends', 'the internet' and 'schoolwork' higher. However, the number of females who participated in game-play was still significantly higher within 8-17 olds today, compared to females within the 25-30 and the 30-35 age groups. Only 19% of females stated that they played video games when they were children amongst the 25-30 age bracket while this declined to 11% in the 30-35 age bracket.[20] This suggests that the introduction of gaming for a more gender-neutral audience has led to the increase in female game-play. Eight to seventeen year old boys however tended to rank 'shooting or battlefield games' as the most commonly played, followed closely by 'racing', 'fantasy' and 'sport games'. This remained fairly consistent throughout the ages of the males surveyed between 8-17; however, there seemed to be a slight increase in the hours played during adolescence.

My findings also showed that amongst adults there has been an overall increase in the

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[16] Fromme, J (2003) Game Studies - Computer Games as a Part of Children's Culture. Retrieved March 12 www.psu.edu
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010
[20] Ibid.

amount of time spent on games. While the number of males who played video games as children was fairly consistent amongst 25-30 year old males, the average time spent was only 1-2 hours per week. Males amongst the 30-35 age bracket however, participated in game-play less as children with only 70% stating they played video games within this age bracket, compared to an 81% of males who play video games today.[21] This may be due to the increase in the production and marketing of games throughout the early 1990s.

Boys between ages 8-17 today within the younger age bracket (8-13 years) tended to describe the appeal of violent games as 'funny' and 'exciting', with one 13 year old boy stating 'It's funny shooting the aliens! Watching them explode into pieces'. Males amongst the 14-17 year age bracket however tended to attribute games as a means to cure boredom, with one 15 year old boy stating 'I like shooting games, they're exhilarating and exciting' while another 17 year old said 'I usually play after school with friends when there's nothing better to do'.[22]

Media and gaming technologies play a significant role in the micro world of children and adolescents. When integrating my primary and secondary research it became apparent that the time spent on communication technologies is far more prevalent than outdoor activities, with gaming being a dominant technology amongst these. The amount of time spent on video game-play has risen significantly since the 1980s, and although female game-play is increasing, males still spend more time on gaming technologies. Parents too play a fundamental role in the extent of children's exposure to media and games, but by adolescence, children exercise more discretion over their media and gaming activities indicating there is still a need for the control of violent content within games and the media.

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010

Chapter 2: Society and Violence

The media is one of many institutions in society and with the rise of mass communication it has become a dominant force affecting not only other institutions such as politics and government, but also individuals, societal subgroups and cultures.[23] Media violence has increased since the rise in the consumption of mass media since the 1960s. Studies have noted an increase in the prevalence of violent images children are exposed to with research demonstrating that while a child by the age of 14 years in 1971 would on average witness 11,000 violent images within the media, by 1993 a child will witness on average 10,000 violent images per year.[24] In regard to gaming, not only has there been a steady increase in the popularity of video games since the mid-1980s - with only 17% of households in 1994 possessing gaming consoles, compared to 32% of households in 2002[25] - but improvements in graphics have too led to more sophisticated and life-like violent scenarios being portrayed within games.

There has also been a change in societal views towards violence within the media, with a study by the Australian Broadcasting Authority revealing that 80% of people agreed that 'the media was more violent these days', which remained a continuity with a 1989 study which found similar statistics.[26] This correlated with my primary research, with 81% of parents surveyed 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' that the media contained higher violent content today compared to when they were children – with many stating that 'this has coincided with the increase of violence within the media as a societal norm'.[27] However, this was more prevalent amongst the older age demographics, with 85% of persons aged 40-50 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' that the media contained more violent content than in the past. Some 76% of persons aged between 30-40 and 69% of persons aged between the 20-30 age demographic agreed

[23] Gentile D. (2003) Media violence and children, Greenwood Publishing Groups
[24] Ibid.
[25] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2010). Australian Social Trends 2007. Retrieved May 21st from http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/0485BB5550FE5799CA25732C00207C77?opendo cument
[26] Nielson A. (2003) Research into Community Attitudes to Violence on Free-to-air Television. Australian Broadcast Authority pp. 55
[27] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010

with this statement.[28] Indicating that people perceive that there has been a significant rise in violent media since the 1960/70s.

Females were more inclined to be concerned about the level of violent content within the media within all age demographics, with roughly 71% of females compared to 58% of males stating they agreed that 'there was a lot of violence within the media'.[29] While parents and persons of older demographics usually made comments such as 'society has become more complacent with the media' and that the media is 'more accessible', children and adolescents usually stated that 'its bad as people will copy what they see on the media' as well as 'it's mainly on the news'.[30] This may indicate that children and young persons have similar views to that of their parent's generation, as few discrepancies occurred in their views. However there was still a tendency for young persons to find violence 'exhilarating' or 'exciting'. Within my primary research, there was also consensus by young persons and children that the media did have a significant impact on how they interpreted violence, with one respondent commenting that 'violence had become more normal/acceptable' and 'it changes the way I think'.[31] Parents also stated that the 'media plays a significant role in how their child interacts' indicating consensus between both generations in concern over violence within the media.

The study conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Authority also noted an increase in persons agreeing with the statement that the media now contains 'more blood and guts' with only 12% of teenagers agreeing with the statement in 1989, and 38% agreeing in 2002.[32] However, this was not strongly consistent with my primary research as 59% of children and adolescence between 8-17 agreed with the statement that 'the media contains lots of blood and guts', while 61% of those within the 20-30 age demographic agreed. [33] Discrepancies may have occurred within these areas because of a possible rise in violence within the media since the 2002 studies or possibly because there was a higher level of concern amongst my demographic which is predominately middle class and conservative. Nonetheless, despite the admission

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[28] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Nielson A. op. cit.
[33] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010

that the media did in fact contain violent content, there was little agreement amongst children between the ages of 8-17 with the statement that 'violence adds to entertainment', with 78% of females and 61% of males 'disagreeing' or 'strongly disagreeing'. However, while males generally disagreed with the statement, they would then justify it saying that they preferred 'action rather than violence' or 'it can be exciting or exhilarating, depending on the show/game'.[34]

Nonetheless, the amount of violent content within the media and gaming has continued to be a concern. According to a study by Gunter and Harrison, 56% of television programmes contained violence on British free-to-air television – compared to 80% on American television.[35] However, this was not reflected in my content analysis of Australian free-to-air television. This disparity may have occurred as the studies focused upon British and American television. My findings demonstrated that 36% of all television programs on prime time television depicted some sort of violent content, with an average of 15% of all violence depicted on prime time television containing graphic images of 'blood and guts', however this was predominately depicted within current affair and news related programmes. In regard to children's programmes however, 18% of programmes depicted violence in some manner, with all of these scenarios being depicted within a humorous context.[36]

In respect to gaming, reports have demonstrated that the 1990s saw the rise of real-life graphics and an increase of violence in gaming with the emergence of shooter games - generating concern within society over the violent content of gaming. The 21st century also saw concern by society when games such as Grand Theft Auto began depicting violence in a realistic and immersive setting.[37] My primary research was consistent with these findings, as my content analysis of the top selling games, showed 3 of 5 of these games contained violent content, with 65% of games depicting violence in graphic images of 'blood and guts'. In all of the games depicting violent content, the player was required to simulate the violent acts first-hand, with 82% of the games

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[34] Primary research: Questionnaire conducted 13 May-19 June 2010
[35] Gunther B. & Harrison J. (2005) Violence on television: an analysis of amount, nature, location and origin, Routledge
[36] Primary research: Content Analysis conducted 10 – 24th April 2010
[37] Rise of the videogame 2010 [television program], Discovery Channel

'rewarding' the player for the violent acts carried out.[38] This indicates that gaming is more of a problematic medium, as not only does it entail repetitive violent action. but it also demonstrates how games contain much more violent content than other media such as television.

It would seem there is general consensus amongst society that the media has become more violent over time, not only amongst older demographics and parents but also amongst younger age demographics. including children. Many speculated that changing societal norms and an ethos of violence had resulted in society becoming more accepting of violence within games and the media. An analysis of my primary and secondary research suggests that societal concern over violence within the media has risen over time with the emergence of gaming being the most problematic in this regard.

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[38] Primary research: Content Analysis conducted 10 – 24th April 2010

Chapter 3: The Psychological Perspective

Gaming and violent media are both predominant within today's society. Potential harmful effects of media violence have been scrutinised for several decades, however, having emerged in the 1980s, violent video games have been subjected to fewer experimental studies. However, in recent years there have been meta-analytic reviews of the correlation between harmful effects of exposure to violent games. These have been measured through the 'short term' effects of gaming immediately after game-play, which are assessed in 'correlation' or 'experimental' studies. However, long term effects arising from repeated exposure to violent games and media are assessed in 'cross sectional' or 'longitudinal' studies.[39]

Integrating both these studies, Bandura concluded that heavy over-exposure to violent video games is correlated with short-term aggressive behavioural effects.[40] Most studies have concluded a correlated link between violent video games with short-term effects such as aggressive play, bullying or fighting. Bandura calls this 'social learning theory' claiming that violent games will stimulate feelings of physiological arousal, aggressive thoughts and reduce social behaviour while playing.[41] This process is known as 'priming', which refers to the game violence being understood by a person's prime aggressive cognitions and emotions.[42] My primary research correlates with these findings, with my interviewee, psychologist Dr. Warburton stating that there is no doubt a correlation between violent video games and media and aggressive behaviour.[43] He stated that heavy exposure to violent video games and media is linked to desensitisation towards violence, a lack of empathy and can affect a person's brain cognitions. Heavy exposure to repetitive violence whether it be through games and media or other mediums will be interpreted similarly by the brain – the brain will take on this 'learnt' behaviour into certain real-life situations by interacting in a violent or aggressive manner or may just stimulate aggressive

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[39] Anderson et al. (2010) Violent Video Game Effects on Aggression, Empathy and Pro-social Behaviour in Eastern and Western Countries: A meta-analytic review, American Psychological Association, pp. 1
[40] Bandura. A. (1973) Aggression: A social learning theory analysis. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Interview, conducted 23rd June 2010 (name used with permission)

thoughts.[44] According to a report by the Australian Institute of Criminology, anti-social behaviours in juveniles such as aggression and substance abuse have risen by 10% since 1999 and this may be correlated with an increase in childrens and adolescents over exposure to repetitive violent images within games.[45]

This was reiterated in a report by Drabman and Thomas, which linked high rates of violence in gaming with desensitisation towards violence in both the media and in real life situations. According to the report persons became 'immune' or developed a lack of empathy by viewing these repeated acts of violence.[46] Thus, the increase in heavy over exposure to violent video games and media may be correlated with the increase in assaults, bullying and even possession of weaponry in schools. According to a newspaper article in 2005, 6500 students were suspended for physical violence within schools, with this figure increasing by 20% by 2008.[47]

According to Anderson, violent video games mirror similar findings to violent TV and film research, however, there is evidence to suggest that violent video game effects may be somewhat larger.[48] Anderson found that 12% of participants that habitually exposed themselves to violent gaming and media (including film, television and games) demonstrated violent behaviour. Of this 12%, over half of the participants had violent behaviour just based upon their habitual exposure to violent games, making it the prevailing medium in which violent behaviour is adopted.[49] This correlates with my primary research, as my interviewee, psychologist Dr. Warburton states "gaming is more problematic as it allows persons to engage in repetitive violent action".[50] The rise in violent video games over just the last couple of decades

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[44] Interview, conducted 23rd June 2010 (name used with permission)
[45] Smart D. et al. (2004) Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra
Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice / 2004 / Diana Smart, Suzanne Vassallo, Ann Sanson and Inez Dussuyer /Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology,
[46] Drabman R. & Thomas M. (1978) Effects of Television Violence on Expectations of Other's Aggression 4. (1),pp. 73-76
[47] 2009 'NSW school suspensions rise' Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April

[48] Anderson et al. op cit.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Interview, conducted 23rd June 2010 (name used with permission)

therefore may be correlated to an increase in the number of suspensions in schools for possession of weapons, which has risen by 17% in recent years. [51]

Nonetheless, the correlation between media and game violence and aggressive behaviour is dependant on the 'social modelling' of the child and whether the context of their environment encourages or discourages aggressive behaviour. Social variables including environmental factors such as a persons socio-economic background as well as individual factors such as an aggressive personality, may influence whether aggressive behaviour is taken on.[52] This was consistent with studies by Professor Huesmann whose research showed that violent media would increase substantially the likelihood of aggressive and violent behaviour both in short term and long term contexts.[53] This was reinforced throughout my primary research, with Dr. Warburton stating that "heavy exposure to violence, whether it be in games and media or other environmental factors will have a similar effect on the brain response."[54] However, the way in which these thoughts and behaviours are interpreted differ and as some persons will show little or no effects as a result of heavy exposure to violent media and games – some studies argue the validity of these conclusions. [55]

A study by Drabman and Thomas revealed that boys were more susceptible to watching and responding to heavy exposure to violent images than their female counterparts.[56] However, Anderson concludes there are no variations in the number of males and females in responding to exposure to violent images, but females are more likely to engage in relational aggression, while males are more likely to engage in physical.[57] This may not have been a variable in the study conducted by Drabman and Thomas, and could indicate the discrepancies that occurred in their findings.

As Anderson concludes, the adoption of aggressive behaviour as a result of exposure to violent games and media may be linked to less significant statistics of females

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[51] 2009 'NSW school suspensions rise' Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April 2009

[52] Anderson A., Gentle D. & Buckley K. (2007) Violent video game effects on children and adolescents, Oxford University Press

[53] Signorielle, N. (2005) Violence in the media: a reference handbook, ABC-CILO, Inc. pp. 112.

[54] Interview, conducted 23rd June 2010 (name used with permission)

[55] ibid.

[56] Drabman R. & Thomas M. op. cit., p.

[57] Anderson et al. op cit. pp. 11

participating in playing violent games (approx. 31%) rather than any sort of resilience to heavy exposure to violent games. However, there has been an increase in female violence in the criminal justice system in the last several decades, and this is corroborated by prior studies revealing that female exposure to violent games has increased over time. According to one newspaper article, the increase in violence by girls in schools has risen by 70% in NSW alone.[58]

In regard to a child's socialisation process, a study by Steven Kirsh proposed that aggressive behaviour will change throughout development. Kirsh also concluded that heavy exposure to violent media was linked with increased levels of aggressive behaviour in adolescence.[59] However, he states that the link may arise from a child having a predisposition to aggressive behaviour, and thus the child is drawn to these games, rather than aggressive behaviour being a direct result of heavy exposure to violent games and media. Kirsh concludes that while heavy exposure to violent video games can contribute to an escalation of aggressive behaviour, there is evidence to suggest that media violence does not impact upon children and young persons differently than it impacts upon adults.[60] Psychologist Dr. Warburton agrees, stating that there is a lack of evidence of developmental differences. This demonstrates that while violent media exposure had negative effects for children, the consequences of violent media consumption do not vary by age and they have similar effects on all persons' socialisation. Dr. Warburton states:

> "You'd think so (that children are more susceptible) as your brain has not developed until the age of 25, but there is actually no evidence to suggest that a child will be more effected"

However, he states it is of fundamental importance to lessen the exposure of violent gaming and media for children – and the introduction of pro-social games and media will promote pro-social behaviour amongst children. This, accompanied by education amongst parents, institutions and children concerning the negative effects will assist

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[58] 2010 'Girl's Charged Over Teen Attack' Sydney Morning Herald, May 31 2010
[59] Kirsh S. (2006) Children, adolescence and media violence. Sage Publications
[60] Ibid.

in alleviating the problematic nature of heavy exposure to violent games and media.[61]

Violent media and games have risen in popularity and production since the 1980s. This has claimed to have led to an increase in aggression and the adoption of violent behaviour – not only effecting a child's socialisation but adults also. The increase in violent media and games is considered by many as a contributing factor to an increase in bullying, and violent behaviour amongst youths since the 1980s. Many people agree that there has been an increase in violent media since the 1960/70s with there being consensus that violence within the media has become entrenched as a cultural norm within our society. While it still remains a constant that males are more likely to engage in violent game play and media activities, the numbers of females are rising within this area. And while there is no difference amongst females and males on the effect of violent images, females will usually tend to adopt relational aggression rather than physical. However, with the smaller percentage of females engaging in game play and violent media activities, violent video games and media is more problematic for males.

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[61] Interview, conducted 23rd June 2010 (name used with permission)

Conclusion

Through my Personal Interest Project, I have learnt how susceptible persons may be to over exposure to violence in the media and how this can impact upon one's own identity and socialisation. I feel as if I have learnt that violence within mass media is of concern for all society; breaking down my pre-conceived ideas that violence was predominately of concern for children and adolescents but I now see how censorship can be beneficial to all persons in society.

The PIP has opened my eyes to the extent that our macro worlds can shape our identity and I feel as if prior to the Personal Interest Project I held the values and attitudes that incentives to eradicate these violent images in media and games were conservative and exaggerated by many. However, through my Personal Interest Project I have shifted my attitudes and I now see it as vital to change the violent orientated nature of popular culture as it can lead to desensitisation, increased aggression, bullying and agitation.

While mass media has continued to depict violence, it has been an increasing characteristic through the development of gaming technologies. Since the development of mass communication, violence within the media has become a social norm and therefore in the future will probably continue to be entrenched in popular culture. However, through the education of children and parents about the effects of this, perhaps it would then allow parents to protect their children from over exposure to violent images through games. This will be beneficial to society as not only will persons achieve positive media habits but it can help individuals to socialise in a healthy social environment.

The Personal Interest Project has been an invaluable experience, and has contributed to my growth as a socially literate researcher through conducting ethical research processes. I ensured ethical research processes by ensuring privacy and by giving credit to all sources in my secondary research, which allowed me to value and respect all person's experiences and their work. I have gained many interpretive skills, and increased my ability to analyse quantitative and qualitative results, which I believe has broadened my ability to conduct social research.

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My interview methodology revealed the extent to which persons are affected and impacted upon by violent images, which surprised me greatly just how much the media can impact upon a person's socialisation. It has also led me to conclude that alleviating violence in the media was beneficial to all persons and not just children or adolescents. It also gave me insight into the social constructs of gender and that this does not impact greatly upon a person's interpretation of violence and that violence within mass media was problematic for all persons.

The journey of the Personal interest Project over the eight months has allowed me to gauge the extent to which mass media and games can actually shape one's identity and I feel I have become more socially and culturally literate as I have acknowledged how popular culture can effect all persons including me and my personal identity.

Annotated Resource List

Books

Howitt B. & Julian R. (2002), Society & Culture, Heinemann, Victoria

This textbook was useful in assisting me in the collaboration of my PIP. It gave me guidance on conducting research for my ethical research for my Personal Interest Project, as well as providing information on the methodologies applicable for me to use. It clearly outlined how to produce a successful PIP, and helped me immensely in the collaboration of my project. This source is a Society and Culture board approved textbook, and thus was reliable.

Donnelly K. et al. (2008) Society and Culture: Preliminary & HSC, Thomson: Social Science Press, Victoria.

This book was useful as it gave me an understanding of the PIP process, but predominately gave me insight into structuring the introduction, log and conclusion as well as the process by which to select an appropriate topic for the PIP. As it was a Society and Culture textbook. it was useful as I could deduce that all the information was from a reliable source.

Gentile D. (2003) Media violence and children, Greenwood Publishing Groups

This book was useful in its applicability to my subject, as through a data analysis it demonstrated how media violence and children has changed over time, as well as a summary of studies conducted on how children interpret violent media. It also gave me an insight into the extent of violence within the media, and allowed me to compare these findings to that of my content analysis that allowed me to come to valid conclusions. This book was reliable as it gave me an unbiased portrayal of violence in the media, reporting predominately on reputable studies.

Anderson, C., Gentile, D. & Buckley, K. (2007) Violent video game effects on children and adolescents. Oxford University Press, New York.

This book was extremely useful as through a data analysis I was able to deduce that violent behaviour is dependant upon the 'social modeling' of a child. This information gave me a basis for my primary methodologies for the questions in my interviews. This book was published by reputable academics and offered a two sided unbiased perspective onto the discussion of the effects of violent video games, and thus was reliable for me to gather valid conclusions.

Journals

Durkin, K. 1995. Computer Games: their effect on young people. Office of Film & Literature Classification. Sydney

This journal was highly useful to my project. Durkin offered a non-biased perspective on both the positive and negative implications of games. This was an academic journal and therefore reliable, and thus gave me valid conclusions. Durkin compared various studies of computer games; their content, children's and parents attitudes as well as the appeal of video games. Through a data analysis, it consolidated my understanding on the nature and appeal of games and was thus extremely useful in its applicability to my project.

Gunther B. & Harrison J. (2005) Violence on television: an analysis of amount, nature, location and origin, Routledge

This journal allowed me to gain quantitative data through a statistical analysis of the prevalence of violence within British television. This was extremely useful to my project, as when taken with my primary methodology of content analysis, it allowed me to make valid conclusions of the extent of violence on television. This journal was predominately factually based, and thus was reliable to use in gathering useful information for my project.

Anderson et al. (2010) Violent Video Game Effects on Aggression, Empathy and Pro-social Behaviour in Eastern and Western Countries: A meta-analytic review, American Psychological Association

This journal was highly useful in its applicability to my project. It was an unbiased academic journal on Anderson's social studies on the effects video games have on socialization and therefore because of its reliability it was extremely useful to my project. Through a data analysis it allowed me to gauge the psychological implications of heavy over exposure to violent games, in which I was then able to consolidate in my primary methodologies. After comparing the studies to other social studies conducted by other psychologists, it allowed me to draw valid conclusions on the psychological implications of heavy exposure to violence within games.

Bandura, A. (1973) Aggression: A social learning theory analysis. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

This journal offered me an unbiased factual perspective on how children interpret violent images. Due to its unbiased perspective, this source was reliable and thus was extremely useful in me gaining information for my project. Through a data analysis of the information, this source consolidated my understanding from other psychologists on how violence is interpreted by children and the effects violence may ensue on socialization. It noted the correlation that over exposure to violent images may have upon children, through studies of what Bandura referred to as 'social learning theory'. This is backed up by other sources, and was useful as it helped me to draw valid conclusions when comparing it with my primary methodologies.

Drabman R. & Thomas M. (1978) Effects of Television Violence on Expectations of Other's Aggression

This journal discussed the implications that heavy exposure to violent images have upon desensitation. It was purely based upon unbiased factual based studies, and thus its reliability meant it was extremely useful in its application to my project. While I only used a small proportion of this article within my project, it was useful as through a data analysis it consolidated my understanding on the effects that heavy exposure to violence have on socialization and helped me to draw valid judgments.

Signorielle, N. (2005) Violence in the media: a reference handbook, ABC-CILO, Inc. pp. 112
Kirsh S. (2006) Children, adolescence and media violence. Sage Publications

This journal consolidated my understanding of violence within the media, and the negative implications of this upon socialization. This source was somewhat reliable, as while it offered a biased perspective that violence within the media was predominately negative, it did however give factual recounts by many reputable persons and studies. It was useful to my project as I was able to gain recounts by academics which were applicable to my subject and when combined with other secondary sources, allowed me to draw valid conclusions.

Reports

Nielson A. (2003) Research into Community Attitudes to Violence on Free-to-air Television. Australian Broadcast Authority pp. 55

This report was incredibly useful in its applicability to my project. It allowed me to gain societal perceptions of violence by Australian society; and gave me a basis to compare this with when conducting my primary methodologies. This report was government based and offered an unbiased perspective, and therefore can be deduced as a reliable source to use. Through both a statistical and data analysis of the qualitative and quantitative information in this source it also gave me an understanding of difference in attitudes by different societal groups, including that of my cross-cultural as well as change over time. This report was compared to a similar report in the 1980s and assisted me in drawing valid conclusions when compared with other secondary sources.

Rutherford, L. & Bittman, M. (2007) Media and Communications in Australian Families. *Australian Communications and Media Authority*, pp. 267

This report was incredibly useful to my Personal Interest Project. It provided me with both qualitative and quantitative data onto the media activities of children and youths and how this has changed over time. It was extremely helpful as it can be deduced as a reliable source as it was an unbiased report from a government executive department. Through a data and statistical analysis of the information within this source, it allowed me to gain a basis for the collaboration of my questionnaires. Its reliability and usefulness allowed me to make valid conclusions on the difference in media activities since the 1960s as well as my cross cultural component.

Smart D. et al. (2004) Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra

This source was extremely useful as it provided me with quantitative data upon social trends within 'anti-social' behaviour amongst adolescents. This source is reliable as it was from a government website, however, as these statistics were produced in 2004, there may have been changes within this area in recent years. Nonetheless, through a statistical analysis this source was still useful in providing quantitative data of adolescents and aggressive behaviour between 2004 and the 1980s, and thus it was a valid source in completing my 'change over time' component of my project.

Newspapers

2009 'NSW school suspensions rise' Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April

This newspaper article gave me an insight into the rising violence within schools in NSW. Although this article was not directed at a correlation to video games, it was useful as through statistical analysis it gave me quantitative data on crime statistics in regard to violence in NSW over the past several years, and was extremely useful in helping to me in regard to my change over time aspect. While the content within this article was biased to some extent, as I only derived quantitative data from this source, so I consider it was a valid source for me to use within my project.

2010 'Girl's Charged Over Teen Attack' Sydney Morning Herald, May 31 2010

This newspaper article gave me an insight into the rising rates of females undertaking violent acts within schools. As this was written in 2010 and was published by a reputable newspaper, this source can be deduced as reliable. It offered me quantitative data on these crime statistics over time, and through comparing this statistical analysis with other primary methodologies, allowed me to come to valid conclusions about the rise in violence amongst females over time. While some aspects of this report demonstrated a biased perspective, I purely drew quantitative data from this article, it was still valid for my project.

Web sites

(2009), National Classification Scheme of Australia, Retrieved February 24 from http://www.oflc.gov.au

This source was somewhat useful for my project. Although it is a government executive site and offered an unbiased and purely factual perspective it can be evaluated as a reliable source, it was fairly un-useful in its applicability to my subject. I only used a small amount of information from this site, including the name of the department and the classification guidelines. However, while it wasn't wholly useful in its applicability to my project, when compared with other secondary data it helped me to gather valid conclusions on the implications of an R18+ rating for games.

Fromme, J (2003) Game Studies - Computer Games as a Part of Children's Culture, Retrieved March 12 www.psu.edu

This website was incredibly useful, as it gave me an unbiased insight into the studies conducted by the social researcher Fromme, and through a data analysis consolidated my understanding on the socialization of children. It served to help in my cross-cultural as it

showed the differences in socialization between males and females. As it was an educational site, it can be considered as reliable and therefore gave me valid information.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2010). Australian Social Trends 2007. Retrieved May 21st from

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/0485BB5550FE5799CA25732C00207C77?open document>

This site was extremely useful in my statistical analysis of media trends. This source gave me useful quantitative data on Australian household trends and changes in this since the 1980s and thus was extremely useful in conducting my 'change over time' component. The Australian Bureau of Statistics is a reliable source as it is government based and thus was useful in assisting me in my project. When comparing these statistics to other secondary research methodologies it helped me in coming to valid conclusions.

Documentaries/television programs

Rise of the videogame 2010 [television program]. Discovery Channel

This source was extremely insightful into the changes to the production of video games over time. It gave an unbiased factual recount of the rise in the production of violent games since the 1980s, up until the 21st century. It was extremely useful in its applicability to my 'change over time' component and as it was an educational based programme and thus can be deduced as a reliable source to use for my project. This programme was extremely useful as through a data analysis it allowed me to consolidate my understanding of the changes to video game production and thus allowed me to draw valid conclusions when comparing it to other secondary research.

Personal Communication
WARBURTON, Wayne, 2010 Psychologist

Dr. Warburton is a psychologist specializing on the impact of violence, both in real-life situations and amongst games and the media upon how this influences persons in society. As a specialist he held extensive knowledge on the impacts violence may have on socialization, and helped me to develop an understanding of the psychological impacts and was very useful to my overall direction of my PIP.

Other resources

SA AG on Games for Over 18s (2010), podcast radio programme, ABC Radio, 5 February
<http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/triplej/hack/saag.mp3>.

This podcast was useful in it's applicability to my project. However, it did offer a somewhat
bias perspective as the podcast was purely based upon persons' opinions. It did however show
an array of the opinions held by both members of society; and the South Australian Attorney-
General, Michael Atkinson. The vast array of opinions offered as well as this source being a
government station, can thus deduce this source as reliable and thus was extremely useful
within my project as I was able to draw out valid conclusions.