

Will Virtual Worlds Destroy Humanity?

My two oldest children spend between 20 to 50 hours a week immersed in virtual worlds. As radical unschoolers, we don't limit their screen time or censor their activities. They have, and deserve, unfiltered access to the world and unfettered control over their time.

That doesn't mean that computers are all they do. On the contrary, they spend a lot of time in front of Netflix, Hulu, and the like, as well as time outside the home running around with friends and cousins, browsing at the library, taking in new flicks, playing at parks, and visiting zoos, aquariums, and museums. Their lives are filled to the brim with stimulus from all sources.

Is the time spent in virtual worlds harming them? I don't believe so. On the contrary, I consider virtual worlds a fantastic way to quickly and cheaply connect with friends, develop cooperation and negotiation skills (a virtual version of what in-person play does for children), provide opportunities for solving problems, introduce new cultures and customs, and allow my children to safely engage in behaviors that would be too dangerous outside of the virtual world, activities like stealing cars, running pedestrians over, and shooting people.

Did you just raise your eyebrows? I sure hope so. Quite understandable. I allow my children to commit such virtual crimes? Of course! What a fantastic way to learn the consequences of these types of actions. When you steal a car, you get chased by cops. When you run people over, you become hated and hunted. When you shoot people, they die, and you may die.

Now that they've done it, and experienced the consequences virtually, why would they do it for real? I don't think they would, and for the same reason that I don't think virtual worlds are dangerous for humanity in the long run.

People who become consumed with virtual worlds do so because they find there the hormonal rewards that are lacking elsewhere. I've heard it said by such a person that he's a hero and champion in his video game, but outside his life is complete shit. How does that happen?

I'm not a psychologist, but it's my understanding that childhood trauma has a lot to do with how happy and fulfilled people can be as adults. Someone who's broken in this way has a much more difficult time finding hormonal rewards unless they've spent the time and energy in therapy to rewire the pathways in their brains to allow for easier delivery. As a child, their developing brain was naturally wired for dealing with much more stressful situations than was called for by their larger environment, due to the artificial stress

created by violent parenting practices.

That's not to say that so-called broken people can't find happiness. They certainly can, and have. But it requires a lot of hard work, and a willingness to stay busy every day in order to find meaning and purpose. But sometimes the purpose is found in virtual reality.

Hence the "obsession" that occurs with virtual worlds. I think people find escapes in many different things, and often those escapes produce meaning and purpose, and what follows are the hormonal rewards that keep them going back, sometimes at the detriment of other areas of their lives. This is a problem for them, to be sure, but it's a symptom.

People hurting other people or taking their stuff, as my kids have so enjoyed doing in their video games, is also a symptom, of the same cause. Hence the shared reason I mentioned before. And I've already mentioned the cause: childhood trauma.

People that are raised with unconditional love and without the use of violence or arbitrary forms of discipline don't need escapes in life and don't hurt other people. Why would they? They aren't broken and their brains aren't wired for their environments in an incompatible way. They find happiness and fulfillment much more easily. They've learned to value mutual respect, compassion, and peacefulness, and have developed intrinsic reasons for tackling challenges and building for their futures.

I can say quite confidently that virtual worlds will not destroy humanity. Their abuse is a symptom of a much larger problem. That's the problem that we should be grappling with. While it was difficult for me personally to see the error of my parenting ways, and change for the better, it's not impossible. The world is filled with fantastic resources and fantastic people to help anyone become better at raising their kids. If you find yourself with a desire to change, please don't hesitate to ask me for help. I'm happy and eager to do so.