LESSON
SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND VIOLENCE IN VIDEO GAMES

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SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND VIOLENCE IN VIDEO GAMES

The point of the exercise is to discuss the effect of violence in video games and its possible effects on real world aggression and violence.

Subject and level
Psychology B levels

Connection to curriculum
The curriculum in psychology has to contain theories in relation to cognitive psychology and theories on learning. A classic theory in that domain is Albert Banduras social learning theory. The exercise can also be applied to theories about aggression, competition, intergroup conflicts etc.

Didactic and pedagogic considerations
The exercise can be adapted in multiple ways depending on the composition and competencies of the students. In this model the focus is on them reflecting on and using their own experiences with gaming. The main objective is for the students to train their ability to look at a case and identify different factors and explanations that could be at play.

The exercise can however also use an article on links between violent video games and aggression which shouldn't be hard to find as it is a common topic in popular science. Here the article can be used as a support for the students because possible factors often are outlined in the articles. This approach could be an advantage if the exercise is used early in the course where the students are still training their ability to look for different factors and explanations in case material.

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Time estimate
30-45 minutes

Group size
3-4

Overall introduction to exercise
The core of the social learning theory is that humans learn not only through positive or negative reinforcement but also through observing others especially through role models. Bandura studied how the rising violence in media in the 60's was connected to a rise in violence and aggression in children. It is that theory that will be discussed in this exercise.

In this exercise the students have already read about and understood the theory, so the focus is on them reflecting about the limitations of the theory and its real-world application.

Exercise as presented to the students
No seperate presentation needed.

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Exercise as presented to the students

First, they are divided into groups where they have to discuss and reflect about the following questions:

- How can we understand the link between violent media and violent and aggressive behaviour through the lens of Banduras social learning theory?
- Have you played video games that contained violence? (E.g. fighting games, shooters, RPGs etc.)
- Do you think that the aspect of violence makes the game more compelling to play?
    - Follow up question – Why do you think that so many video games today contain violence in one form or another?
- Have you ever gotten angry, aggressive, hostile, violent etc. while playing or after playing a violent videogame?
    - Follow up question: was the violence in the game the main factor for your experience or were there other factors that influenced your behaviour?
- Do violent video games/media make people more violent? What are the arguments for and against Banduras hypothesis?

Extra question if the students run out of discussion points:

- Could violence in video games make people less violent/aggressive?

When the groups are done discussing, the groups share their reflections and discussion points with the whole class.

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