

Bad Game Behaviour Increases Moral Awareness

A recent study conducted at the University of Buffalo is suggesting that gamers who act badly in videogames are actually better equipped to understand complex moral situations than regular people.

The theory is that by breaking moral codes virtually, the player gains an increased understanding of the issues that arise from their poor behaviour.

The study, named ["Being Bad in a Video Game Can Make Us More Morally Sensitive"](#) was conducted by Matthew Grizzard, PhD. He commented "Rather than leading players to become less moral this research suggests that violent video-game play may actually lead to increased moral sensitivity. This may, as it does in real life, provoke players to engage in voluntary behavior that benefits others."

The study found that committing immoral or bad acts in a video game often elicits a feeling of guilt in the player, leading them to becoming more sensitive of the moral issues that surround them, particularly when they pertain to the same issue that the gamer had previously violated in-game.

The study appears to match up to other studies which suggest that guilt evoked by immoral behaviour in the real world also has a positive effect on our moral compass, allowing us to become more altruistic and pro-social.

The study involved inducing guilt in the participants by having them commit bad acts in relation to two of five moral domains, listed as: care/harm, fairness/reciprocity, in-group loyalty, respect for authority, and purity/sanctity.

"We suggest that pro-social behavior also may result when guilt is provoked by virtual behavior," Grizzard continues. "We found that after a subject played a violent video game, they felt guilt and that guilt was associated with greater sensitivity toward the two particular domains they violated — those of care/harm and fairness/reciprocity.

"Our findings suggest that emotional experiences evoked by media exposure can increase the intuitive foundations upon which human beings make moral judgments," Grizzard adds. "This is particularly relevant for video-game play, where habitual engagement with that media is the norm for a small, but considerably important group of users."

Grizzard also adds that the players cultural surroundings and influences will also factor into the moral choices they make and how what they do in-game affects them. He uses the general example of an American citizen being provided the avatar of a terrorist and a UN Peacekeeper. Even if the player commits the same actions with each, they will generally see the terrorist's acts as morally reprehensible and thus experience guilt, whereas the same acts may be considered less immoral if committed by the UN Peacekeeper.

The study involved 185 subjects using this very scenario, with players being randomly selected as either a control group controlling a UN soldier or a guilt-inducing group which saw them control a terrorist.

Subjects were also asked to recall real-life situations that had induced guilt or did not induce guilt, depending on which area of the study they fell under. Following completion of the game, participants were asked to complete a 'guilt scale' before answering 30 questions based around the five moral domains mentioned previously.