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Jeff Lawrence is a veteran of the United States Air Force. At NIU, he is majoring in electrical engineering and is a member of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars and the NIU Clean Snowmobile Team. This essay was interesting for Jeff to write because of the importance of the issue of violence in the media as well as Jeff’s passion for analyzing and conducting arguments.

Jeff Lawrence wrote this essay in Elizabeth Lamszus's English 104 course during the spring of 2010. Jeff has followed APA Style guidelines.
Authors Gerard Jones, with “Violent Media Is Good for Kids,” and Eugene F. Provenzo Jr., with “Testimony Before the Senate Commerce Committee Hearing on “The Impact of Interactive Violence on Children,” present us with both sides of a debate on violent media. This debate is over whether or not violent media such as comic books, video games, and movies have a positive or negative effect on children. The authors take opposing sides on this argument; Jones is a comic book writer who believes violent stories, such as the ones he writes help children deal with natural emotions. Provenzo is a long-time writer and researcher at the University of Miami who testified before the Senate Commerce Committee in regards to how violent media is negatively effecting child development. Both authors use several different methods of argumentation: appeals to logic and emotion through reasoning techniques and the establishment of credibility through experience. Both authors use these techniques; however, Jones’s essay seems to use these methods of argumentation to provide a more complete argument. There is no doubt that people in America have encountered this issue at some point. The way Jones and Provenzo present their sides of the issue allows us to analyze and determine the strongest argument.

While both authors address similar issues, it is apparent that they differ in some aspects. Jones’s (2000) main argument was that sheltering children from violent media damages their ability to deal with natural emotions, which in turn shelters them “against power and selfhood” (p. 498). His argument is directed towards parents and adults; his examples contain methods and ideas about parenting. Jones made it seem like this piece was written for almost anyone; it was as if anyone can be involved in the prevention of his or her child’s development. The way Jones targeted a large audience could in fact strengthen his article. It leaves the reader and myself with a lasting impression and makes it seem that there is something we can do about the problem. Provenzo believes certain types of games are actually simulations, training children to become better killers. He says that these violent simulators are in fact causing people to view violence romantically. Provenzo does have
a dissimilar audience. He was speaking towards the Senate Committee—people who can make drastic changes in the availability of violent media. The fact that this essay was written about his experience in the hearing seems to damage his argument. He is attempting to reach a broader audience by publishing his thoughts, but he fails to include methods of arguing with a broad audience. After reading Provenzo’s essay, it is difficult to find what action he wants done. It almost seems as if he was trying to outlaw the ability to create violent First Person Shooter type games; someone not on the Senate Committee may have a hard time accomplishing this. His arguments can speak to most adults, but they lack direction and do not really inspire any action for a normal parent. This does seem appropriate based on the context; he was offering his expert consultation to the committee based on his research.

Jones and Provenzo both use rhetoric to build the credibility within each piece of evidence. Provenzo begins by stating both literary works that he has written to establish himself as an expert. Even the fact that he was being asked to testify to the Senate could be a source of credibility; this act could justify calling him an expert in his field. Then, he uses many specific examples of media violence and their relation to actual violence. His main example was that of the Columbine school shooting. Provenzo believes it was clear that these students learned their planned actions from the video game *Doom* and the movie *Natural Born Killers*. This example was credible in the fact that the evidence supports the fact that they were mimicking this media; however, he uses this one example as the outcome of all violent exposure. Since it is well known that violent media has been extremely mainstream since the advent of computer systems, Provenzo (2000) mildly loses some of his credibility by only presenting one example where the “increasing ‘romanticization’ of violence” actually caused real violence (p. 500).

Jones almost exclusively uses personal experience in his examples, which causes him to lose a bit of credibility. Jones starts off strong and explains what he went through as a child, and how the violent media helped him turn into a better person. He uses his son as an example, and it seems to help the argument. However, when he mentions that he himself is a comic book writer, there was a definite conflict of interest between acceptability of comic books
and his career. He offers one expert opinion, that of a psychologist who works with many children in public schools. This one expert opinion raises his credibility, but he then loses it again when he mentions that he was in league with this psychologist to create a program for children. Jones does not offer any examples that are not directly related to his own actions. He presents a strong argument, but it was an argument based on generally accepted beliefs and personal opinion only.

To bring these authors into comparison, Jones had little credibility in his evidence but had decent examples and a great amount of real-world experience. Provenzo had the credibility of an expert but lacked enough evidence that could be related to the real world. The differences in credibility generally even out and bring the authors on par with each other. It was interesting that a comic book writer can seemingly be just as credible in the area of child development as a professor who studies children and education.

Both authors presented evidence to support their claims. The authors used evidence to make the reader reach the same logical conclusion as they did. Since the conclusions about the effects of violent media differ, we must break apart the arguments and analyze the logic each author uses. To begin with Jones’s opening example, he believes there is a simple cause and effect of his trouble as a child. The stated cause was that his parents, in their progressive manner, sheltered him from violent media. He believes the effect he felt was that he moved into a state of “passivity and loneliness” (Jones, 2000, p. 496). He further explained that when he was finally introduced to the Incredible Hulk comic books, his faults were soon fixed. By using deductive reasoning, Jones believes that his experience with violent videogames helped him become a more rounded person. This theme is carried through the rest of his essay and personal examples; examples of two girls who were bettered by strategic use of violent media extend this cause and effect. These logical cause and effects by deductive reasoning are valid, but may not be totally sound. The examples of the two girls did not show total control over their behavior; it seems that the author puts his logic to test on the girls and creates a causation fallacy between violent media and the results. To set up a quick deductive reasoning experiment, we can insert Jones’s premises: (1) Girl listens to rap music; (2) Girl turns out productive; (3)
Therefore, rap music is productive. It is apparent that these premises are odd, but it seems to be how Jones describes the example. Another interesting logical point is how he mentions the fact that there have been school shootings. Jones (2000) argues that violent entertainment has “helped hundreds of people for everyone it’s hurt” (p. 497). This can be put to logic, and even though Jones does not state statistics of child violence, it seems to be sound that violent media is not the sole cause of violence among children.

Provenzo also uses a good amount of cause and effect and even states the logic he uses within one of the paragraphs. To begin, Provenzo must prove that violent games are literally “instructing” adolescents in the ways of warfare and violence. This was where the Columbine shooters came in; their video diaries clearly showed that they were mimicking what they learned in games and movies. Then he used this to describe how skilled people become skilled through practice, and that game players become better with practice, and finally that game players are becoming skilled in the profession of violence. He then moved on to explain that the continuous increase in computing capability will cause violent simulations to only increase their ability to train children. A negative aspect of Provenzo’s logic was that he never brought together the children skilled in violence and the children who commit violence. This seems like a major disconnect in his logic, and although his logic was sound, he was not connecting it properly through his examples. This could be the reason he only had one cause and effect example of a school shooting where there was a direct connection to violent media and the effect.

When comparing the logic of both authors, it seemed like Jones touches on the heart of the issue more than Provenzo. Jones acknowledges that violent media can be negative but has positive qualities that can be found when presented correctly with parental guidance. Provenzo offers no positive aspects of violent media and is quick to condemn it completely. Logically, it was easier to agree with Jones’s article because he acknowledges both sides of the argument, while Provenzo does not.

The other argumentation technique found in both articles is the method of appealing to emotion. Jones uses this much more than Provenzo does, and it makes his argument stronger in some aspects. Provenzo did a good job staying objective and presenting his evidence to the committee, while it was apparent that Jones had
very strong emotional feelings on the issue. Jones’s argument about his childhood can appeal to emotions of compassion to people who felt similarly as a child. He also makes use of many feelings and philosophies during the rest of his essay, talking about power, selfhood, and general emotions like fear and anxiety, which are felt by everyone. By telling people what would happen if they sheltered children from violence, he appeals to readers’ feelings of guilt or regret. It is apparent that he was not only targeting adults and parents, but more specifically, targeting adults’ and parents’ emotions. Provenzo mostly sticks to the logical aspect of his argument, but he does appeal to the emotion at the end of his essay when he compares the rise of media to a genetic engineering experiment. This choice of analogy adds gravity to the situation and works the emotion by adding a sense of urgency to the situation.

The conclusions of both essays were very strong in that they ended on a powerful note. Jones used his emotional appeal with an analogy about the Victorians sheltering their children from sexuality, and he continued to talk about sheltered emotions. Provenzo compared violent games to a genetic engineering experiment gone wrong, which made his work seem important and urgent. Overall, Jones’s article targeted at emotions seems to be more convincing, even with his slightly sub-par evidence. While that may be because I have played violent games myself, I think it was because Jones seems to brush on the surface of the deeper issue: parenting. While Jones really never stresses the importance of proper media implementation and explanation done by a parent, Provenzo did not mention the role of a parent at all in his entire essay and only stated his facts based on pure logic. Provenzo’s problem came when I took a deep look at his logic and revealed that what he had created was a fallacy. Of course it can be said that violent games train children in warfare techniques, but there was a disconnection when it comes to actually putting those techniques learned to negative uses. If it is agreed that parenting was the disconnection, Provenzo does not include that into his logic, and this undermines his entire essay. With that being said, if the context of Provenzo’s essay was to offer objective information to the Committee, this would explain the disconnection. In the end, Jones’s essay was the one that provided a more complete and persuasive argument.
REFERENCES
