

Racing, Shooting, and Zapping Your Way to Better Visual Skills: Study Finds Benefits of Playing Video Games

December 17, 2009

Do your kids want a Wii, a PlayStation or an Xbox 360 this year? This holiday gift season is packed with popular gaming systems and adrenaline-pumping, sharpshooting games. What's a parent to do? Is there any redeeming value in the hours that teens spend transfixed by these video games?

According to a new study in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, regular gamers are fast and accurate information processors, not only during game play, but in real-life situations as well.

In the study, psychological scientists from the University of Rochester, Matthew Dye, Shawn Green and Daphne Bavelier, looked at all of the existing literature on video gaming and found some surprising insights in the data. For example, they found that avid players got faster not only on their game of choice, but on a variety of unrelated laboratory tests of reaction time.

Many skeptics agree that gamers are fast, but that they become less accurate as their speed of play increases. Dye and colleagues find the opposite: Gamers don't lose accuracy (in the game or in lab tests) as they get faster. The scientists believe that this is a result of the gamer's improved visual cognition. Playing video games enhances performance on mental rotation skills, visual and spatial memory, and tasks requiring divided attention.

The scientists conclude that training with video games may serve to reduce gender differences in visual and spatial processing, and thwart some of the cognitive declines that come with aging.