



Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter

By Steven Johnson

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Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter By Steven Johnson

Look out for Johnson's new book, *Wonderland*, now on sale.

Forget everything you've ever read about the age of dumbed-down, instant-gratification culture. In this provocative, unfailingly intelligent, thoroughly researched, and surprisingly convincing big idea book, Steven Johnson draws from fields as diverse as neuroscience, economics, and media theory to argue that the pop culture we soak in every day—from **Lord of the Rings** to **Grand Theft Auto** to **The Simpsons**—has been growing more sophisticated with each passing year, and, far from rotting our brains, is actually posing new cognitive challenges that are actually making our minds measurably sharper. After reading *Everything Bad is Good for You*, you will never regard the glow of the video game or television screen the same way again.

With a new afterword by the author.

Steven Johnson's newest book, *How We Got to Now*, is now available from Riverhead Books.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In his fourth book, *Everything Bad Is Good for You*, iconoclastic science writer Steven Johnson (who used himself as a test subject for the latest neurological technology in his last book, *Mind Wide Open*) takes on one of the most widely held preconceptions of the postmodern world--the belief that video games, television shows, and other forms of popular entertainment are detrimental to Americans' cognitive and moral development. *Everything Good* builds a case to the contrary that is engaging, thorough, and ultimately convincing.

The heart of Johnson's argument is something called the Sleeper Curve--a universe of popular entertainment that trends, intellectually speaking, ever upward, so that today's pop-culture consumer has to do more "cognitive work"--making snap decisions and coming up with long-term strategies in role-playing video games, for example, or mastering new virtual environments on the Internet-- than ever before. Johnson makes a compelling case that even today's least nutritional TV junk food--the *Joe Millionaires* and *Survivors* so commonly derided as evidence of America's cultural decline--is more complex and stimulating, in terms of plot complexity and the amount of external information viewers need to understand them, than the *Love Boats* and *I Love Lucys* that preceded it. When it comes to television, even (perhaps especially) crappy television, Johnson argues, "the content is less interesting than the cognitive work the show elicits from your mind."

Johnson's work has been controversial, as befits a writer willing to challenge wisdom so conventional it has ossified into accepted truth. But even the most skeptical readers should be captivated by the intriguing questions Johnson raises, whether or not they choose to accept his answers. --*Erica C. Barnett*

From Publishers Weekly

Worried about how much time your children spend playing video games? Don't be, advises Johnson—not only are they learning valuable problem-solving skills, they'd probably do better on an IQ test than you or your parents could at their age. Go ahead and let them watch more television, too, since even reality shows can function as "elaborately staged group psychology experiments" to stimulate rather than pacify the brain. With the same winning combination of personal revelation and friendly scientific explanation he displayed in last year's *Mind Wide Open*, Johnson shatters the conventional wisdom about pop culture as pabulum, showing how video games, television shows and movies have become increasingly complex. Furthermore, he says, consumers are drawn specifically to those products that require the most mental engagement, from small children who can't get enough of their favorite Disney DVDs to adults who find new layers of meaning with each repeated viewing of *Seinfeld*. Johnson lays out a strong case that what we do for fun is just as educational in its way as what we study in the classroom (although it's still worthwhile to encourage good reading habits, too). There's an important message here for every parent—one they should hear from the source before savvy kids (especially teens) try to take advantage of it. *Agent, Lydia Wills at Paradigm. (May)*
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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Johnson puts the much-maligned pastime of playing video games under the microscope and comes up with some startling conclusions concerning the intellectual value and cognitive demands of this pop-culture activity. He argues that it isn't the content of today's games that engages the mind and makes one smarter; rather, it is their ever-increasing level of complexity and sophistication that challenges the mind to grow neurologically. One only comes to understand how to play a game by probing the complex interfaces

within its levels to see what works as one goes along. Johnson observes that this is much like real life. He urges parents to sit down with their children and play in order to understand just how mentally challenging the games can be. He extends his argument to TV series such as *The Sopranos*, *24*, *Six Feet Under*, and *Law and Order*, all of which, he argues, are multi-threaded and require viewers to think in order to follow the increasingly complex character and plot developments. While the book and its arguments endorsing the cognitive challenges of video games and other mass media are thought-provoking and somewhat convincing, Johnson is less successful in convincing readers that video games—especially the more violent ones—are good for a player's mental health. While the book should be of value for reports, don't be surprised if many students can't resist citing it the next time their parents ask why they haven't finished their homework.—*Catherine Gilbride, Fairfax County Public Library, VA*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Coffman:

What do you with regards to book? It is not important with you? Or just adding material when you require something to explain what the ones you have problem? How about your free time? Or are you busy man? If you don't have spare time to try and do others business, it is make you feel bored faster. And you have free time? What did you do? Everybody has many questions above. The doctor has to answer that question due to the fact just their can do that will. It said that about book. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is right. Because start from on kindergarten until university need this particular Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter to read.

Erica Clark:

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