Do Violent Video Games Contribute to Youth Violence?

As many as 97% of US kids age 12-17 play video games, contributing to the $21.53 billion domestic video game industry. More than half of the 50 top-selling video games contain violence.

Violent video games have been blamed for school shootings, increases in bullying, and violence towards women. Critics argue that these games desensitize players to violence, reward players for simulating violence, and teach children that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts.

Video game advocates contend that a majority of the research on the topic is deeply flawed and that no causal relationship has been found between video games and social violence. They argue that violent video games may provide a safe outlet for aggressive and angry feelings and may reduce crime. Read more background...

Top Pro & Con Arguments

**Pro 1**
Playing violent video games causes more aggression, bullying, and fighting. [60][61][80] 60% of middle school boys and 40% of middle school girls who played at least one Mature-rated (M-rated) game hit or beat up someone, compared with 39% of boys and 14% of girls who did not play M-rated games. [2] A 2014 peer-reviewed study in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that habitual violent video game playing had a causal link with increased, long-term, aggressive behavior. Several peer-reviewed studies have shown that children who play M-rated games are more likely to bully and cyberbully their peers, get into physical fights, be hostile, argue with teachers, and show aggression towards their peers throughout the school year. [73][76][2][67][31]

**Con 1**
Sales of violent video games have significantly increased while violent juvenile crime rates have significantly decreased. Total US sales of video game hardware and software increased 204% from 1994 to 2014, reaching $13.1 billion in 2014, while violent crimes decreased 37% and murders by juveniles acting alone fell 76% in that same period. [133][134][135][136][82][83] The juvenile Violent Crime Index arrest rate in 2012 was 38% below 1980 levels and 63% below 1994, the peak year. [83] The number of high school students who had been in at least one physical fight decreased from 43% in 1991 to 25% in 2013, and student reports of criminal victimization at school dropped by more than half from 1995 to 2011. [107][106] An Aug. 2014 peer-reviewed study found that: "Annual trends in video game sales for the past 33 years were unrelated to violent crime... Monthly sales of video games were related to concurrent decreases in aggravated assaults." [84]

**Pro 1**
There is broad consensus among medical associations, pediatricians, parents, and researchers that violent video games increase aggressive behavior. [74] A 2014 study published in Psychology of Popular Media Culture found that 90% of pediatricians and 67% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that violent video games can increase

**Con 2**
Studies claiming a causal link between video game violence and real life violence are flawed. [34] Many
aggressive behavior among children. [75]. More than 98% of pediatricians in the United States say that too much exposure to violent media heightens childhood aggression. [62] In addition, 66% of researchers agreed or strongly agreed. Since only 17% of researchers disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 17% were undecided, the study concluded "That means that among researchers who have an opinion, eight out of 10 agree that violent games increase aggression." [75] A joint statement by six leading national medical associations, including the American Medical Association and American Psychological Association, stated: "Well over 1,000 studies - including reports from the Surgeon General's office, the National Institute of Mental Health, and numerous studies conducted by leading figures within our medical and public health organizations - our own members - point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children." [33]

### Pro 1

Simulating violence such as shooting guns and hand-to-hand combat in video games can cause real-life violent behavior. Video games often require players to simulate violent actions, such as stabbing, shooting, or dismembering someone with an ax, sword, chainsaw, or other weapons. Game controllers are so sophisticated and other weapons. Game controllers are so sophisticated and the games are so realistic that simulating the violent acts enhances the learning of those violent behaviors. [23] A 2015 peer-reviewed study found "compelling evidence that the use of realistic controllers can have a significant effect on the level of cognitive aggression." [118] Two teenagers in Tennessee who shot at passing cars and killed one driver told police they got the idea from playing Grand Theft Auto III. [49] Bruce Bartholow, professor of psychology at the University of Missouri, spoke about the effects of simulating violence: "More than any other media, these [violent] video games encourage active participation in violence. From a psychological perspective, video games are excellent teaching tools because they reward players for engaging in certain types of behavior. Unfortunately, in many popular video games, the behavior is violence." [53] A Sep. 2014 peer-reviewed study found that first-person shooter games trained players to have better accuracy in shooting a gun outside the game, and made them more likely to aim for the head. [85]

### Pro 2

Many perpetrators of mass shootings played violent video games. The teenage shooters in the 1999 Columbine High School massacre of 13 students played violent combat games. [43] Many mass shootings have been carried out by avid video game players: James Holmes in the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting (2012); Jared Lee Loughner in the Arizona shooting that injured Rep. Gabby Giffords and killed six others (2011); and Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway (2011) and admitted to using the game Modern Warfare 2 for training. [53] An FBI school shooter threat assessment stated that a student who makes threats of violence should be considered more credible if he or she also spends "inordinate amounts of

### Con 3

The US Supreme Court ruled that violent video games do not cause youth to act aggressively. In Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association (2011) the US Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that California could not ban the sale of violent video games to minors. Justice Antonin Scalia wrote in the majority opinion that studies purporting to show a connection between violent video games and harmful effects on children "have been rejected by every court to consider them, and with good reason: They do not prove that violent video games cause minors to act aggressively." [81]

### Con 4

Playing violent video games does not cause kids to commit mass shootings. Over 150 million Americans (and 71% of teens) play video games. There have been 71 mass shootings between 1982 and Aug. 2015, seven of which (9.8%) involved shooters age 18 or younger. [87][91] [92] Katherine Newman, PhD, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Johns Hopkins University, wrote: "Millions of young people play video games full of fistfights, blazing guns, and body slams... Yet only a minuscule fraction of the consumers become violent." [86] A report by the US Secret Service and US Department of Education examined 37 incidents of targeted school violence between 1974 and 2000. Of the 41 attackers studied, 27% had an interest in violent movies, 24% in violent books, and 37% exhibited interest in their own violent writings, while only 12% showed interest in violent video games. The report did not find a relationship between playing violent video games and school shootings. [35] An Apr. 2015 peer-reviewed study published in Psychiatric Quarterly found that playing violent video games had no impact on hostility levels in teenagers. [123]

### Con 5

Violent video games allow players to release their stress and anger (catharsis) in the game, leading to less real world aggression. A peer-reviewed study published in the
Pro 1
Violent video games desensitize players to real-life violence. Desensitization to violence was defined in a Journal of Experimental Social Psychology peer-reviewed study as "a reduction in emotion-related physiological reactivity to real violence." The study found that just 20 minutes of playing a violent video game "can cause people to become less physiologically aroused by real violence. People desensitized to violence are more likely to commit a violent act." [51][112][111] By age 18, American children will have seen 16,000 murders and 200,000 acts of violence depicted in violent video games, movies, and television. [110] A Sep. 2011 peer-reviewed study found a causal link between violent video game exposure and an increase in aggression as a result of a reduction in the brain's response to depictions of real-life violence. [52] Studies have found reduced emotional and physiological responses to violence in both the long and short term. [55][58] In a 2005 peer-reviewed study, violent video game exposure was linked to reduced P300 amplitudes in the brain, which is associated with desensitization to violence and increases in aggressive behavior. [24]

Con 6
Violent video game players know the difference between virtual violence in the context of a game and appropriate behavior in the real world. By age seven, children can distinguish fantasy from reality, and can tell the difference between video game violence and real-world violence. [99] [100] Video game players understand they are playing a game. Kids see fantasy violence all the time, from Harry Potter and the Minions to Bugs Bunny and Tom and Jerry. Their ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality prevents them from emulating video game violence in real life. [9] Exposure to fantasy is important for kids. Fisher-Price toy company stated, "Pretending is more than play: it's a major part of a child's development. Fantasy not only develops creative thinking, it's also a way for children to deal with situations and problems that concern them." [108]

Pro 1
By inhabiting violent characters in video games, children are more likely to imitate the behaviors of those characters and have difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy. Violent video games require active participation and identification with violent characters, which reinforces violent behavior. [59] Young children are more likely to confuse fantasy violence with real world violence, and without a framework for ethical decision making, they may mimic the actions they see in violent video games. [4] Child Development and Early Childhood Education expert Jane Katch, MST, stated in an interview with Education Week, "I found that young children often have difficulty separating fantasy from reality when they are playing and can temporarily believe they are the character they are pretending to be." US Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer wrote in his dissent in Brown v. ESA that "the closer a child's behavior comes, not to watching, but to acting out horrific violence, the greater the potential psychological harm." [124]

Con 7
Studies have shown that violent video games can have a positive effect on kindness, civic engagement, and "prosocial" behaviors. Research shows that playing violent video games can induce a feeling of guilt that leads to increased prosocial behavior (positive actions that benefit others) in the real world. [104] Another study published in Computers in Human Behavior discovered that youths exposed to violence in action games displayed more prosocial behavior and civic engagement, "possibly due to the team-oriented multiplayer options in many of these games." [103] In a 2013 peer-reviewed study published in PLOS ONE, "Three experiments failed to find a detrimental effect of violent video games on prosocial behavior [positive actions taken to benefit others], despite using contemporary and classic games, delayed and immediate test-phases, and short and long exposures." [102] Researchers have shown that playing video games also results in increased moral sensitivity. [104]

Pro 1
Exposure to violent video games is linked to lower empathy and decreased kindness. Empathy, the ability to understand and enter into another's feelings is believed to inhibit aggressive behavior. In a study of 150 fourth and fifth graders by Jeanne Funk, PhD, Distinguished University Professor of Psychology at the University of Toledo, violent video games were the only type of media associated with lower empathy. [32] A study published in the American Psychological Association's Psychological Bulletin found that exposure to violent video games led to a lack of empathy and prosocial behavior (positive actions that

Con 8
Nearly all young men play video games, so the fact that some people who commit violent acts also played games should not be surprising, nor does it imply a causal