

Violence in Video Games

By: Yasmine Moussa



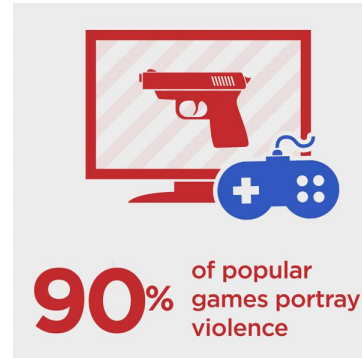
Teenage boy, Max, plays the violent video game Grand Theft Auto on his computer while sitting at his desk. (Photo by Yasmine Moussa)

Violent video games influencing real world violence has been studied and talked about for over 30 years. In fact, this topic dates back to 1987, when Tipper Gore, also known as Mary Elizabeth Aitcheson Gore, conducted a strong campaign to get record albums with sexually explicit lyrics, extreme violence, or drug-glorifying imagery labeled with parental advisories. However, many argued that campaigning for warning labels violated [First Amendment rights](#).

The Supreme Court declared 7-2 in 2011, that a California law prohibiting the sale of violent video games to children was unconstitutional. Many people seemed to think there was a connection between school shootings and violent video game use. This begs the questions, do violent video games influence violence in teenage boys? Do video games encourage violence? Are video games related to gun deaths?

Max, a 16-year-old boy, Luisana, a mother and teacher, and George, a GameStop employee, shared their insight on the topic. They asked for their last names to not be shared due to privacy reasons. Sarah Coyne, who is a developmental psychologist, also shared her perceptions.

The most violent video game series include some of the best-selling ones. Each of the Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto franchises has sold over 100 million copies of its video games. Games in these series are rated for adults and contain "blood and gore" and "intense violence," according to the Entertainment Ratings Safety Board (ESRB).



Statistics show 91% of kids play video games and 90% of those games portray violence. (Graphic provided by Healthline.com)

The average daily time spent playing video games among children aged 8 to 18 increased from 26 minutes per day in 1999 to approximately 110 minutes, which is just about 2 hours per day by 2009. The percentages are significantly higher for boys, 25% of whom spend four or more hours a day playing video games.

“When I used to play a lot, I would play for 4-5 hours a night, but now I limit myself to 2 hours,” said Max. “I used to be very addicted to the game, it’s addicting because you want to win the most money possible by completing missions throughout the game.”

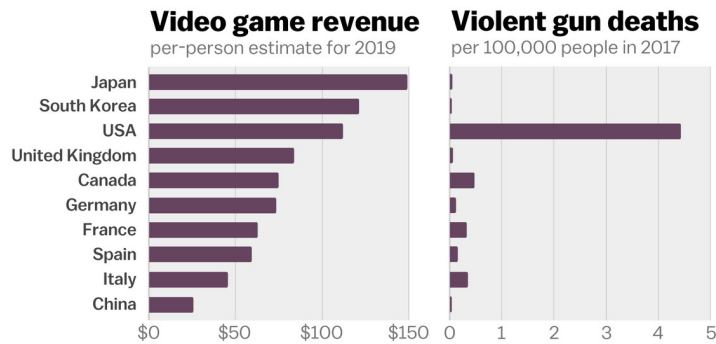
“Grand Theft Auto is a lot of shooting, violence, drugs,” said Max. “The goal of the game is to shoot people and hit people with cars to complete the mission and get money.”

Max described how he does feel a rush of dopamine when he plays the game with his friends. He said he feels a flight or fight mode to complete the mission.

However, he personally does not think the violent video game influences gun violence in teenage boys because he knows that he and his friends just want to have fun and they are aware that it’s not real.

He also does not think that by playing these games it makes him any more desensitized towards violence.

“If I were to see that violence in real life I would definitely be scared and sad,” said Max.



Violent video games and violent gun death data show little correlation in every other country except the USA. (Provided by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation from Newzoo | Games Market Data)

Video game violence is a cause for concern because numerous researches have attempted to establish a relationship between video game violence and violence in the real world.

Even though Japan shows the lowest violent crime rate in the world, there are a lot of gamers there, proving that there is little evidence that connects violent games to violence within people, let alone mass murders.

The fact that video games have become immensely popular throughout the world without causing other nations' levels of violence to reach the height that the USA's has is the key reason to be skeptical of direct correlation.

Luisana, mother of a 16-year-old son and 3rd grade teacher, said her child averages about 3-4 hours per day after school.

She said that she does think these violent games make her child emotionless towards violence, due to the fact that he knows it's just a game and it's not real, so he lacks building empathy.

"I do think violence in video games influences violence in real life because when you're chasing someone down with a violent weapon like a gun, they are getting some dopamine or serotonin from it," said Luisana. "I just don't think it elicits an emotional response as in empathy or compassion."

This showed the difference in the way Gen X and Gen Z think.

When asking Max if he thinks these violent video games teach him how to shoot a gun he immediately replied with no.

But Luisana thinks it does teach kids how to shoot a gun.

“They're using the weapon even though it's with a joystick they're still aiming, shooting, and either hitting their target or not, so it is some sort of practice in using a weapon even though it's like a virtual reality,” said Luisana.

Being a teacher working in a school, Luisana gets a pit in her stomach every time they go on lockdown or have an unidentified teenager walking near their school.

“More contributes to the violence in the youth,” said Luisana. “I think it's mental health and schools not having enough counselors to do counseling and guidance for the children.”



The top two best-selling violent video games pictured are Call of Duty (middle) and Grand Theft Auto (right) featured by another popular violent video game Doom (left). (Photo by Yasmine Moussa)

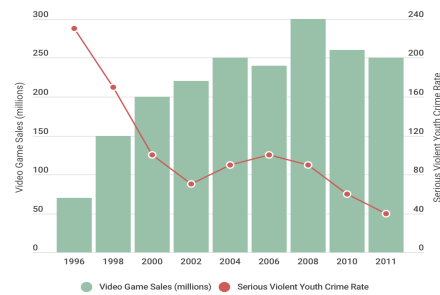
George, a 23-year-old who works at GameStop, says that the most violent video games he sees being sold are Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto.

“Mostly teenage boys roughly ages 18 to 25 is who come in to buy them,” said George. “If they're younger most of the time the parent comes in with their child to buy them since the games are rated 17+ for mature audiences.”

With George being a violent video game player himself, he does not think the games influence violence in teenage boys. He said it didn't have an influence on himself and he thinks it depends on the kid and their home life.

“In video games, usually kids know that it's not real so I wouldn't say video games have that big of a factor, but again if kids are seeing people shooting in games, they could think that it's okay, so that could play a small factor,” said George.

Youth Violence vs. Video Game Sales



Sources: Entertainment Software Association and Bureau of Justice Statistics
(Made by Yasmine Moussa)

Made with Infogram

Youth Violence vs. Video Revenue shown over the years 1996-2011. (Graph made with Infogram by Yasmine Moussa)

In 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics made a statement regarding the impact of video games in relation to violence.

“Violent media sets a poor example for kids. Video games that use human or other living targets or award points for killing teaches children to associate pleasure and success with their ability to cause pain and suffering to others.”

However, statistical evidence showed an increase in sales of violent video games and a decline in youth violent crime rates.

Sarah Coyne is a developmental psychologist who did a study on [Growing Up with Grand Theft Auto: A 10-Year Study of Longitudinal Growth of Violent Video Game Play in Adolescents](#). Her study showed more of a behavioral aspect on the topic.

Coyne said her guess on whether violent video games influence violence in teenage boys would be very rare.

“I learned that violence in video games matters, but it's much more nuanced than we may think and doesn't impact everyone the exact same way,” said Coyne.

She said that violent video games are just one of many risk factors.

“I would say violent video games have a small, but significant effect on aggression - with other factors being more influential, such as access to guns, family background, gender, etc.,” said Coyne.

So, what's the conclusion then?

It is no secret that these studies have been a back-and-forth debate for decades now. The truth is that the studies come back empty handed or lacking evidence.

Does video game violence serve a direct link to violence in the youth?

The outcome is still undetermined, but studies showed video games can enhance hostile thoughts and feelings, activate the body's fight-or-flight response, and reduce sympathetic behavior. Contrary, playing violent video games awakens underlying aggression-prone traits brought on by genetics, personality, and household environments.

