

Violent Video Games

Persuasive Speech

On Wednesday, Matthew Ward shot and killed the schoolmaster, Mr. Butler, for excessively punishing his brother the day before. Although this may seem like a story taken from yesterday's newspaper, it is actually from November 2, 1853, according to crimeandliterature.com.

This story illustrates that acts of violence are an age old problem. Nonetheless, whenever an incident of this nature occurs, people blame it on aspects of present day society and call for a number of social reforms, such as a ban on violent video games. Although it may seem logical that there is a relationship between video game violence and real-life violence, there is no evidence to prove this. Banning violent video games will not reduce the number of violent acts in our country.

To support this premise, let's first define violent video games and then take a closer look at the appeal of video games, who plays video games, and the benefits of playing video games. Finally, I will provide evidence that video game violence does not contribute to actual violent incidents.

A violent video game is one in which the range of options available to a player includes killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting an image of a human being, as defined by a proposed California law. Many violent video games have objectives such as getting past soldiers or a checkpoint on each level that the gamer needs to pass without dying.

According to the article "Video Game Violence: Why Do We Like it, and What's it Doing to Us?" by Sami Yenigun, people enjoy playing violent video games for a variety of reasons. First, gamers have an adrenaline rush. This gives them feelings similar to being in a real fight, but they know they're safe. Second, violent video games tap into a primal instinct

which forces the gamer to pay attention. Third, video games hit all three human motivations. They give gamers a sense of control, feelings of belonging, and feelings of competency.

Violence provides thrills that we're hardwired to enjoy and it is an easy way to create conflict to make the game interesting.

Now that we've looked at the appeal of video games, who actually plays video games and what kind of games do they typically play?

According to the *Entertainment Software Association*, 58% of Americans play video games and of these, 45% are women. The average game player is 30 years old and has been playing games for 13 years. 51% of US households own a game console and most own an average of 2. In 2012, consumers spent \$20.77 billion on videogames, hardware, and accessories. Not all of these games are violent, 91% of games rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board in 2012 received a rating of "E" for Everyone.

However, the number one bestselling video game in 2013 across all platforms, with nearly 30 million copies sold globally, was *Grand Theft Auto V*, which has a mature rating. Following on the list was *Call of Duty: Ghosts*, *Pokemon X/Y*, *FIFA Soccer 14*, and *Battlefield 4*. Three of these top five bestselling video games are rated "Mature" with content suitable for ages 17 and up. These games may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language. Out of the people who buy mature games, 40% of them are under the age of 18. But surprisingly, parents are letting their young children play these games as they are present when games are purchased or rented 89% of the time.

Although many video games are associated with violence and often assumed to cause violent behaviors, there are actually many benefits that may result from playing video games.

According to Johnson Daniel, a writer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, studies have shown improvements in mood, reductions in stress, and feelings of competence and autonomy resulting from playing video games. Video games are also associated with social wellbeing,

feelings of relatedness, increased brain activity in young people, reduction in tension, anger, depression, and fatigue, and an increase in vigor.

Playing video games can have many other benefits. First, players often use repetitive actions that can train the brain and muscles to perform better in real-life activities. This can have the same effect as reading a book or riding a bike. Second, active gamers have a better sense of their surroundings and can make decisions faster and more accurately. Third, video games can improve vision by making players more sensitive to different shades of color. Video gamers who played first-person-shooter games were 58% better at noticing fine differences in contrasting colors. Fourth, playing action video games helps children with dyslexia read faster and more accurately because they help improve the attention span which can lead to better reading skills. Finally, children age 3-6 have better object motor skills after playing video games. Some of these skills include kicking, catching, throwing, and bouncing a ball.

We know that over one half of all Americans play video games for a variety of reasons and that playing them offers many benefits. Now, let's take a look at some studies that confirm that violent video games do not lead to violent behaviors.

According to Susan Perry, author of the article "Violent video games not shown to cause real-world violence," there is no statistical correlation between the consumption of violent video games and gun-related killings. They actually found that higher rates of violent video game sales related to a decrease in violent crimes.

Psychologist Vaughan Bell points out in an article of *The Observer* that the effects of violent video games have been widely studied and these studies do not suggest that they lead young people to act out violently in real life. Bell writes: "Using randomized controlled trials, research has found that violent video games cause a reliable short-term increase in aggression during lab-based tests. However, television and even violence in the news have been found to have a similar impact. This aggression is not the same as actual violence. It turns out that

delinquent peers, depression, and an abusive family environment account for actual violent incidents, while exposure to media violence seems to have only a minor and usually insignificant effect.”

Psychologist at Iowa State University, Craig A. Anderson stated that extreme acts, such as a school shooting, do not occur because of only one risk factor; there are many factors, including feeling socially isolated or being bullied. Yenigun agreed in the article “Video Game Violence” when she said, “Take the killers at the Columbine High School. They had been bullied, they had psychiatric illnesses, and, yes, they also consumed a lot of media violence, but no one of these things was the cause of their violence.”

According to the Center for the Prevention of School-Aged Violence, factors such as the home environment, peers, lack of guidance, and easy availability to weapons are some of the main factors that lead to violent behaviors.

As we have learned, many people play violent video games for a variety of reasons. There are many factors that cause people to become violent and commit horrific acts of violence, but playing violent video games is not one of these factors. It is not necessary to ban these games as some states have attempted to do or to force companies to change their games. We only need to look back at Mathew Ward’s Case from 1853 to see that violence has been around long before violent video games.

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