

Video Games and Society

# Video Games, Violence, and Crime

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# Compelling Violence

## Introduction

**W**hen the first home versions of video games appeared in the 1970s and 1980s, few people realized just how popular they would become over the next few decades. In 1982 the revenue of the home video game industry was \$3.8 billion; in 2013, according to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), American consumers spent \$21.53 billion on video games, hardware, and accessories. The ESA reports that as of January 2014, 59 percent of Americans play video games, and 71 percent of them are age eighteen or older.

For some of these players, gaming is not a casual hobby but an important part of daily life. More than 60 percent of them play games with others, either in the presence of other players or online, and many of these individuals gain a sense of community from their game play. Some also join clubs devoted to particular games and attend events dressed as their favorite characters. Many positive experiences can come out of such activities. However, they can also create difficulties for gamers who cannot limit the amount of time devoted to them. When people become obsessed with gaming, they can play for so many hours that it destroys their relationships with friends and family, costs them their jobs, and brings financial hardship and depression.

## First-Person Shooters

Many of the downsides related to video games are, according to experts, the result of heavy gaming. Some believe that heavy gaming can make people more aggressive and perhaps even violent, particularly if the games being played involve committing violent acts in the world of the game. Ohio State professor of communication and psychology Brad Bushman, who has spent roughly twenty-five years studying the link between violent games and violent behavior, says this is largely

because “video games require the player to identify and interact with a violent character instead of just observing them.”<sup>1</sup>

One type of video game provides an especially strong connection between the game player and a violent game character: the first-person shooter game. Such games put the player in the point of view of a character who is firing a weapon at other characters. In other words, the player is seeing the action through the eyes of a game character who is killing others. Some first-person shooter games also offer a third-person camera mode, whereby the player is viewing the game from just behind and slightly above the shooter.

These games have millions of players. For example, according to the game company Activision, more than 400 million people play games from its *Call of Duty* franchise each month. As of the end of 2013, this consisted of ten games, and more than 100 million copies of these games have been sold since the first *Call of Duty* was released in 2003. Activision also reports that gamers spent more than 1.6 billion hours playing its *Call of Duty* game *Modern Warfare 3* online between its release in 2011 and the end of 2013.

“Video games require the player to identify and interact with a violent character instead of just observing them.”<sup>1</sup>

—Brad Bushman,  
a professor of  
communication and  
psychology at Ohio State  
University.

## Adrenalin Rushes

Lennart Nacke, the director of the Games and Media Entertainment Research Laboratory at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, says the main reason first-person shooter games are so popular is that they require quick-thinking decisions that provide a kind of excitement most people do not experience in real life. He explains why this is so compelling:

If you look at it in terms of our evolution, most of us have office jobs. We’re in front of the computer all day. We don’t have to go out and fight a tiger or a bear to find our dinner. But it’s still hardwired in humans. Our brain craves this kind of interaction, our brain wants to be stimulated. We miss this adrenaline-generating decision-making.<sup>2</sup>



*A menacing figure in the game Titanfall is projected on a screen during a promotional preview of the game in 2013. Many believe that the violence in such games is highly addictive to gamers.*

This craving can lead some people to return to the gaming world again and again, which is perhaps why many gamers say that first-person shooter games are highly addictive. Gamer Steve Tilley, for example, reports being addicted to a multiplayer first-person shooter game called *Titanfall*. But it is not just the quick decisions that compel him to play. It is the violence, as evidenced by what he says he longs to do when his desire to play *Titanfall* overtakes him: “I want to sneak up behind an adversary holed up in a sniper’s [nest] and snap

## Related Organizations and Websites

### American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

125 Broad St., 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10004  
phone: (212) 549-2500  
e-mail: [aclu@aclu.org](mailto:aclu@aclu.org)  
website: [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)

An opponent of government efforts to censor books, movies, video games, and other forms of media, the ACLU has been involved in many legal cases related to First Amendment rights.

### Ars Technica

website: <http://arstechnica.com>

The Ars Technica website provides articles about video gaming, technology, and Internet issues.

### Center for Internet and Technology Addiction

17 S. Highland St.  
West Hartford, CT 06119  
phone: (860) 561-8727  
e-mail: [drdave@virtual-addiction.com](mailto:drdave@virtual-addiction.com)  
website: [www.virtual-addiction.com](http://www.virtual-addiction.com)

The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction provides counseling, information, and resources related to online addictions. Its website offers articles, news releases, and videos related to these addictions.

## For Further Research

### Books

Andrew P. Doan and Brooke Strickland, *Hooked on Games: The Lure and Cost of Video Game and Internet Addiction*. Coralville, IA: FEP International, 2012.

Christopher J. Ferguson, *Adolescents, Crime, and the Media*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2013.

Kishonna L. Gray, *Race, Gender, and Deviance in Xbox Live*. Waltham, MA: Anderson, 2014.

Dave Grossman and Gloria DeGaetano, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*. New York: Harmony, 2014.

Frank E. Hagan, *Introduction to Criminology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011.

David Kushner, *Jacked: The Outlaw Story of "Grand Theft Auto."* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

Peter Langman, *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Mind of School Shooters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Fletcher Wortmann, *Triggered: A Memoir of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*. New York: Thomas Dunn, 2012.

### Internet Sources

Doug Gross, "The 10 Most Controversial Violent Video Games," CNN, August 26, 2013 [www.cnn.com/2013/08/26/tech/gaming-gadgets/controversial-violent-video-games](http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/26/tech/gaming-gadgets/controversial-violent-video-games).