

## GTA: Games Too Aggressive?

[Oscar Bentley](#) examines the question of whether video games encourage aggressive emotions and behaviour

Tuesday 12 June 2018



Image: Rockstar

Gamers are often accused of being addicted to the violence of video games. Video games are vilified and sensationalised in tabloid media as violent and causing violent behaviour in young people, while also leaving them irresistibly addicted. These claims aren't unfounded. One of the most financially successful video games ever is *Grand Theft Auto V*, raking in over \$6bn. There's a scene where the gamer plays as Trevor and is encouraged to torture a man, electrocuting him and pulling out his teeth. How-ever, is it fair to say video games actually lead to increased violence?

A 1990s study by Bushman and Anderson found an increase in aggression of between four and nine per cent after playing violent video games, with the increased exposure to violence arguably making the player more desensitised to violence in the real world. The aforementioned torture scene from *GTA V* would fit into this category. Others have dis-agreed and instead see a link between video games and frustration, rather than violence. A 2000s study by Przybylski was evidence for this connection, as the players in the study showed increased levels of frustration, rather than violence.

The media is full of violent imagery: why is Trevor torturing a man in *GTA V* any different to Daryl being tortured by Negan in *The Walking Dead*? Some may argue it's because video games are an active art form as opposed to the passiveness of TV. The player physically controls Trevor, causing him carry out the actions of torture, even if the game mechanics force them to do this. Meanwhile, they are simply a spectator of *The Walking Dead*'s violence. Gaming gives the player the agency to feel as if they're doing it themselves, but does agency really equal violence? Video games may cause violence in the same way that sports or political arguments do. It's not the frivolous violence shown on-screen, but rather the

frustration of something not going your way that causes a temporary increase in aggression. It is the game's mechanics, which prevent progression, which cause aggressive emotions and actions. It is not the exposure to violent imagery itself. Media theory has moved far on from the hypodermic needle idea of a passive audience consuming and completely accepting what they see.



It's simply frustration with the game mechanics which causes any aggression

Take a game such as *Candy Crush Saga*, a very child-friendly fantasy land, with anthropomorphised bunnies, soothing music, and supernatural stimuli of bright candies. There is no violence present here in the slightest, but that doesn't stop players becoming incredibly frustrated when they become stuck on a level or get locked out of playing once they've spent their five lives. As with *GTA V*, it's simply frustration with the game mechanics, with not being able to overcome a difficult situation, which causes any level of aggression present to rise.

Like violence, video game addiction is also looked down on and sensationalised. But does excess really equal addiction? No one would be accused of being addicted to reading; there aren't think-pieces in tabloids complaining of teens' classical literature ad-diction or being antisocial by spending hours reading. The belief that gamers are only teen-age boys is also wrong. The "average" gamer is actually aged between 35 and 41 per cent of which are also female. Clearly there are many misconceptions about gaming. Society condescendingly looks down upon video games. They're seen as a lesser art form, compared to that of literature and even TV. Gamers and games may get a bad rap but, whether it's violence or addiction they aren't doing anything that others aren't in other situations. Video games may very well be violent, and allow the player to commit violent acts during game-play. However, this doesn't necessarily mean they are the cause of violent behaviour away from the controller. They certainly aren't the only source of violent imagery either.



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