

## When Play Turns to Misbelief: The Illusion of Catharsis in Violent Video Games

Tobias Greitemeyer

*University of Innsbruck, Austria*

### ABSTRACT

Video games are ubiquitous in modern society, with many featuring violent content. This research first presents data showing that players of violent video games often believe these games help them release aggressive feelings, thereby reducing aggressive behavior. However, while players endorsed this catharsis belief, it was unrelated to their actual levels of aggression. Instead, playing violent video games improved players' moods, and this enhanced mood was misinterpreted as a reduction in aggression. Two additional studies explored whether habitual players, when participating in research, are motivated to challenge the idea that violent video games increase aggression. Participants were told that the study would either test the hypothesis that violent video games are linked to aggression or that they are not. Aggressive behavior (Study 1) or trait aggression (Study 2) was then measured. When the study was described as testing a link between violent video games and aggression, no significant correlation emerged. However, when the study was framed as testing the absence of a link, habitual players showed increased aggression. These findings have implications for future research on the psychological effects of violent video games.

**Keywords:** Aggression; Catharsis; Mood; Motivation; Video games