THESIS

A CROSS-GENERATIONAL STUDY OF VIDEO GAMING:

PLAYERS' CULTURAL MODELS, FELT STIGMA, AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

A CROSS-GENERATIONAL STUDY OF VIDEO GAMING:

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Video game players are oftentimes stigmatized as being lazy, unhealthy, immature, addicts, and other negative stereotypes. In this thesis, I question how conflicting cultural understandings might influence such stigmatization, thereby impacting the subjective well-being of video game players from different generational/age groups. I examine how cognitive anthropological theories and methods can inform sociological ideas about how stigma and labeling might emerge from generational differences in cultural norms and values. I investigate this idea using cognitive anthropological notions of shared and socially transmitted models of reality held in individual minds, i.e., cultural models (D'Andrade, 1995). I also looked at cultural consensus (Weller, 2007) to understand culturally accepted thoughts and behaviors, and cultural consonance (Dressler W, 2005) to explore how low cultural consensus might manifest through social stigmatization and impact video game players' sense of well-being. From this point of view, video game players, who don't behave per culturally consensual notions about what constitutes good and proper behavior by playing video games can be low in "cultural consonance" and stigmatized as deviant. I explain how cultural models around video gaming are influenced by popular media and misunderstandings about video game players in general. I provide examples to show how these misunderstandings might inform inappropriate medical diagnoses of so-called "addiction" (Kardefelt-Winther, 2017). Furthermore, I show how not being "consonant" with mainstream understandings or "models" of the good life might lead to

what are interpreted as characteristic signs of addiction: e.g., withdrawal from family and friends (stigmatizing social-networks) and concealing the behavior (stigma management).

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to video game play and offers my own perspective to elucidate my interest, expertise, and unintentional, yet probable, biases. Chapter one includes an overview of the problem, theory, and methods. Chapter two provides a brief history of video games in the USA, video game genres, video game stigma, demographics of video game players, and descriptions of interviewees. Chapter three is a discussion of the cognitive anthropological approach, and a briefing on how cultural models (D'Andrade, 1995), cultural consensus (Weller, 2007), and cultural consonance (Dressler W. , 2005) can impact subjective well-being (Diener, 1985). This chapter also includes a discussion on sociological theories of stigma, labeling, and moral panic (Cohen, 1972/1980), and stigma management (Herek,1996). I also discuss generations and age groups, explaining my reason for grouping players into three age categories; Late Millennials (18-27), Early Millennials (28-37) GenX and Boomers (38 +), as well as the importance of including age variables in video game studies. Chapters four explains my three-phase iterative research methods of data collection and analysis (participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and field surveys). Chapter five includes results and discussion, and chapter six concludes and summarizes this study.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Beyond the gates of mighty kingdoms, lies a vast, unexplored world.

A world of honor. A world of mystery. A world of danger.

The world of Warcraft."

— Original trailer, narrated by Peter Cullen

1.1 Video Games as Virtual Reality

Three elves frolicked across an open field in front of her as she rushed to complete the tasks that were assigned by heavily armed guards and civil leaders who stood at the temple gates, adorned in medieval silk robes. Sprinting up a hill, she paused and pondered the inscription on an ancient scroll that hung from an obelisk stone shrine: *"Dath Ray Mar, who is said to be a noble elf. He is to be remembered for his sacrifice and dedication to the cause of our continued survival. All who prosper in Quel Thalas, do so thanks to him."* After reading the scroll, she completed several other tasks and veered down a pebbled pathway towards a picturesque courtyard, which was the entrance to the home of the notorious Blood Elves. Her heart seemed to beat faster and her cheeks flushed red as a slow and steady thump, thump, thump of war drums in the distance shook the ground beneath her feet. She quickly entered the courtyard and hurdled over a park bench, looking for instructors to teach her some basic skills to aid in her journeys. Finding several trainers gathered in an upstairs room at the inn, she stepped up to a cleric who taught her first aid, and she sewed the first of many linen bandages, hoping to mend her wounds after the bloody battles she knew were to come. A noble herbalist also demonstrated the intricacies of alchemy, which she would use for concocting potions to increase her endurance and rejuvenate her mana, the ancient power-source of magicians. She understood that in the

days, months, and years to come, her crafting skills would increase and she would discover new combinations of naturally growing plants and herbs to consume and sell to others. She also studied rare and precious minerals and learned how to exploit the deposits of ore that were tantalizing visible along the mountain ridge. She expected that one day she would learn to smelt raw ore at the city's forge and become an engineer, crafting trinkets, toys, and even flying machines.

Her next stop was the galley where she spoke with a master chef who taught her the fundamentals of cooking and fire kindling. Gathering the ingredients to cook her first meal, she noticed the approach of a heavily armed warrior. He must have spotted the freshly sparked campfire, as he began grilling a gooey bat leg over the dancing flames. She dug through her bags for some raw meat and began to roast several wolf flanks over the same crackling fire. Glancing up at him she whispered, *"Hello."* The warrior nodded, grinned, and continued turning his skewer of bat meat over the hot glowing coals.

"Just a minute." Jennifer looked at me and groaned, *"I have to take the dog out."*

I quietly observed from a nearby chair in the room as Jennifer set her keyboard aside and sprung from the brown leather couch. Seizing the dog leash from the coat rack, she bolted across the room, swung the door open, and clanked down three flights of black wrought iron stairs, trailing behind the dog. Together, they raced across a blazing hot blacktop parking lot and onto a patch of cool green grass. She paced anxiously, waiting for the dog to relieve himself. Jennifer is a 36-year-old, well-established massage therapist, who told me that she feels stigmatized for playing video games. *"I feel kind of embarrassed,"* she said, after bringing her dog back inside and pulling the keyboard back onto her lap. *"I think that people think I'm immature. Or they*

think I'm not healthy because I like spending my time playing video games instead of working out, or working a second job, or something like that."

This is an excerpt from a participant observation session that I conducted in Jennifer's home during my field research on how video game players from different generational groups might be impacted by perceptions of a social stigma around video gaming.

1.2 A Personal Perspective

My own experience with video games began back in the 1970s when I, like many others from the Boomer generation, received *Pong* and *Atari* games as gifts from my parents. During the 1980s, I played *PacMan* and *Space Invaders* for hours-on-end at pizza parlors, lounges, and arcades. It wasn't until the late 1990s that I became hooked on video games. It was at that time that I picked up a *PlayStation* controller to help my preteen son jump Lara Croft (*Tomb Raider*) across stone pillars that were surrounded by steel spikes and hot lava. Somehow, I managed to jump her across without a fatality. My son was ecstatic. I was hooked. I began playing every evening into the wee hours of the night. This common interest bonded my son and I in ways that many non-gaming parents of video game players might not understand. My motto was simple: the family that plays together, stays together. To this day, my son and I enjoy reminiscing about those shared experiences—our video game escapades—the good-ole-days.

When *EverQuest* was released in 1998, my son and I played on two computers in the same room and laughed until we cried, so very many times. My infatuation with video games continued as I played *Everquest*, *World of Warcraft*, *Guild Wars 2*, and other types of games on consoles; *Xbox, PlayStation, Dreamcast, Nintendo*. You name it. I played it. With each new avatar created, I enjoyed leveling up, earning rewards, and competing against other players. Connecting with others, who I otherwise would never have met, was one motivation for playing

these games. I made friends twenty-years-ago that I still think of today, and have remained in contact with a few of them over all these years. In short, I played video games regularly and intensively for a good part of my life. Most importantly, I have worked on a variety of research projects that involve video gaming and video game players for nearly my entire career at Colorado State University, but what spurred me to begin this project was that I noticed a common pattern in video gaming studies—the research participants were almost always college students, most of them in their early 20s. Having been a video game player myself for over twenty years, I began to think about how studies regarding the positive and negative aspects of video gaming might show different results for older players. What about players in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and beyond? Additionally, video gaming studies frequently focus on how video game play impacts player's well-being, either positively or negatively. Having felt stigmatized for playing video games myself, I wanted to find out how other players were impacted by my own perceived video gaming stigmatization, and to discover whether such stigma might impact players of various generational age groups differently. I also questioned whether a video game stigma might one-day become a distant memory, as older generations pass away and younger generations, who might be more accepting of digital gaming technologies, become the senior generations. I wondered if the potential diagnosis of video game "addiction" might actually be more of a "transient mental illness" (Hacking, 1998) and eventually disappear from our cultural reality.

It is with this transparency that I commence this master thesis—as an insider with unintentional biases, yet with the open and curious mind of an anthropologist.

1.3 The Argument

Video game play is more prevalent now than in past decades and millions of Americans currently embrace video gaming as a positive and normal part of their everyday lived experiences—perhaps more so with younger individuals than those of older generations who have not been so readily exposed to digital video game technologies. In studying the perceptions and impacts of social stigma on video game players in the US, I explored how cultural models around the good life compared across generational groups of video game players, and considered how digital technologies have provided new avenues for players to experience "the good life" through virtual achievements, glimmering rewards, and feelings of social belonging within the video game community. I looked at how US cultural models around living the good life might influence the ways that younger generations embrace video gaming to a greater extent than do members of older generations who might follow more traditional ideals around the good life, such as ideas about productivity and appropriate use of time. In short, by better understanding generational cultural models and frames around living the good life, I aimed to elucidate how video game play is sometimes viewed as a positive hobby or past-time and other times viewed as a negative activity for people who are lazy and non-productive deviants. With these thoughts in mind, my hypotheses were as follows:

H1.) I hypothesized that video game players of different generational groups and the broader American society might hold conflicting cultural models of what it means to live the "good life" and spend time appropriately.

H2.) I hypothesized that being out of sync (not consonant) with mainstream ideas of living the good life can both compromise gamers' subjective well-being (because of stigmatization) and also produce the characteristic symptoms of so-called video game

"addiction" (such as withdrawing from non-player friends/family and concealing their interest in video games), with these processes varying according to video gamers' age/generation.

I employed anthropological methods to answer these questions and utilized an anthropologically grounded mixed methods approach. The results, both qualitative and quantitative, showed that players from three different age groups (Late Millennials [ages 18-27], Early Millennials [ages 28-37], GenX and Boomers [ages 38 +]), did indeed report different levels of distress when asked about video game stigma.

The central finding of this study was that most individuals who play video games, from all age groups, understand that there is a negative stereotype of video game players and a social stigma is often-times attached to those who enjoy video game play. Furthermore, the perception of video game stigma distressed, in various degrees, most of the participants in this study, as most interviewees concealed their video game play from at least some groups and/or individuals within their social networks.

Additionally, as I explored video game players' perceptions of and impacts from social stigma, I looked at player's cultural consonance, i.e., players' perceptions of how they felt their own lives "fit-in" or were "in-sync' with cultural norms, by asking how they would describe "the good life" and then asking how their own lives coincided with those ideals or "models" (D'Andrade, 1995; DeMunck, 2000; Dressler, 2000; 2005; Lindholm, 2001). I also compared responses from participants within the various generational/age groups to determine how social stigma might influence "symptoms" of "behavioral addiction" differently, depending on the player's age/generational group.

At this point, some readers may assert that video gaming is just *"playing a game"* and that it does not matter if the larger population stigmatizes video game players as deviants.

However, while many hobbies and past-times exist within contemporary US culture, video gaming is oftentimes set apart from what some may deem as more culturally acceptable hobbies. During my research, many video game players expressed that they feel stigmatized as lazy, immature, unhealthy, addicted, and even prone to violence. One interviewee stated emphatically *"What is it about video games!?"*—because most other hobbyists are not challenged by negative stereotypes and social stigmatization. For example, individuals who enjoy hobbies or past-times such as football, baseball, soccer, golf, sewing, knitting, bicycling, skiing, painting, writing, reading, movie watching, and a plethora of other interests that people regularly engage, even regularly and intensively, are not socially stigmatized in the same way as those who play video games. Additionally, popular media oftentimes mocks or villainizes video game players, and existing literature on the negative aspects of video gaming is plentiful, including the American Psychiatric Association's consideration of online video gaming as a behavioral addiction in diagnostic manuals (APA, 2013).

Granted, video game play, like any interest or activity, can indeed become detrimental to one's physical, mental, or emotional well-being when taken to the extreme and some players even self-identify as video game "addicts" (Chong, 2014; Gentile, 2009; Grüsser, 2007; Seay, 2007: Snodgrass, 2011; 2014). However, digital technology has increased rapidly since the 1970's and video games have become more diverse—appealing to a multitude of people from all age groups who play a variety of video games, both casually and intensively, without problem. Additionally, most of today's youth and young to middle-age adults are familiar with video gaming platforms, and more recent social science research shows that video game play can be a healthy and positive activity, even increasing the subjective well-

being of many players (Kotick, 2016; Pearce, 2008; Schreier, 2010; Snodgrass, 2011; Yee, 2006; 2014).

1.4. Theoretical Perspective

Over the past twenty years or so, the positive and negative aspects of video game play have been contested within the research community as well as within popular media (Anderson, 2001; 2010; 2013; APA.org, 2015; Chong, 2014; Ferguson, 2007; Gentile, 2009; Graden, 2006; Grüsser, 2007; McLean, 2013; Snodgrass, 2014; van Rooij, 2011; Yee, 2014). Current literature also addresses moral panic and the problems with labeling video gaming as an addiction (Billieux et al., 2015; Cohen, 1972/1980; Golub & Lingley, 2008; Kardefelt-Winther et al., 2017; Szablewicz, 2010). Similar, yet somewhat different in perspective, this thesis uses an anthropological approach and concentrates on players' subjective perceptions of video game stigma and explores how individuals in different age/generational groups conceptualize and manage such stigmatization differently. This perspective is an important addition to the arguments around video gaming. For example, an online *Google Scholar* (2017) search for "video game stigma" without the word "obese" in the title yielded only two results, and a *Web of Science* query yielded a mere fourteen results, with only one of the fourteen articles actually focusing on video game "stigma." What I argue is needed and what I set out to accomplish in this thesis was an ethnographically informed exploration of the multi-generational community of video game players and their perceptions of social stigmatization, and the potential that their subjective well-being might be impacted by low cultural consonance (fitting-in) that inevitably relates to social stigmatization.

This study was grounded in cultural anthropology theory and methods, particularly psychological/cognitive anthropology (D'Andrade, 1995; Dressler, 2005; Weller, 2007). With

that in mind, I also looked at how video game players understand or model "the good life" in their own minds, and explored how the activity of video gaming might (or might not) fit into those models. The methodological tools provided with this perspective were ample for comparing gamers generational models of the good life and for understanding how video game players might experience cultural consonance (or lack thereof) with what they perceive as the broader cultural consensus around living the good life and the activity of video gaming (Dressler, 2005).

The generational/age exploration was vital to this study because existing video game research tends to focus primarily on teens and young adults (Anderson, 2001; Chong, 2014; Gentile, 2009; Khanolkar & McLean, 2012; Lenhart, 2008). While these studies are indeed valid and enlighten ways of understanding how video game play impacts players of younger age-groups, it is also important to compare how stigmatization might impact players from various age groups. For example, studies that target older players often look at cognitive benefits for this group, such as hand-eye coordination, problem-solving skills, as well as social and emotional wellbeing (Kaufman, 2017; Pearce, 2008)— leaving players between the ages of thirty to fifty-five out of many video gaming studies. Furthermore, research that attempts to understand the benefits and/or detriments of video game play generally focuses on the effects of video gaming on emerging adults, often-times focusing on players within the ages of eighteen to twenty-nine (Arnett, 2014). Therefore, this project compares perspectives of video game players of different generational/age groups, examining players' cultural consonance and perceptions of a video game stigma, with the understanding that social stigma and feelings of not "fitting-in" can impact subjective wellbeing and even motivate symptoms of behavioral addiction.

1.5. Introduction to Methods

This project utilized a three phase, mixed method, iterative approach. I began the study with approximately six-months of field work as recommended by Radcliffe-Brown (1951). Field work consisted of participant observation (Malinowski,1989), cohabitating in physical and virtual environments alongside video game players (Snodgrass, 2016). I recorded observations online, in public spaces, and in players' homes, carrying out informal interviews which guided my design for the semi-structured interviews. After analysis of field notes, I designed the semi-structured interview protocol which consisted of open-ended questions that were guided by my research hypotheses and coded themes from field research analysis. Finally, with the online survey, I attempted to capture players' models around "the good life," their perceptions of video gaming stigma, and their subjective well-being (i.e., happiness and life satisfaction [Diener 1985]), by asking respondents to identify their level of agreement with statements on which I anticipated a significant level of diverse thinking across generational groups. The results of the survey added richness to my qualitative dataset and allowed me to test my interpretations of the qualitative data by way of statistical analysis. My familiarity with the qualitative data informed my interpretation of the quantitative data, and the results of the statistical analyses helped clarify and confirm the qualitative findings. This mixed methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data, allowed for a cross-comparison data analysis and was instrumental in the resulting consistency of the final analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

"Neither the life of an individual

nor the history of a society can be understood

without understanding both" (Mills 1959).

Introduction

Today, nearly everything in our lives is digitized. Most of us are connected to others and the world at large through smart phones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers. Our televisions broadcast news and entertainment via digital Wi-Fi signals. Soon, our cars, buses, and semi-trucks will traverse the highways unmanned, via computerization. Most children, teenagers, and young adults today have never known life without digital, immersive, and interactive technologies. Virtual Reality (VR) headsets have recently gained immense popularity, yet the newest digital technologies that define contemporary US culture resemble the immersive and interactive digital platforms that have been enjoyed by video game players for decades. Therefore, the history of video gaming is important because it sheds light on how older generations of Americans might understand, or lack understanding, of video games and video game players. However, it is also important to understand that video game play has recently (within the past twenty-years) become a normal everyday activity for a diverse group of individuals within the American society.

2.1. A Brief History of Video games

In 1966, J.R.R Tolkien published the Lord of the Rings trilogy in the USA. His epic saga was based on a fantasy world complete with its own races, historic lore, and of course, the battle

between good and evil. The characters and monsters found in Tolkien's masterpiece live on, as they excite the imaginations of millions of video game players across the world, having sparked the role-playing video game phenomenon that we see today (Yee, 2014). Elves, dwarves, and hobbit-like characters abound in virtual reality video games and such lore started with board games, complete with dice, paper, pencils, a book of rules, and the imagination of players. In 1972, a board game "that included dragons and a heroic figure" called *Chainmail* was created by Gary Gygax, and in 1974, a more commonly known and the first role-playing board game was created by Gygax and Dave Arneson; *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D) (Yee, 2014). This game was clearly based on "Tolkien's Greek mythological and medieval lore" and revolved around characters such as "Balrogs, Ents, and Hobbits" (Yee, 2014). D&D also incorporated Tolkien type characters such as magicians, archers, and warriors, and gave them unique abilities such as casting spells, shooting arrows, and wielding two-handed swords (Yee, 2014).

However popular D&D had become during the 1970s, computerized games in their rawest form had already existed on college campuses since 1969 (Yee, 2014). One interviewee explained that he had played computer games since "back in the seventies and eighties." He played on a $3000, 64k memory, computer with floppy disks. At that time, computer-game players had to know about computers and all the "internal stuff" such as "how to make the game even run on the computer" (David). *Pong* and *Atari* were also introduced in the 1970's, and many interviewees mentioned receiving these gaming consoles as gifts from their parents during their adolescent years. Multi User Dungeons (MUDs) were introduced in the 1980s. These 2D computerized games connected only a handful of players and required players to read text from the computer screen and imagine everything that was happening. Arcade games such as *PacMan*

and *Space Invaders* were also popular in bars and nightclubs during the 1970s and 1980s, and unlike today, were considered as "adult pastimes" (Yee, 2014).

Then, in 1991, American Online (AOL) launched *Never Winter Nights* with a five-hundred player capacity but this game proved too expensive for players, as AOL charged a time-based fee. However, in 1997, *Ultima Online* was launched to anxious video game enthusiasts and introduced the concept of the massive-multiplayer-online (MMO) video game with a larger player capacity of two-hundred-fifty-thousand. Shortly after the launch of *Ultima Online,* in 1999, Sony Entertainment introduced *Everquest* to the public. *Everquest's* player base nearly doubled *Ultima Online*, with a whopping four-hundred-fifty-thousand player base at its peak. Then, in 2004, the MMO player base exploded when Blizzard Entertainment launched a new game called *World of Warcraft* (WoW). Remarkably, and within months, WoW reached over one-million paid subscribers. WoWs popularity increased so steadily that by 2013, over twelve-million players were paying a monthly fee of $14.95 to immerse themselves in the Tolkien-like virtual world that Blizzard developers had created.

Video game technology has advanced immensely since the 1970s. Currently, there are a multitude of video games distributed for public consumption on a variety of digital platforms. The primary devices that players use today for video gaming are personal computers (PC) and gaming consoles such as *PlayStation, Nintendo, and Xbox*. However, video games are also extremely popular on handheld devices such as smart phones and tablets. Current video game genres are amazingly diverse and game types range from First Person Shooters (FPS), where war-like action and shooting is visualized through the eyes of the player's character, to games that focus on puzzle solving, narrative lore, and exploration. Another type of popular video game is the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA). This genre connects teams of players

who compete against each other to gain rank and status online. There is also a host of other video game genres such as racing games, massively-multiplayer-online-role-playing-games (MMORPG) where tens-of-millions of players interact within virtual environments, play in real-time, complete quests, and level up their characters. Along with these examples, there are strategy role playing games (SRPG) where players capture competitor's armies and bases, sports games that simulate traditional physical sports, as well as sandbox RPGs were players roam, explore, and interact with elaborate virtual worlds and creatively customize their avatars.

This is by no means a comprehensive history that covers all of the details of video game development, but the objective was to point out some moments that got us where we are today. Twenty years from now the topic of this thesis may be obsolete, as video game play and virtual reality technology will be far advanced and most likely common place in household conversations, as television is today. The interactivity of digital media is different now than the analog (low or non-interactivity) of just a few decades ago and is becoming more interactive and "virtual" with the introduction of each new digital platform or device.

2.3. Who Plays Video games?

According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, 50% of men and 48% of women reported that they play some type of video game and 63% of adults within the ages of 18 to 46 own gaming consoles (Duggan, 2015). In 2008, the PEW Internet and American Life project reported that over 90% of American teens play some sort of video game (Hung, 2011). Other studies show that 97% of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 play some type of video game (APA.org, 2015; Lenhart, et al., 2008; NPD Group, 2011). Additionally, a 2016 financial report from Activision, producers of only a handful of popular video games (*WoW, Destiny, Starcraft,* and *Hearthstone)*, stated:

"Our customer base spent 42 billion hours playing and watching our games in the past 12 months, similar to the number of hours people spent watching Netflix, and greater than the number of hours people consumed video on Facebook… and more than four times the national viewership of professional U.S. sports leagues, including the NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL, and MLS combined" (Kotick, 2016).

Likewise, the participants for this research project came from all walks of life. The following list of interviewee descriptions is provided to exemplify how video game players belong to a diverse community, composed of individuals who share at least one commonality—they all enjoy playing video games.

R1: Jason is a twenty-two-year-old single male who self-identifies with the term "gamer." Jason works as a prep-cook for a restaurant and has always wanted to own a cafe. He described himself as a positive and humorous person. Jason was five or six years old when he started playing video games and currently plays *Hearthstone, Over Watch*, and *League of Legends* for two to three hours at a time, at least five days a week. Jason is proud of his video game console collection which includes a PS4, PS3, PS2, Wii U and a Wii, as well as an original Nintendo-64.

R2: Sarah is a single twenty-five-year-old female who self-identifies as a "gamer woman." She is a graduate student and teaches a course at the university. Sarah was about four or five-years-old when she was introduced to video games and she absolutely loves to play *Nintendo*. Sarah told me that over winter break, she "put like thirty hours in Zelda, in one week." When classes are in session she plays video games for about one or two hours, three nights per week. Sarah's significant other also plays video games in nearly all of his spare time.

R3: Kevin is a single thirty-one-year-old male who self-identifies as "gamer." He is a doctoral student who studies civil and environmental engineering. He described himself as friendly, easygoing, and he is "pretty reliable and intelligent." Kevin enjoys the outdoors and

fishing, and he goes backpacking with his girlfriend during the summer as a "kind of reset." He started playing when he was six or seven-years-old and currently plays video games at least two hours every day and more on the weekends.

R4: Melody is a married thirty-three-year-old female who does not identify with the term gamer but says she is a "casual player." She is a property manager who likes to spend time alone reading, meditating, and doing yoga. She also enjoys spending time with her family and organizing/decorating her home. Melody has been playing video games since she was six-years-old and currently plays video games for three to four hours at a time, about twice per week. Melody stated that she has been playing video games her whole life.

R5: John is a married thirty-two-year-old male who is currently seeking employment after recently earning a graduate degree. He loves writing, photography, and research. He describes himself as "an information addict," "nature buff," and a "health nut." Jason started playing video games was he was seven-years-old and is currently "really addicted to Over Watch" because "finding like-minded people" makes him happy. He plays at least four hours every day.

R6: Jennifer is a thirty-six-year-old married female who was featured in the introduction of this thesis. She is a massage therapist who enjoys meditating, working out, and hanging out with her spouse. She is interested in science, technology, fantasy board games, and comic books. Jennifer started playing video games at four-years-old but more actively at seven. She currently plays video games for about twelve hours per week.

R7: Richard is a thirty-one-year-old single male who prefers not to identify as a gamer and considers gaming as just a "hobby." He makes his living in online sales from his home. When I asked Richard what he likes to do, he stated that he drinks a lot of coffee, stays up late,

watches videos, and he is interested in teachings like Tao. Richard started playing video games when he "was a kid" and his older brothers got him interested in the hobby. He currently plays *Civilization* for about five hours every day.

R8: Melissa is a forty-five-year-old married female who works as a paralegal and research coordinator. She loves being a housewife, has three dogs, and takes care of her mother and niece who live with her. Melissa enjoys meditation, reading, visiting museums, doing art, going for walks, and praying. She plays *World of Warcraft* from about 6:00 pm until midnight nearly every evening. Melissa has endometriosis, so when she is in a lot of pain, and plays *World of Warcraft* to keep her "mind completely engaged" so she can "forget the pain."

R9: Dale is a forty-six-year-old married male who does not identify as a gamer but prefers to describe himself as "nerdy." He works as a pharmaceutical manufacturer. Dale started playing video games about twenty years ago, and plays two to three hours a few days per week. He plays video games on *PlayStation* and *Xbox,* primarily with his wife and his teenaged kids. Dale stated that in his profession "there's a lot of respect for nerdy."

R 10: Karen is a forty-six-year-old married female who describes herself as a "soft-core gamer." She works as a pharmaceutical statistician and is an active member in the local orchestra. Karen plays video games for about five hours per day and on some Saturdays, she plays for about ten hours. Most of the people that she knows who play video games are "a lot younger," "highly intelligent," "nerds." Karen thinks of herself as "the video game mom."

R 11: Mark is a forty-six-year-old married male who works as a technical writer. He can't imagine his life without technology, which has been a part of his life since he was ten. He describes himself as "slightly over-weight," "over-the-hill," "arthritic," and a "guy that knows something about technology." Mark started playing computer games in 1980 and enjoys playing

World of Warcraft and *StarCraft* with his son who recently joined the air force. When the last *World of Warcraft* expansion was released, Mark played for three and a half days— it was "solid game time." "Rather than going outside and throwing a ball, we pick up the controller and sit here and get fat."

R 12: Connie is a forty-four-year-old female who self-identifies as a gamer. She is a special needs teacher who enjoys gardening, painting, beaching, and cooking. Connie started playing *Asteroids* and *Pong* when she was about seven-years-old. Connie plays "all-day, every day." She describes herself as "a good mom first above all, then a gamer at heart forever." Connie says that video gaming is simply a part of her life and all her children's lives.

R 13: David is a fifty-year-old married male who described himself as a "flavor of gamer." He works as a computer software consultant and plays a variety of computer and console games with all members of his immediate family. He likes to "nap" and enjoys time with his family that "isn't directed," such as sitting down and watching TV. David started playing video games in the 1970s on a mainframe computer. He was playing *Pong* at the age of eight. He currently plays *Age of Empire*, adventure games, and RPGs for twelve to fourteen hours per week, and for about one weekend a month he spends about six to eight hours playing video games.

R 14: Kate is a seventy-two-year old female. Kate said that she is a casual gamer. She is retired and describes herself as an artist who is organized and has interest in "creative adventures." Her son got her started playing video games at the age of sixty-two. Kate has played a variety of RPGs and on weekdays she plays for a couple of hours per day, and for longer time periods on weekends. Kate stated: "Gaming is like when we were kids pretending, only now we use electronic online environments to do our pretending."

R 15: Darla is a seventy-one-year-old female and a retired computer programmer who considers herself to be a gamer. Darla has always loved fantasy and science fiction books. She enjoys volunteer work, socializing with friends, and watching television. The first game Darla played was the original *Bard's Tale*, in the 1980's. Darla has played *Ultima Online* and *Everquest,* and she currently plays *World of Warcraft*. Darla stated that when she's really into a game, she'll play for thirty to fifty hours per week, and sometimes more. Darla also has "some seriously addicted old lady friends who are deeply into *Candy Crush Saga*."

Conclusion

The brief history and genre of video gaming in America and the descriptions of interviewees are essential for conceptualizing how a stigma of video game players as societal deviants is similar to all stigmatization; it is socially constructed and separate from empirical realities. In one example, Nick Yee's (2014) online study of more than 50,000 video game players (the Daedalus Project) illustrated the diversity of players who ranged from high school and college students, to young adult professional, homemakers, war veterans and retirees. My findings concur with Yee's (2014), in that "many online gamers are leading normal adult lives outside of games." Yee (2014) also noted that "50 percent of gamers work full-time, 36 percent are married, and 22 percent have children…players average age is around thirty…and only about 20 percent of these online gamers are teenage boys."

CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND

"The cultures of societies are underestimated

determinants of their population

health and well-being" (Eckersley 2006).

Introduction

This chapter covers the theoretical underpinnings for this thesis. It begins with an explanation and history of psychological anthropology and an in-depth elucidation of cognitive anthropology, (a sub-category of psychological anthropology), which is the primary perspective for this thesis. The culture and the mind section highlights early theorists who sparked and advanced psychological/cognitive anthropology. Part two explains some scholarly debates regarding the positive and negative impacts of video game play and offers examples of how video game players are often-times portrayed negatively in the news and entertainment media. I also examine the notion of transient illness by introducing Hacking's 1998 study on "fugue." Hacking's (1998) work illustrates how cultural models of mental health can change over space and time, and shows how technological changes might influence mental health diagnosis. Here, I also offer a scholarly consensus on the current mental health definition of behavioral addiction, and offer exclusions from this definition suggested by a number of researchers from different countries and academic fields (Kardefelt-Winther, et al., 2017; Billieux, et al., 2017). I also examine Spradley's (1970) celebrated study on homeless men which exemplifies how misunderstandings of those that are "different" can prove deleterious for such stigmatized individuals, even causing feedback loops that aggravate individual well-being. Part three outlines sociological theories of stigma, labeling, and moral panic, and includes a case study by sociologists Khanolkar and McLean (2012), detailing how some video game players manage

stigma. The last section of this chapter lays out the generational aspect of this thesis and outlines how generational variables can be understood in terms of age groups. I also explain the reasons why it is important to look at generation and age variables when studying video game players and the impacts of stigmatization.

3.1 Psychological Anthropology

"Psychologists are concerned with individual phenomena while cultural anthropologists are concerned with shared public cultural phenomena" (Bloch, 2012). In other words, psychology seeks to understand the individual mind by looking at motivation, cognition, and perception etc., whereas cultural anthropology focuses on social experiences and shared understandings. However, psychological anthropology addresses this issue by combining the disciplines of psychology and anthropology to inform a more holistic perspective on human thought and behavior. Furthermore, psychological anthropology studies culture and the mind, and "has a mandate" to "define what it is to be human" and to understand how people "draw their reality" (Lindholm, 2001). Most importantly, psychological anthropology broadens the focus of cultural anthropology by examining cultural frames, models, schemas, and prototypes, which are mental constructs of culturally normative and ideal thoughts and behaviors. This perspective maintains that culture is found both on the inside and on the outside of human beings. Inside, as individual thoughts, and outside as actions, behaviors, social learning, and material artifacts that are specifically meaningful to various cultures (DeMunck, 2000).

3.1.1 Psychological Anthropology: Culture and the Mind

Anthropologist Obeyesekere explained that culture manifests through symbols. He theorized that humans display culture in three types of symbols; public, private and personal (Obeyesekere, 1981). For example, public symbols might be expressed through public displays

of religious traditions and rituals, private symbols could be struggles within a family unit, and personal symbols are thoughts in the individual mind regarding such things as childhood memories or internal religious conflicts. Geertz considered culture as primarily public, or the external expressions of inner thoughts through public behavior (Geertz, 1973). Anthropologists have disagreed about whether culture is the actual thoughts and mental processes that take place inside the human mind or whether culture is purely public symbolic expressions of social norms or idioms of distress.

One reason why anthropology struggles with the notion of cognitive anthropology is because anthropology has historically been situated as a social science and not a natural science, which would include mental models held within the physical mind (Bloch, 2012). Some notable anthropologists, like Geertz, understand "private mental knowledge" and "public symbols" as subjects to be studied separately by separating psychology as the discipline that deals with the mind and anthropology as the discipline that deals with "publicly shared cultural experiences" (Bloch, 2012). Cultural Models Theory contends that cultural models are constructed with socially shared knowledge, experiential reasoning, and are held within the individual mind (D'Andrade, 1995).

Another disagreement among anthropologists is with Bloch's (2012) contention that there are three sources of knowledge: genetics, experiential learning, and communication with others. Historically, anthropologists tended to reject any type of biological explanations of knowledge for fear of racism and sexism. Yet, by looking at culture with a cognitive anthropological perspective we can better understand how subjective experiences produce variations in personalities and behaviors among individuals within cultural groups (Bennardo & Munck,

2014). Therefore, the cognitive anthropological perspective is crucial for understanding the connection between culture and the individual.

The connection between culture and the mind was initially sparked by Freud's concepts around motivation and desire. Mead and Benedict were influenced by Freud and theorized that culturally relative childrearing traditions shaped the individual adult personality (Mead, 1928). For example, Freud asserted that the adult personality was rooted in childhood experiences with parents, particularly the father— and Mead interpreted baby bathing rituals in Bali as the reason that Balinese appear to be less bonded to one another and more dissociative as adults (Mead, 1928). Mead, Benedict, and Bateson's Culture and Personality School maintained that social practices, such as childrearing and enculturation techniques were the catalysts for shaping adult social identities and personality traits, such as dependent, independent, dissociative etc. Mead also contended that culture is a projective system where anxieties, fears, and highly emotional early childhood experiences become rooted in the psyche and are projected by adults through ritual dances and dramas to work through childhood trauma (Mead, 1928). Mead's theory was criticized for drawing conclusions and omitting historic-socio-political and environmental variables, and for theorizing with a western bias. Nevertheless, the critiques of Mead's approach informed new ways of thinking about the impacts of culture on personality, such as how the family structure, pop-culture, economics, and environmental variables might influence identity, personality, and behavior (Lindholm, 2001). Building on these new perspectives, anthropologists began looking at the diverse personalities of individuals within cultures and realized that numerous cultural variables might influence the development of personality, identity, and behavior. For example, the Frankfort School attributed the western individualistic identity to socio-political systems and saw capitalism as a force that encouraged competition and

consumption behaviors. This model moved away from Mead's theory of early childhood

development of the personality to the idea of political-economic institutions and structures as the

forces that shape personalities (Lindholm, 2001).

As anthropologists deliberated on the complexities of identity, personality, and culture,

the computer was introduced in the 1950's. At that time, computers were designed with memory

and could plan future moves in chess games (Clark & Steadman, 2017). This allowed researchers

to extend what was known about computers and problem solving to a better understanding of the

human mind (D'Andrade, 1995). In 1957, Norm Chomsky looked closer at human cognition and

asserted that acquiring language is more than simply learning words and grammar, but that

words form "mental objects," i.e., ideas, beliefs, and values. This concept illustrated the

formation of individual thoughts as a social process, since language creates mental objects such

as models, schema, and prototypes, and language is socially learned. Dressler (2005) expanded

on this idea with the concept that these "mental objects" (D'Andrade, 1995) are "cultural

models" around given domains that exist within individual minds. Dressler (2005) defined

culture as "a collection of cultural models of specific domains with empirically verifiable

distributions within a social group."

In short, cultural models can be described as the way that members of a given culture

think the world should work when thinking about a given domain. Cultural domains are

categories of cultural models, such as the domain of the good life, the domain of video gaming,

or the domain of mental health. By defining specific cultural models, we can better understand

how stigmatization might stem from conflicting models of right living, productive activities,

mental health and the like, as cultural models theory describes how members of a group are

expected to think and act in given situations (Bennardo & Munck, 2014; Dressler, 2005).

Cognitive anthropology utilizes Cultural Models Theory to understand the organization of knowledge in the mind (Bennardo & Munck, 2014). To grasp this concept, it is imperative to realize that while cultural knowledge is socially learned and shared, all knowledge is located within individual minds (Bennardo & Munck, 2014).

As mentioned above, cultural models are concepts or ways of thinking about cultural domains, and cultural domains are mental categories of these models. In other words, cultural models are the "mental representations" of those domains and are "shared by members of a culture" (Bennardo & Munck, 2014). For example, the cultural domain of food encompasses a variety of cultural models, or ways that members of any given group commonly think about food such as harvesting, distribution, preparation, and consumption.

The key premise of Cultural Models Theory is that the mind does not construct and organize cultural models solely from experiential reasoning, nor solely from social learning. Instead, the mind fuses knowledge acquired from experiential reasoning with socially learned knowledge (Bennardo & Munck, 2014). More basically, cultural models consist of knowledge that is acquired through individual reasoning, social interactions, environmental experiences, and through social learning of shared knowledge.

The cultural domains that I examined in this study were primarily video game play and what it means to live "the good life." I examined these domains to discover whether video game players' cultural models might differ generationally. I also explored how players' perceptions of family, friend, and societal stigmatization might indicate low cultural consonance, i.e., feelings of not fitting-in with family and/or society.

3.2.1 Cognitive Anthropology: A Subfield of Psychological Anthropology

The primary theoretical perspective for this thesis draws from cognitive anthropology and the theory of cultural models (D'Andrade). Cognitive anthropology is a sub-field of psychological anthropology that defines culture as socially shared and learned thoughts and behaviors (D'Andrade, 1995). This definition assumes that schemas, frames of reference, prototypes, and cultural models of the world and how it should ideally work are learned and shared through social contact, are individually internalized and embodied within members of a given society, and are displayed and perpetuated through individual and group behaviors. That being said, cognitive anthropology is a theoretical perspective that includes a methodology which recognizes thoughts and behaviors as influenced by mind-models, or the organization of cultural and experiential knowledge within individual minds. Simply put, knowledge is embodied in individuals through both experiential reasoning and social learning. This amalgamation of psychology and anthropology expands the focus of cultural anthropology by acknowledging social learning and by recognizing that knowledge is organized within each individual mind.

3.2.2 Cognitive Anthropology: Cultural Models

Cultural Models Theory is utilized by cognitive anthropology and encompasses three main categories of analysis— cultural consensus, cultural competence, and cultural consonance (Bennardo & Munck, 2014; D'Andrade, 1995; DeMunck, 2000; Weller, 2007). Cultural domains and models can be identified and analyzed through cultural consensus analysis (Dressler, 2000; Romney 1986; Weller, 2007). However, it is important to note that these methods assume that changes in cultural models can occur as groups inherently modify cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, and concepts (Weller, 2007). Additionally, cultural consonance is the measure of how

closely individuals conform to the cultural consensus of a cultural model within a given domain (Dressler, 2005). Cultural models theory (D'Andrade, 1995) helps us to understand the degree to which members of any given culture agree on normative thoughts and behaviors around specific domains and assumes that this knowledge is socially learned and shared among individuals within those groups.

Cognitive anthropology suggests that individuals, having been born into social groups and through social learning, internalize the group's normative ways of thinking and acting in the world, thereby adopting the group's cultural ways of both thinking (inside) and behaving (outside) (DeMunck, 2000). Understanding that the cultural point of view, or cultural consensus, is the dominant, mainstream, and socially normative way to think and behave— humans commonly control themselves and their thoughts to fit-in and display their loyalty to their cultural group. For example, US citizens oftentimes join clubs and associate themselves with products, businesses, schools, sports teams, religions, and the like. However, there is an inner structure to the human mind that holds mental models of the way the world should work and the way that people should behave (Lindholm, 2001). These cultural models, or norms, are learned through interactions with the social world and are also embedded in the mind, like a set of directional maps, guiding the individual through life. These mind maps are what cognitive anthropologists refer to as schemas, frames, and models.

Anthropologists observe human behaviors through a variety of theoretical lenses to predict patterns among groups, and cognitive anthropology is a theoretical perspective that utilizes the theory of cultural models to understand how individual minds organize concepts based on both experience and social learning to navigate the world around them (Bennardo & Munck, 2014). Cultural models theory (D'Andrade, 1995) has advanced anthropology by

progressing the field from cultural determinism to a field that recognizes the complex

interactions between reasoning human minds and socially learned knowledge. However, the

primary premise of cultural models theory (D'Andrade, 1995) is that cultural models are not

solely constructed by individual experiences nor by collective social learning, but are

amalgamations of reasoning minds and socially shared knowledge. Bernardo and Munck (2014)

explain cultural models as the "quintessential units that constitute the fabric of any culture."

Importantly, the organization of knowledge in the mind can change when individual

experiences diverge from the default or core models within a cultural domain. By looking at

culture from this perspective, we can understand how individual experiences can influence

changes in cultural models and produce variations in personalities and behaviors among

individuals within cultural groups (Bennardo & Munck, 2014).

3.2.3 Cognitive Anthropology: Cultural Consensus

The cultural consensus framework assumes that culture consists of cognitive models that

group members share, such as similar prototypes, schemas, and mind-models around a variety of

cultural domains. Essentially, group consensus around cultural domains and the models of

normative or deviant thoughts and behaviors are indications that there is shared knowledge about

how the world should work and how members of a local community or group should think and

act around a given situation (Romney, Weller, & Batchelder, 1986). It is important to note that

cultural models of normative and deviant behaviors can be internalized differently among

individuals within a given culture and this diversity is demonstrated through various behaviors

dependent on individual life histories and motivations (Weller, 2007). For instance, many

Americans frame their identity with relation to sex and gender, religious beliefs or affiliations,

geographic states or regions, occupations, sports teams, universities, political parties,

income/social class, and lifestyle choices. These types of mental constructs influence the individual's relationships with others, motivations for achievement, and commodity consumption choices such as food, clothing, and entertainment. Individuals are particularly influenced by the experiential and social models of those with whom they closely connect, and sometimes these models conflict. Therefore, the examination and understanding of conflicting cultural models can bring us closer to finding solutions for social conflict and mental distress that stems from social stigmatization.

Methodologically, cultural consensus is an analytical method that estimates agreement between people within a group to determine cultural models around a given domain by comparing the cultural knowledge of individual group members (Dressler W. W., 2000). Cultural competency is the measure of how well individuals understand the group consensus and helps to identify key informants who know and understand the group's social agreements around particular domains.

3.2.4 Cognitive Anthropology: Cultural Consonance

Cultural Consonance Theory explores the psychological and physiological impacts of culture by looking for links between culture, cognition, behavior, and health (Dressler, 2005). Cultural consonance theory and methods provide a way to make cultural theory "operational" and Dressler (2005) suggests determining cultural consonance with methods such as free-lists, pile sorts, and Likert scale surveys. By utilizing these methods, we can identify cultural models and understand how individuals with a cultural group might think, as well as why they might engage in certain behaviors. This framework assumes that members of the group share cultural knowledge around given domains regarding what is appropriate, acceptable, or normal.

Cultural consonance is both a theoretical perspective and a method in that it measures how closely individuals conform to the cultural consensus or normative thoughts and behaviors around a cultural model in a domain (Dressler, 2000; 2005). The degree of fitting-in, or consonance, an individual has with these cultural norms (models) can directly impact their health, either positively or negatively (Dressler, 2000; 2005). Measuring cultural consonance is important for understanding the impacts of stress, because individuals who are low in cultural consonance are shown to be at risk for experiencing symptoms of physical or psychological distress (Dressler, 2000; 2005). For instance, Dressler and Bindon (2000) studied the cultural consonance and biomarkers of individuals in Brazilian communities and found that individuals who were low in consonance with models of "the good life" had higher rates of depression and elevated blood pressure.

I propose that video game players who do not fit-in with cultural models of living a good life—which can include American ideals of productivity, achievement, and time well spent— might experience distress, as their thoughts and behaviors might be out-of-sync with the cultural models of their non-gaming friends, families, and larger communities. Furthermore, when the mind tries to organize "two or more conflicting cognitions" it can lead to "disequilibrium, discomfort, and anxiety" (Festinger, 2003 [1957]; Snodgrass, Dengah, & Lacy, 2014).

In summary, psychological/cognitive anthropology is a theoretical perspective that recognizes thoughts and behaviors as socially learned and transmitted knowledge that is organized as models of appropriate thought and behavior within individual minds. Therefore, by utilizing a cognitive anthropological approach, I compared video game players' cultural models of the good life across different generational groups of players, to see how these models might differ across generations. I also explored how low cultural consonance might be related to

perceptions of stigmatization, and how stigmatization might impact players' social interactions, specifically when interacting with those who hold opposing models of video game play. With cultural consonance and stigmatization in mind, it is reasonable to assume that negative stereotyping or cultural modeling of video game players as social deviants might actually intensify players' motivations to withdraw from stigmatizing individuals and communities by seeking social connections within video gaming communities, where they might experience higher cultural consonance, acceptance, and empowerment in environments filled with achievements, rewards, and greater potential for earning social status.

3.3.1 Video gaming: A Positive or Negative Behavior?

With the rapid advances in technology over the past fifty years, we can see how quickly sub-cultural knowledge can be shared among those within the video gaming community. For example, online spaces afford individuals the ability to connect with others around the globe via "virtual worlds", even website forums, blogs, and a wide-range of other social-networking platforms. However, sub-cultural approval of video gaming as a worthwhile activity sometimes conflicts with the broader cultural models of right living and acceptable behaviors. In addition to interacting with other players on websites designed specifically for interactive communication, millions of players socially engage with other players by forming friendships and working as partners or teammates to cooperatively complete tasks, fulfill objectives, and earn rewards. Video games also afford players the ability to design, name, and identify with intriguing avatars, and to "virtually" inhabit the scenic landscapes of video games. Most video game players also commit their time, mental and emotional energy, and some "real-life" cash to experience, explore, and exploit these digital environments, while fostering social relationships and escaping the stress of day-to-day life (Snodgrass J. G., 2011; Schreier, 2010). Researchers have found a

multitude of benefits from video game play such as improvements in visual tracking, fine motor skills, concentration, organization, tolerance, leadership skills, and social bonding (Squire, 2002; Snodgrass, 2011). During interactions with both non-players and players, video gamers obtain cultural and subcultural knowledge regarding socially acceptable attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. However, these models sometimes conflict, particularly around whether video gaming is an acceptable use of time, or the right way to live a good life. Hence, many video gaming researchers attempt to identify and solve problems that are assumed to be associated with video game play.

Numerous researchers argue that individuals who spend long hours playing video games suffer from some kind of problematic video gaming, and players themselves have admitted to suffering what they label as "addiction" (Gentile, 2009; Grüsser, 2007; Seay, 2007; van Rooij, 2011). Researchers have labeled intensive or long hours of video gaming as problematic internet use, online gaming addiction, internet gaming disorder, excessive play, and other descriptions not mentioned (Chong, 2014; Gentile, 2009; Grüsser, 2007; Mehroof, 2010; Seay, 2007; van Rooij, 2011). In addition, some measure the effects of intensive video game play by using the psychiatric "behavioral addiction" scale that was designed for activities such as gambling. This scale lists symptoms of addiction such as playing compulsively, neglecting real-life activities such as employment or school work, and experiencing withdrawal when access to the game is removed (APA, 2013; Chong, 2014; Gentile, 2009). Others have linked video game play with violent behavior (Anderson, 2001; 2010; 2013; Ferguson 2007; 2013; McLean, 2013; Mehroof, 2010), and some scholars have associated video game play with drug use (van Rooij, 2011).

3.3.1.1 Behavioral Addiction

Online video game addiction is currently listed under Section III of the DSM-5 as a "condition warranting more clinical research and experience before it might be considered for inclusion in the main book as a formal disorder" (APA, 2013). Therefore, in response to this statement and current research on the psychological effects of video game play, this project followed a cognitive anthropological approach to explore how the stigmatization of video game players might be impacting the subjective well-being of players. Notions of video gaming as a mental health issue i.e., a behavioral addiction, most likely increases the stigmatization of players and could actually elicit the symptoms of behavioral addiction by motivating players to withdraw from non-supportive family and friends, to play for longer periods of time, and to conceal the activity from stigmatizing others (APA, 2013).

In response to the APAs (2013) proposition for including video game addiction in the forthcoming diagnostic manual, a number of researchers from different countries and academic fields developed a list of criteria that would negate the diagnoses of video gaming as a behavioral addiction for certain "intensive" players (Billieux, et al., 2017; Kardefelt-Winther, et al., 2017). This international team clarified the current notion of behavioral addiction and defined it as follows: "A repeated behavior leading to significant harm or distress. The behavior is not reduced by the person and persists over a significant period of time. The harm or distress is of a functionally impairing nature" (Billieux, et al., 2017). More simply, behavioral addiction is currently defined as a behavior that causes imparing harm or distress, cannot be reduced by the person, and persists over time. The researcher team suggest the following list as criteria that would deny a diagnosis of behavioral addiction:

1. "The behavior is better explained by an underlying disorder (e.g., a depressive disorder or impulse-control disorder).

2. The functional impairment results from an activity that, although potentially harmful, is the consequence of a willful choice (e.g. high-level sports).

3. The behavior can be characterized as a period of prolonged intensive involvement that detracts time and focus from other aspects of life, but does not lead to significant functional impairment or distress for the individual.

4. The behavior is the result of a temporary coping strategy as an expected response to common stressors or losses." (Billieux, et al., 2017).

These criteria accurately incorporate contextuality of individual lives and allows for a critical perspective of video gaming as a behavioral addiction. For example, the list shows that a medicalized diagnosis must take into consideration "underlying disorders", "willful choices", the *subjective* well-being of the player (as opposed to outside judgements), and the understanding that humans naturally utilize a variety of mental and emotional outlets as temporary coping strategies.

Considering the conclusions of this research team, it is crucial to understand that all mental health diagnoses are derived from cultural models of symptoms, diagnosis, and socially accepted treatments, as researchers themselves have conflicting ideas about what constitutes mental illness. Moreover, the prevalence of a mental health model that labels subjectively unimpaired video game enthusiasts as mentally ill "addicts" might increase social stigmatization, leading to players feeling that they don't fit-in with family or society (low cultural consonance), negatively impacting players' health (Dressler, 2005). Additionally, stigmatization by friends, family, and/or society might

actually increase players' motivations for immersing in video games even more intensively, where they might feel socially accepted and enjoy a sense of social status within the gaming community.

Similarly, in a 2011 study, Snodgrass et al found that individuals who played online video games with their family and/or "real-life" friends were less likely to experience negative symptoms that are commonly associated with behavioral addiction. This study showed that playing video games with family and/or friends decreased players' feelings of immersion and influenced players' adherence to offline culturally normative behaviors (Snodgrass, 2011). Perhaps just fitting-in (high cultural consonance) with those they are close to and the lack of stigmatization, increases players' subjective-wellbeing and decreases the need for stigma management, such as concealing their interest in video games and withdrawing from non-supportive relationships.

3.3.1.2 Culture, Mental Health, and Transient Illness?

By looking at mental health as a cultural domain, we can understand how health workers and the public might organize their thoughts regarding video gaming and mental health. We might also understand how a mental health diagnosis such as "behavioral addiction" can be influenced by time and place-based cultural models of successful living, healthy relationships, acceptable behaviors, personality traits, etc. Furthermore, to elucidate how "mental health" is indeed a cultural domain and to help understand why intensive video game players might be viewed as mentally ill "addicts", we can look at other examples of how culture impacts ways of thinking about mental illness. For example, in *Mad Travelers*, Hacking (1998) coined the term "transient

mental illness" and determined that the Victorian-era diagnosis of the mental illness "fugue" was culturally biased and is now essentially obsolete. Hacking (1998) explains that a transient mental illness is a clinically diagnosed illness that emerges at certain times and places and then vanishes. In this case study, Cambridge professor Ian Hacking (1998) analyzed the medical records of Albert Dadas, who was diagnosed with fugue in the late 1800s. Fugue was defined as a dissociative mental disorder in which the sufferer experienced the urge to travel and underwent amnesia until the episode was over. Dadas had embarked on long journeys, leaving behind everything he owned including his identity, to travel until he was picked up by the police. Albert was then turned over to doctors for the opportunity to diagnosis this "new" mental condition (Hacking, 1998). Depending upon the time and place he was found, various doctors concluded that Albert's compulsive travel with amnesia was either epilepsy or hysteria. Albert's primary physician made the first diagnoses of fugue which sparked a fugue epidemic that moved through Bordeaux France and as far as Italy, Germany, and Russia for a period of around twenty years and then suddenly it vanished (Hacking 1998). The diagnosis of fugue flourished in Europe before the turn of the 20th century and then was virtual gone and forgotten by 1909, apparently because hysteria, (fugue was sub-categorized as hysteria), had gone by the wayside.

With this case study, Hacking (1998) illustrated how cultural models of travel patterns and proper behavior in the 1890's explained the phenomenon of "fugue"— a "transient mental illness." He explained how cultural models around the domain of travel changed over time as tourism and the transportation industry increased in popularity. Hacking (1998) postulated that the medical society created an "ecological niche" by medicalizing the phenomenon. These

ecological niches are specific times and places where the medical community diagnoses

particular behaviors as mental illness and labels the so-called illnesses, i.e., fugue, hysteria, etc.

Hacking contends that these niches are culturally fertile grounds for transient mental illnesses to

manifest, flourish, and then vanish when the medical community decides to discontinue the

diagnoses. Hacking (1998) strongly advises consideration of these "ecological niches" when

proposing new diagnoses of mental illnesses because mental illnesses have the potential to

vanish as cultural models of right behavior and diagnostic criteria changes (Hacking, 1998).

While contending that medical diagnosis can be cultural in nature, Hacking (1998) makes it clear

that mental distress and its symptoms are very real to the individuals who suffer them.

     The "ecological niche" theory is valuable for examining video game play as a behavioral

addiction, as an example of how mental distress, diagnosis, and treatments are bound within

complex cultural contexts. I specifically point to Hacking's (1998) ecological niche theory

because intensive video gaming as a behavioral addiction, if adopted by the APA (2013), may

well become a transient illness as younger people, who enjoy playing video games, become the

medical professionals of tomorrow. Diagnosis and prescribed treatment for a behavioral

addiction such as video gaming might actually stem from an "ecological niche"— perhaps a

moral panic (Cohen, 1972/1980), perpetuating stigmatization and increasing symptoms of

behavioral addiction such as withdrawing from family and friends, playing for longer periods of

time, and concealing the behavior.

3.3.1.3 Video game Violence: Bloody Minded Little Psyches

     According to a 2015 Pew study on gaming and gamers, 40% of the public agree that there

is a relationship between video game violence and violent behavior, while only 26% of self-

identified gamers agree with that statement (Duggan, 2015). Popular media has also associated

teenaged boys with video games and violence. For example, a 1989 Newsweek article read

"Nintendo speaks to something primal and powerful in their bloody-minded little psyches, the

warrior instinct that in another culture would have sent them out on a hunt or a warpath"

(Newsweek, 1989; Kinder, 1991; Yee, 2014) Additionally, in a more recent press release, the

APA (2105) described the negative media surrounding video game players and violence:

> *"News commentators often turn to violent video game use as a potential causal*
> *contributor to acts of mass homicide. The media point to perpetrators' gaming*
> *habits as either a reason that they have chosen to commit their crimes, or as a*
> *method of training. This practice extends at least as far back as the Columbine*
> *massacre (1999) and has more recently figured prominently in the*
> *investigation into and reporting of the Aurora, CO theatre shootings (2012),*
> *Sandy Hook massacre (2012), and Washington Navy Yard massacre (2013)"*
> (American Psychological Association, 2015).

Apparently, the APA (2015) agreed with the negative media around video gamers and

violence, as they go on to say: "Quantitative reviews since APA's 2005 Resolution that focused

on the effects of violent video game use have found a direct association between violent video

game use and aggressive outcomes (Anderson C. A., 2013; Anderson C. A., 2001; Ferguson

2007; Ferguson & Kilburn, 2009)." However, in a strong critique of the APA's (2015) statement,

a group of "two-hundred-eighty-eight scholars in psychology, communication, and media studies

signed a letter to the American Psychological Association" stating that the "resolution on the

causal relationship between violent video games and aggression is unwarranted" (Yee, 2014).

Understandably, with media and academic statements such as the aforementioned, some

non-players most likely view video game players as social deviants and believe that video games

have a negative influence on players. Video game players are likely to disagree with these

adverse portrayals of video games and players themselves. For example, 53% of those who

identify as gamers do not think gaming is a waste of time, compared to only 13% of non-players

who agree with them (Duggan, 2015). The same Pew research study on gaming and gamers,

found that video games players think more positively about video game play than non-players. (Duggan, 2015). The study showed that 39% of self-identified gamers think that video games "help develop good problem solving and strategic thinking skills" as opposed to only 8% of non-gamers who agreed with that statement (Duggan, 2015). Additionally, over one-third of self-identified gamers think of video gaming as a "better form of entertainment than television" as compared to only 5% of non-gamers who agreed with that statement (Duggan, 2015). Studies such as this show how players themselves understand video gaming differently, and hold more positive and less negative "models" of video gaming than those who do not play these digital games.

3.4.1 Stigma and Feedback Loops

Social groups establish deviance by making rules about whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to specific people and labeling them as outsiders (Mead, 1934). From Mead's (1934) point of view, deviance is not the actual act a person commits, but rather a label imposed on the "offender" who broke the cultural rules of the larger society. Once labeled as a deviant, the individual withdraws from the larger society and tends to associate primarily with others who are branded with the same label (Becker, 1963). Furthermore, societal labels create stigmatization which affects the individual's identity and self-concept (Goffman, 1963).

In one example of how deviant labels impact those who are "different," Spradley (1970) worked with homeless men in Seattle and showed that an ethical and logical approach to mental health must include anthropological methods in order to prevent a revolving door of distress and unsupportive "treatment." Spradley's acclaimed work, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* (1970), illuminates how ethnographic research defines complex variations in belief systems within

"popular, medical… and sociological models." Through candid personal narratives and ethnographic analysis, Spradley urged society to stop stigmatizing the poor and homeless, and to "learn the other point of view" (Spradley, 1970). Spradley also confirmed how the arrest cycle stigmatized and alienated homeless men from society and contributed to their cognitive model of reality as consisting of poverty, drunkenness and jail, leading to stigmatized individuals who develop deeper solidification, internalization, and self-identification as tramps. Having been arrested for drunkenness and stigmatized as deviants, inmates distanced themselves even further from mainstream society and adapted to social-stressors by developing stronger attachments to the tramp-life where their need for belonging was fulfilled and where alcohol consumption contributed to acceptance and, albeit temporary, relief from distressful situations— entering once again into the continuous and hopeless cycle of poverty, drunkenness, and jail. This study shows how individuals who are stigmatized by society internalize the social stigmas, creating a feedback loop and increasing self-identification as deviants (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1963; Spradley, 1970).

In light of the aforementioned example of stigmatization creating feedback loops, it is essential for the medical community and society at large to "learn the other point of view" and stop stigmatizing individuals who are different, or accept the precarious probability of inadvertently creating a cyclical process, serving only to intensify mental distress and increase the problems they are attempting to resolve (Spradley, 1970). In other words, if societal norms conflict with an individual's concepts around a specific interest or activity such as video gaming, the individual might resist and withdraw from the core social group and seek acceptance from the sub-group, further displaying so-called symptoms of behavioral addiction such as

withdrawing from unsupportive relationships and spending more time engaged with the stigmatized interest or activity.

> *"Stereotypes and beliefs or ideology are perpetuated by the institutions in which we live and grow. In addition to providing us with information and values, education, religion, and our families, along with the media, encourage us to adopt a particular picture of the world and our place in it...in effect, they construct what we take to be reality"* *(Rothenberg & Mayhew, 2014).*

3.4.2 Stigma Management

Individuals who are labeled as deviant fall into two groups, those who cannot hide the trait, and those who are able to conceal the stigmatized trait (Herek, Jobe, & Carney, 1996). Video game players fall into the second category, as they are able to manage the stigma by concealing their interest and engagement with video games. Goffman (1963) explains how stigmatized individuals manage the stigma through concealment: "To display or not to display, to tell or not to tell, to let on or not to let on, to lie or not to lie; and in each case to whom, how, when, and where".

Stigma can be defined as an "undesired differentness" that turns others away and is placed on individuals for at least one of three differences: physical deformities, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigmas of race, nation, religion (Goffman, 1963). Video gaming stigma is associated with the second difference, blemishes of character (Goffman, 1963) which also includes the notion of "addiction."

Some might wonder how the video game stigma came about. Perhaps it was a case of moral panic (Cohen, 1972/1980) or the deviant portrayals of video game players in the news and entertainment media (Wolf, 2010; Graden, 2006; Yee, 2014). What we do know is that there are "pervasive stereotypes around those who play video games" (Yee, 2014). For example, in one episode of the popular television show *Law and Order*, video game players are depicted as a

grotesque looking male and female couple who incessantly play video games in their filthy living room. In this episode, trash is strewn across the floor and the couple is both yelling at the television screen and making disgusting facial expressions (Wolf, 2010). Another example of video game stereotyping was found in one of the most widely known South Park episodes where video game players are depicted as socially awkward, unhealthy, unemployed teens, living in their mothers' basements. They continue playing WoW while their mother brings them food and a bucket to defecate (Graden, 2006). These and other television shows and movies give the impression that video game players are filthy, lazy, deviant, losers.

A recent study on video game stigma management showed how players "shunned" the "socially isolated gamer" stereotype (Khanolkar & McLean, 2012). The same study also illustrates how "devoted" video game players construct subcultural norms, create social identities, and manage the stigmatization of those outside of the gaming community (Khanolkar & McLean, 2012). The study also showed how gaining status within the subgroup and stigma management actually reinforced the group's solidarity. Players who were "good at a game" were rewarded with "admiration, meaning, and inspiration" as opposed to labels and stigma applied by the broader culture (Khanolkar & McLean, 2012).

3.4.2 Moral Panic

Moral Panic occurs when a "group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests, its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people" (Cohen, 1972/1980). Moral panic is assessed in several ways such as "heightened societal concern and hostility towards the behaviors of 'the outsiders';

consensus that the behavior is harmful to the moral order of the society, and a disproportionate societal interpretation and reactions to the problem" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Like the moral panics that occurred with the introduction of radio, television, and cinema, video gaming was likewise received with moral panic. When video games were introduced, one can only imagine how the stereotypes and stigmas spread even more rapidly, because by that time there were plenty of media avenues in place to spread the word that video games and video game players cause problems; print, radio, television, and cinema were already in place to spread fear about video game violence and the threat of dissociative immersion (Cohen, 1972/1980; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Kardefelt-Winther, et al., 2017; Szablewicz, 2010). "Online games actually combine two separate moral panics –worry about video games and fear of the Internet" (Yee, 2014).

As with all moral panics, blaming video games is easier than facing social, economic, and political problems. As Yee explained, with regard to the association of video games and violent crimes: "It's easier to put warning labels on video games than to address all the very real social, cultural, and psychological factors that lead to gun violence" (Yee, 2014). Additionally, by grouping people together and calling the whole bunch of them deviant, the larger community can stand together as the "normal ones" (Durkheim, 1895). Durkheim (1895) described deviance as a necessary part of culture that affirms cultural norms, illuminates right and wrong, promotes social change, unifies members of the society, and facilitates collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1895). In short, moral panic and teenage deviance has been associated with the introduction of nearly every new medium of communication technology such as "movies in the 1920s, radio in the 1930s, comic books, and rock and roll…" (Yee, 2014).

3.5.1 Generation Gaps and Technology

It is important to understand that while American models of the good life might be similar across generational groups, the ability for achieving the good life has inherently changed, possibly due to social, political, and economic changes. Furthermore, turn-of-the-21st-century technological innovations, particularly digital technologies and instantaneous global communications, have provided ways for younger (pre-boomer) generations to experience achievement and enjoy a broader sense of social belonging by playing video games and engaging with like-minded players from around the world. Hence, countless young Americans embrace video game play as a positive and normal part of everyday lived experiences.

Cultural models around the good life, particularly around appropriate use of time, no-doubt also influence how younger generations embrace video gaming to a greater extent than those of the Boomer generation who might follow more traditional 20th century ideas of productivity and appropriate use of time. By better understanding generational models of the good life we can better understand how video game play is framed differently across generations as either a socially normal or deviant activity. However, most video gaming research specifically targets adolescent and young adult males (Gentile, 2009; McLean, 2013). Therefore, it is important to advance our understanding of video games and players by looking at generational differences in cultural models around video gaming.

Neil Howe and William Strauss published their first book *Generations* in 1991. In this work, the authors describe generational cohorts as those being born over an approximate twenty-year span, which is about the same as the four phases of life— childhood, young adulthood, midlife, and elderhood. According to Howe and Strauss (1991), individuals belong to generational cohorts who share three criteria; location in history, common beliefs and behaviors,

and a perception that they belong to that generation (Howe & Strauss, 1992). In *The Fourth Turning*, the same authors describe a generation as "composed of people whose common location in history lends them a collective persona" (Strauss & Neil Howe, 1998). "A full human life is divided into four phases…and each phase is associated with a specific social role that conditions how its occupants perceive the world and act on those perceptions" (Strauss & Neil Howe, 1998). Strauss and Howe also coined the term "Millennials" in 1989, suggesting that Millennials were born sometime between 1982 and 2004 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Naturally, we understand that being born during a specific period in history does not assume that all members of that group will think and act the same. Culture is full of complexities and variance. Likewise, Strauss and Howes defended their position on generations from criticism that it generalized and stereotyped people: "We've never tried to say that any individual generation is going to be monochromatic. It'll obviously include all kinds of people" (Lamb, 1991). However, when looking at generational groups, the broad cultural notion of the prototypical American and the model of living the good life is, no-doubt, somewhat different across age groups, partially due to technological innovations which influence attitudes about activities like internet use and video game play. That being said, individuals who became adults during the 1960's and 1970's are typically classified as belonging to the Boomer generation, those who came of age during the 1980's and 90's are often referred to as GenXers, and those who came of age at the turn of the 21st century are commonly designated as Millennials. However, generational cohorts seem to have collapsed and condensed with the rapid change in technologies.

In 2014, psychologist Jean Twenge published a widely popular book and referred to the newest generation as iGen. In an interview with *USA Today*, Twenge commented, "This is a generation of multicultural, multimedia, multiracial and multifamily kids" (Twenge, 2014; see

also Horovitz, 2012). While Twenge's perspective verges on technological determinism, I use this example to likewise argue that rapid technological changes have collapsed generation "gaps" into decades, as opposed to twenty year periods. (I found in both interview and survey results that differences in perceptions and distress from stigmatization seemed to differ by decade, not twenty-year age spans). For example, Twenge (2012) stated: "With the pace of cultural and technological change accelerating, it's possible that generational shifts are occurring in half the time — say, every 10 years." Considering my own, and Twenge's observations, as well as the rapid increase in the variety of digital communication technologies, I grouped video game players roughly into three age categories; *Late Millennials (18-27), Early Millennials (28-37) GenX and Boomers (38 +).*

3.5.2 Generational Differences in Video Game Acceptance and Understandings

Imagine a person born in the US, roughly between the years 1982 and 2004 (Millennial). This person would have developed cultural models during the escalation of digital technologies and would most likely think of video gaming as a normal behavior like *Netflix* marathons or posting selfies on *Snapchat* or *Instagram.* Conversely, someone born during the 1940s -1960s (Boomer generation), would have developed, learned, and internalized cultural models of right living by watching television shows like *Leave it to Beaver, Ponderosa*, and *My Three Sons*. This individual might consider video game play as a deviant behavior, as video gaming does not align with their generational cultural model of socially normal and worthwhile activities. This example illustrates how people in the US culture, who live among those of different age groups or generations, have not necessarily learned and shared the same cultural knowledge that might contribute to a multi-generational consensus on right ways of thinking and behaving.

Therefore, we can reasonably assume that individuals who were born and raised during different decades and were exposed to different technologies throughout their lives, might have conflicting thoughts about normal and deviant behaviors. For instance, Boomers came of age during the 1960s and 1970s, and their idea of the prototypical American developed Post-WWII, when the US economy and capitalism was booming. Also, most parents of these boomers grew up during the Great Depression and were adolescents during WWII—later instilling the same Great Depression and WWII sense of conservativism in their boomer children. Consequently, having been raised by parents who esteemed hard work and conservativism as important cultural traits, and by coming of age during the post-WWII economic surge of capitalism, consumerism, and suburbanization, boomers most likely retained a long-hours-at-the-office model for right living and time appropriation. Furthermore, for the developing boomer generation, consensus around the domain of time well spent would have included additional physical work or socially appropriate activities such as playing cards around the kitchen table, bowling with the family, tossing horse shoes in the backyard, taking the kids to the drive-in movie, or other family-based and local neighborhood activities. Television, the boomer's childhood technological innovation, was often utilized as a Sunday night family activity.

It is no wonder that some Boomers experience confusion and frustration when their adult children spend hours of time in an apparent state of dissociation, staring at warrior-like avatars and killing cartoonish monsters on a computer screen. It is interesting to note that the Boomer generation often-times gave video games, video gaming consoles, and computers as gifts to their Millennial children, not realizing that their children would continue to enjoy these technologies into adulthood.

However, generational cultural models of video game play also present variations to the norm. For example, in one in-depth study of Boomers who enjoy video games, one participant explained video games in this way*:*

> *"It is a vacation at my desk with no hectic schedule to follow, no lost luggage and all the comforts of home while meeting fascinating characters, gaping at awe-inspiring scenery and being drawn through the computer screen into amazing, frightening, wonderful journeys, from which we can return a little bit better than when we started"* (Pearce, 2008).

Conclusion

As we have seen, psychological anthropologists agree that culturally learned and shared thoughts and behaviors do indeed influence the personal, public, and private thoughts and behaviors of individuals within a given culture (Obeyesekere, 1981). However, due to individual experiences, particularly but not limited to, technological changes during phases of life, generational cohorts socially learn and share thoughts and behaviors that differ from other generational cohorts, even whilst they are all members of the same broader cultural society. "Not all schemas are accepted equally by everybody, as a result of variations in the learning environment." (Lindholm, 2001). Hence, due to historical placement at birth, individuals who share the same socio-cultural space likely learn, share, and experience somewhat different social, political, economic, and technological ways of thinking and being in the world, thus drawing different realities and models of normalcy and deviance. The relationship of good life models and the activity of playing video games is likely to be different when comparing groups who came of age during these different times in history, as it is well documented that interactive digital technologies and video game play are more prevalent today than in previous decades.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODS

Most of what we know

about what people think and do

comes from interviews and questionnaires. (Weller, 2007)

Introduction

To ensure validity, I employed a mixed method grounded anthropological approach where participants informed me of their own cultural and personal life experiences (Glaser B.G., 1967; Bernard R.H., 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I utilized multiple lines of evidence, with a three-phase iterative research design which included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and field surveys. This mixed method approach encompassed an approximate one year time-frame and included both qualitative and quantitative methods to increase the understanding of emic meanings and to identify patterns in cultural models and impacts of video gaming stigmatization across generational/age groups of video game players. During the course of this project, I collected the following types of data: (1) participant observational data in the form of field notes, (2) audio recordings and transcripts from semi-structured interviews, and (3) survey data that included measures of stigmatization, subjective well-being, video game addiction, and good life models.

4.1 Data Collection

Field work took place within natural settings and multiple field sites which included the digital realms of video games, internet gaming forums and websites, public spaces, and in homes where players physically played video games (Snodgrass, 2016). Empirical data was collected by writing detailed observational field-notes and conducting informal and semi-structured interviews within the various field-sites. It is important to note that these field-sites were

"constructed rather than discovered" because video game anthropologists must find the people who play these games and follow them where they go (Snodgrass, 2016). For example, the field-sites were constructed in multiple localities such as within the video game *World of Warcraft*, a guild website, video game forums, game developer websites, public venues, and within players' homes. I also spoke with a variety of people and asked about video gaming whenever the opportunity arose. Due to the wide-range of player locations, semi-structured interviews were conducted through forum chats, voice/video mediums such as Skype, and within homes and public venues for more locally situated face-to-face interviews.

4.1.1 Data Collection Phase I: Participant Observation

This project commenced with participant observation where I actively and sometimes passively engaged with the video gaming community. Ethnographic methodology is a key component of anthropological research and spending time with people in their natural settings was the most reliable way to get hands-on understanding and knowledge about the culture (Bernard, 2015). Participating in video gaming and conversing informally with players wherever I could find them was the ideal method for uncovering linguistic nuances, social taboos and rules, and building rapport with a variety of informants (Bernard, 2015). I also established trusting relationships with informants which reduced the possibility of gathering false information from mistrusting informants, as this is particularly important when researching a stigmatized group such as video game players (Bernard, 2015). All identities were masked with pseudonyms and all participants were advised of this, as well as the research topic.

Along with observations regarding activities, both ritualized and mundane, field notes contained the context of informal conversational interviews as recommended by Wutich (2015). In addition to detecting the first theme identifications, data collection at this level was central to

learning about behavioral and linguistic nuances that were necessary for designing a culturally relevant and appropriate semi-structured interview protocol during the next phase of the project (Wutich, 2015; Bernard, 2015). Understandably, all researchers have some sort of cultural bias, therefore, one limitation of participant observation was the probability of bias when making ethnographic observations (Bernard, 2015). Being a long-term member of the video game community I undoubtedly commenced this project with unintentional insider bias. Nevertheless, the benefit of discovering deeper meanings, particularly of those from different generational groups, far outweighed the weakness of unintentional research bias (Bernard, 2015).

During this phase, I found that some video gaming message boards, websites, and blogs discussed video gaming stigma. However, while engaging with players in the virtual spaces, I found that players preferred to talk about the games and not heavy topics such as their own stigmatization by society. Participant observation involves fitting in with the group, therefore I did not engage much with players about ideas of the good life or stigmatization while interacting with them in game. I waited for more opportune times to direct my questions about stigma. However, quite often I asked people if they play video games. While responses were nearly always uncomfortable at first, and people seemed embarrassed to admit that they played video games, I was able to build rapport and discovered that nearly everyone I asked either "admitted" that they played video games and became eager to talk about stigma, or they were non-gamers and were eager to tell me how they abhor video gaming.

4.1.2 Data Collection Phase II: Semi-structured Interviews

Anthropologic informant and respondent interviews were imperative for this study to accurately represent the meanings and cultural nuances of the video gaming community. Person-centered, informant and respondent, formal and informal interviews are central to

anthropological research because diverse cultural groups experience and express meanings in a variety of complex ways, and interviews with local individuals help uncover cultural ways of thinking (Kohrt, 2015). Complex human ecologies require researchers to understand variabilities in cultural models (Kleinman, 1981), and by interviewing key informants I was able to uncover cultural models and gauge cultural consensus around the good life and perceptions of stigmatization, as well as differences in generational attitudes about the good life, stigmatization, and video gaming.

4.1.2.1 Semi-structured Interview Sample Size, Type, Design, and Process

Interview sampling consisted of convenience and quota sampling. Fifteen interview informants were selected as key informants who play or had recently played video games. However, stigmatized populations were more difficult to access as they are more "hidden" (Bernard, 2015). Therefore, the sample population was chosen from multiple localities such as a *World of Warcraft* guild, Facebook social media video gaming groups, local video game players who had previously participated in video gaming studies at Colorado State University, as well as individual video game players that I personally knew (5/15). Care was taken to include a variety of people in the interview sample (Bernard, 2015). I attempted to recruit participants with an age/generation quota sampling technique (Wutich A., 2015). However, recruiting video game players for lengthy semi-structured interviews was somewhat difficult (as mentioned above) so the ages of interviewees fell into uneven categories with most participants in a 31-50 category. Ages of interviewees were as follows (*N*=15): 22-25 (2), 31-37 (5), 45-50 (6), 71-71 (2). Seven interviewees were male and eight were female. Interviewees stated that they played video games anywhere from 8 to 40 hours per week, with the over half of them playing approximately 20 hours a week, and 4 interviewees playing around 40 hours per week or more.

The interview process began with participant observation and rapport building with a variety of individuals within the gaming community. Establishing good rapport with key informants reduced the possibility of receiving false information. I established rapport with participants within the *WoW* online game and within a specific gaming guild whose players were all over the age of twenty-five. Interview sessions lasted for approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Participants seemed to enjoy the prestige and respect associated with being interviewed as "experts" (Levy, 2015). However, I did have some difficulty gaining face-to-face interviews but was able to meet face-to-face with four interviewees, nine were *Skype* video interviews, and the remaining two interviews were administered via online text chat within the guild website.

Researchers need to have cultural knowledge before conducting interviews to make sure that the questions and probes are culturally appropriate (Levy, 2015); so accordingly, based on fieldwork and previous experience, I composed a series of culturally relevant questions in which most were related to personal histories of video game play, social relationships, models of the good life, and perceptions of video gaming stigma. When structuring the interview questions, I changed back and forth between respondent and informant modes to understand the relationship between the interviewee's personal thoughts and how they understood their own thoughts in context with others (Levy, 2015).

The interview questions were designed with the data collected and analyzed during phase I, and were composed with a series of questions to test my research hypotheses. The interviews were conducted to discover how players framed their own models of the good life and how video gaming might fit into those models. I also asked interviewees what their families, friends, and broader communities thought about video gaming and video game players. I asked if they had

ever been uncomfortable talking about their own video game play. The semi-structured

interviews consisted of 48 open-ended questions designed with probe-enhancing protocol.

Respondents were asked to free list items such as "What does a happy person do during their

leisure time?" and "What are some of the terms that non- players use when referring to someone

who plays video game for long periods of time?" These interview questions were designed to

uncover deeper meanings and knowledge around the themes that immerged during the preceding

participant observation analysis. Audio interviews were transcribed word-for-word into text

documents with *Transcribe* software (Really, 2016).

(see Appendix I for semi-structured interview protocol)

4.1.3 Data Collection Phase III: Field Surveys

The validity of the qualitative data was enhanced by incorporating an online field survey

as an additional source of data to test my hypotheses. This phase included design and distribution

of field surveys. Participatory observation field notes, informal interviews, semi-structured

interviews, and the initial research hypotheses directed the survey design. Survey design

included Likert scale (Likert, 1932) and free list (Bernard, 2015; DeMunck, 2000) questions

designed to illuminate cultural consonance (Dressler, 2000). The survey included questions and

statements focused on the good life, video game stigma, a video game addiction scale

(Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009), and a satisfaction with life scale (Diener, Larson,

Emmons, & Griffin, 1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is a measure of life

satisfaction and assumes that life satisfaction is one factor of subjective well-being (Diener,

Larson, Emmons, & Griffin, 1985).

The online survey consisted of open ended, multiple choice, and rating scale questions.

Likert-style statements were designed using terms and phrases that were prominent themes

discovered during interview analysis. All Likert-type scales used values from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* or 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* (Likert, 1932). Please see Appendix II for Field Survey measures.

Participants reported how many days per week they played (1-7) and how many hours per week they played given a multiple-choice format. (0-10, 10-20, 20-30, 30-40, 40 + hours). I averaged the number of days and the number of hours to generate Gaming Frequency.

To get a sense of subjective well-being, I used the satisfaction with life scale (Diener, Larson, Emmons, & Griffin, 1985).

To gauge cultural consensus around what constitutes the good life, I used ten items from the PEW report on the good life (OECD). Respondents were asked to rate how important each of the following are for living "the good life": Wealth/finances, Leisure time/freedom, Goals/achievements, Stability, Love/friendship, Adventure, Mental stimulation, Physical health, Job satisfaction, Spirituality/religion.

To examine cultural consonance with the four highest rated concepts coded during semi-structured interview analysis, as well as in the PEW good life report (health, wealth, housing, job satisfaction) (Diener, Larson, Emmons, & Griffin, 1985), I asked respondents to compare their own lives with the average person in the US. Participants responded to the following four questions using 5 point Likert scales: "Relative to the average person in the US, how physically healthy are you?" "Relative to the average person in the US, how much money do you make?" "Relative to the average person in the US, how nice are your living conditions?" and "Relative to the average person in the US, how satisfied are you with your job situation?"

The survey was constructed and uploaded with *Qualtrics* (Qualtrics, 2017) survey software for design and distribution which ensured ease of access for survey participants.

4.1.3.1. Field Survey: Sample Type, and Distribution

  Convenience sampling was utilized for the field survey and this required recruitment of

video game players who were willing to spend time (about 15 minutes) taking the survey. I also

attempted to use quota sampling by refining the title of my online survey request to include the

preferred ages of participants that I needed in order to improve age quota ratios. All participants

were asked if they self-identified as video game players and had logged onto video games within

the past thirty days. Surveys were distributed via online forums and websites where video game

players congregate (e.g., Facebook groups, guild website, Reddit). The survey was initially

distributed to ten video game players to ensure that the questions and vocabulary made sense to a

larger group of respondents. Once the questionnaire was tested and found to be culturally correct,

complete, and relevant to my research hypothesis, the survey was distributed by posting an

online link on the video gaming forums and websites. The benefit of online surveys was that they

were economical, easy to access, and respondents could answer questions at their own pace. Due

to the nearly impossible task of acquiring a complete list of names and contact information for

millions of video game players, a non-probability convenience sample was necessary for

recruiting respondents. All participants were unpaid volunteers.

4.2 Data Analysis

4.2.1 Data Analysis: Participant Observation

  Once the participant observation phase was complete, I uploaded my field notes

to *Maxqda* professional qualitative data analysis software (Verbi, 1989-2017). Next, I analyzed

the text line-by-line to identify patterned themes, and created a codebook for clarity and

consistency (Wutich, 2015). Along with theme identification, coding was critical for the semi-

structured interview design so that I could design the questions around the themes that pertained

to my research hypotheses, and to ensure that culturally appropriate language was used throughout the interviews (Bernard, 2015).

4.2.2 Data Analysis: Semi-structured Interviews

Grounded theory was used to analyze the in-depth semi-structured interview sessions that were held with research participants who informed me of their own cultural and personal life experiences (Bernard, 2015; Glaser, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Interview analysis consisted of reviewing the transcribed semi-structured interview texts line-by-line, looking for themes and interpreting concepts, repetitive words and metaphors, and then marking these themed statements with codes that captured the meaning of the words and phrases.

Next, the codes were grouped into larger thematic categories based on focus codes, which are codes that appeared repeatedly and were used for naming the categories (Wutich, 2015). This type of coding and memo writing was based on observations, hunches, and insights, and then categorized and organized digitally with MaxQDA software (Wutich, 2015). To test the themes that emerged from the first interview, I closely examined the texts to see if the codes and thematic models held up across interviews (Bernard, 2015; 2017; Wutich, 2015). Inductive coding methods were used during the initial grounded theory text analysis and deductive coding was used after inductive coding had revealed themes that were relevant to my research project. For example, as themes become more distinct, content analysis methods such as lexical searches and word counts added to verification (Haroz, 2016; Wutich, 2015).

I also looked at models of the good life to find whether interviewees reported whether they felt that they fit-in with the broader cultural consensus (OECD) and to see how this might differ across generation/age groups. I wanted to see if video game players across the different

generation/age groups might model the good life similarly or differently, and whether there was any difference in their consonance with those models.

4.2.2 Data Analysis: Field Survey

First, I excluded participants that were outside the perimeters of this study (e.g., under the age of 18, non-gamer). I also excluded 28 participants who failed to answer a verification question correctly. The remaining responses included only those within the USA, English speakers (the survey was published in English), and video game players; this left 422 responses for analysis.

I developed a code book with ID, demographic information with scaled (age), nominal (male, female), and ordinal (Likert-type) responses, and converted responses to numerical code. For example, male=1 and female=2.

IBM SPSS software was used for data analysis (IBM, 1989, 2016). I tested for internal consistency and the extent to which the items that made up each scale measured the same underlying construct. I used Cronbach's coefficient Alpha which provided an indication of the average correlation among all the items that made up the scales. The values range from 0 to 1 with higher values indicating greater reliability. Ideally, Cronbach Coefficient Alphas should be over .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

To generate a gaming frequency score, I averaged the number of days and number of hours that participants reported. Participants had reported how many days per week they played (1 to 7) and how many hours per week they played given a multiple-choice format (1 = 0-10 hours; 2 = 10-20 hours; 3 = 20-30 hours; 4 = 30-40 hours; 5 = 40+ hours).

To generate a measure of cultural consonance (a subjective measure of participants' perceived standing relative to the highest ranking cultural models of the good life: (health,

wealth, employment, and housing), I combined responses to the questions of health, money, housing, and job satisfaction as explained in the Results section. I then conducted two factor analyses using Principal Components Analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation and Kaiser normalization to determine the number of factors for: (1) the ten Good Life items and (2) the seven Stigma items.

Next, I tested for age group differences related to the gaming frequency, gaming addiction scale, Cultural Consonance (labeled Status), Stigma, and Satisfaction with Life (SWL), and perceptions of what the good life entails. Then, using correlational analyses, I tested the hypotheses related to: Stigma and Addiction, Stigma and SWL, Stigma and Addiction by Age Group, Stigma and SWL by Age Group, Gaming Frequency and Stigma, and Stigma and Status. Finally, I conducted a path analysis using Mplus software, version 7.4 (Muthen and Muthen 1998-2015) to investigate the association between seven variables: Stigma from Family & Friends, Social Stigma, Age, Gaming Addiction, SWL, and Status (Consonance with "the good life").

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I don't put anything about video games on my social media.

So, if you didn't know me very well then you wouldn't know.

It's not something I talk about, you know.

(Richard R7)

Introduction

Results from observations, interviews, and field surveys showed that most video game players, from all generational/age groups, recognized that video game players are oftentimes stigmatized as social deviants. Many gamers seem to feel that they are stigmatized as having cultural deficiencies and are viewed as unwilling to conform to the American work ethic. Some participants also agreed with negative stereotypes that players used when explaining how non-gamers might describe video game players. Stigmatization clearly impacted nearly all participants to some degree. However, stigmatization by family, friends, and coworkers seemed to generate the most frustration and distress for many players. Additionally, eleven of the fifteen interviewees exhibited stigma management techniques and described how they concealed their interest in video games from non-gamers, particularly in the work environment and when around parents, older family members, and their non-gamer friends. The most common stigmatizing labels and stereotypes that interviewees mentioned were "time wasters," "nerds," "loners," "lazy," "addicts," "no-lifers," and "basement dwellers," just to name a few. Throughout the interviews, Millennials expressed more distress and frustration from stigmatization than GenX and Boomers, perhaps because Millennials are expected to be working towards financial stability

and home ownership (instead of playing video games), which are often-times associated with living the good life.

5.1 Results: Participant Observation and Semi-Structured Interviews

The results of the qualitative analysis suggest that video game players of all ages seem to have a cultural consensus of what it means to live the good life, although not all players feel that they are financially able to live that good life and are not consonant with that model. However, many players feel that video gaming offers them affordable entertainment and feelings of adventure, as well as social interaction and mental stimulation without the higher monetary costs of "real-life" activities. Most players also agreed on a perceived social stigma around video gaming and negative labeling of video game players as social deviants. However, interviewees over the age of thirty-six showed somewhat greater resilience to video gaming stigma and seemed less aggravated by stigmatization than most participants within the twenty to thirty-six age group who expressed greater distress and frustration from the stigma.

5.1.1 Hypothesis I: Diverse Good Life Models?

I hypothesized that video game players of different generational groups and members of the broader American society hold conflicting cultural models of what it means to live the "good life" and spend time appropriately. For many of the interviewees, the activity where they spent most their free time seemed to be video gaming, yet most did not mention video gaming as something that a person who is living the good life would do with their time. Some Millennials described the good life as filled with expensive activities such as traveling the world. For example, thirty-two-year-old Jason explained:

> *"The world is eye candy and if you don't get to see that eye candy you might feel like there's much to see. I feel like if you're able to make enough money to where you can*

travel frequently and see places and maybe even visit other countries, that is something that can give you a good life."

However, Jason also told me that video gaming is an affordable alternative to costly travel, as video game players, albeit virtually, can explore scenic landscapes and find adventure without spending much money or leaving the comfort of their homes.

Millennials (ages 22-36) also responded to free list questions about the good life with phrases such as "*having a white picket fence*," "*owning a home*," and "*having excess money.*" They also described happiness as satisfaction with the now— no worry, having fun and free time, low stress, having goals and a good job, being productive, having the ability to travel, having good relationships, and possessing enough money to do these things. Nevertheless, like Jason, most of the Millennials also said that financial security is an uncertainty for them— they want to enjoy the good life, but most felt that it was scarcely attainable.

It begs to reason that if Millennials feel powerless to achieve the US cultural model of the good life and they grew up playing video games where virtual goals are attainable, they might be more apt to spend their time immersing in luscious landscapes and heroic missions found in video games and dissociating with the real world of disappointment, unemployment, and insurmountable debt. Twenty-five-year-old Sarah told me, *"As long as you've set yourself up so that you can continually be happy, you can afford food, you can afford shelter, and perhaps save for retirement, I think that would be really nice. But it's so scary. It's so hard."*

GenX and Boomer players described their ideas of the good life similar to Millennials. However, contrary to the younger group, GenX interviewees (ages 46-49) all had permanent careers and appeared to be at least somewhat financially stable. They described the good life as having love, happiness, and peace, as well as having goals to accomplish. Those in this higher

age group expressed that life for them was good. They spoke of getting enough sleep, working out, and engaging with enjoyable hobbies.

The 50+ interviewees, supported themselves with good paying careers or were comfortably retired. These players described the good life as having healthy relationships and enough time to pursue hobbies and interests. It was clear that the older players struggled less from financial insecurity and had already established the means to enjoy more of "the good life," contrary to the younger Millennials who were still establishing themselves in society. Nonetheless, all fifteen interviewees described the good life similar to what we might think of as the American Dream, yet players in their twenties and thirties struggled more with pressure to attain that financially stable lifestyle. Perhaps video gaming provides some players with temporary relief from the financial strains.

> *"Gaming is satisfying and it's cheap. It's not expensive. You don't have to have a nice house to play video games. You don't even have to have a good computer. There's a lot of old video games. With gaming you don't need very much to be happy and successful, or to be satisfied" (Jason 22).*

5.1.2 Hypothesis II: Stigma, Distress, and Generational Differences

I hypothesized that low cultural consonance manifests through stigmatization, impacting video game players' subjective well-being, perpetuating symptoms of behavioral addiction such as withdrawing from non-supportive friends/family and concealing their interest in video games. Included in this hypothesis is the idea that stigmatization impacts players differently due to their generational/age positions in history and society.

When asked about social stigma, interviewees openly explained how they felt stigmatized and many gave detailed examples of how they managed the stigma through concealment. For example, twenty-two-year-old Jason's statement clearly illustrated stigma management:

> *"If it's work-related, like someone who would be a potential…like trying to get a job or something like that… I don't think I would bring it [video gaming] up…like not to my boss. And I think in general it's not something that I would bring up unless it's already been established with that person, or they already know, or I play games with them. I wouldn't say it's something I would mention."*

In another example, twenty-five-year-old Sarah told me:

> *"When I initially start off working in a place, or especially like in interviews, I don't think I would mention it [video gaming], just because I feel like there is that stigma…that lazy… perhaps they think 'oh well, she's not a hard worker. She doesn't like to leave her house. She might be obsessed with her video games'. But I'm a social person, you know. I like to work hard…but I also like video games!"*

Specific professional positions seemed to influence the perception, reaction, and management of stigma for early and late Millennials, as well as GenXers. For instance, players who had technical careers said that they frequently discussed gaming with coworkers who also played video games regularly. One GenX respondent, Dale, who has a lucrative career in upper management with a large pharmaceutical company, stated that most of the people he worked with are *"geeks"*. In any case, he was not concerned with what the other employees thought of his video gaming. However, when asked how his parents and older family members viewed his gaming, he said:

> *"I don't know that it would ever come up with them. And my brother-in-law, I think he's sixty-five…he's a guy that sees a computer as a completely utilitarian tool. You would never ever in a million years catch him playing a video game…let alone spending money on a console to play a video game. He thinks his wife's Candy Crush habit is stupid. He represents that group of people."*

In another instance, Karen, a forty-six-year-old statistician, said she felt *"cool"* around her daughter's teenage friends, but expressed that she only mentioned her gaming to coworkers occasionally—and always in jest. *"I mean, my office mates know. I tell them like, yeah man, I have to go home and beat skeleton face guy tonight…and they laugh…and I mean, it's just what it is."*

However, forty-five-year-old Melissa, a paralegal with a city law firm, felt highly stigmatized within the office setting and regularly concealed her interest in video games from coworkers. She stated:

> *"I keep it [video gaming] very personal. In my profession, video games are considered the most geekiest… you know… non-positive way to spend your time. They look at you quite weird. There's a really big stigma around that sort of thing, so you don't talk about it. They're so against the games!"*

Likewise, two interviewees in their seventies told me that they do not talk about video gaming with their friends, but both also seemed somewhat resilient to what others might think. For instance, when asked if she had ever heard anything about video game players that surprised her, seventy-one-year-old Darla replied: *"People who would look down on me would not be my friends…it's just another aspect of racism…to each their own."* In fact, nearly all the interviewees did indeed manage stigma by concealing their video gaming from specific non-gamers, and interviewees of all three generations stated that they would definitely not disclose their interest in video gaming during a job interview.

Regarding familial attitudes around video gaming, the Millennial and GenX interviewees said that their parents viewed video gaming as a bad habit and a waste of time, and most said that their parents had never understood video gaming and therefore did not approve of it.

John (twenty-two) told me:

> *"My parents thought it was all a waste of time. My dad didn't take to video gaming that well…he stopped playing once we kicked his butt at Mario Kart. And my mom would always yell at us for playing too much. They felt it was a waste of time, like we could be developing skills, or I don't know… going outside. But I feel like as a kid I went outside a lot! Like, they were worried that I wasn't going to develop any skills."*

When I asked interviewees to describe the average player, late Millennials, in their early twenties, said that most other video game players are also in their twenties. They told me that older people, particularly those over fifty, do not play video games much at all. However, when I

asked older Millennials and GenXers to describe the average video game player, they also stated

that "older" people do not understand technology.

> *"Like my granddad,"* thirty-three-year-old Melody told me, *"I would never tell him about it. Oh never! I think he would just be like, 'why are you wasting time on something like that?' So, I guess as people get older the more I hesitate to talk to them about it."*

Additionally, several players from all generational/age groups seemed to agree with the

more common video game stereotypes, the same stigmatizing stereotypes that players are

frustrated about hearing from non-players. For example, when players were asked to describe

other video game players, some interviewees described other players as unhealthy, lazy, addicts,

who "live in their mom's basements." This indicated that cultural stereotypes and stigmatization

of video game players was so prevalent that the model was actually held in the minds of video

game players themselves. While nearly all of the interviewees described themselves and their

own gaming friends positively and without these stigmatizing stereotypes, some went on to

described the average video game player negatively. Thirty-three-year-old Melody explained:

> *"It's surprising! I mean, even though I was raised on video games, and even though I play video games and my family plays video games, there is the stigma that people who play video games are fat, basement living, losers…you live in your mom's basement, you can't get a girlfriend, and your life is just devoted to playing video games 'cause you'll never make anything of yourself in the real life. It's even impacted my own view of gamers, even though no one I know who plays games is a loser."*

It is also important to note that all interview participants had at least some family

members and friends who also played video games. Perhaps this is why all of my interviewees

reiterated that they did not view long hours of playing video games as problematic. In fact, all

fifteen interviewees stated that video gaming was a positive aspect of their lives. However, it was

with the larger field survey analysis that I discovered an even clearer relationship between stigma

and symptoms of behavioral addiction, beyond stigma management.

In summary, I found that older players, particularly the three players who were fifty and over, did not feel much impacted from stigma, although they did know what it was. The forty-six-year-olds' responses seemed to be influenced by their economic status. For example, one paralegal managed the stigma by concealing her game play from co-workers and was embarrassed when her husband mentioned gaming in front of her co-workers. Another forty-six-year-old with an above average income (over $100k) and a top management position was not worried about co-workers knowing that he plays video games. However, he did conceal his gaming from his older parents and certain in-laws who don't play video games. His wife, who also makes over $80k per year, said that she jokes occasionally about her gaming with co-workers and feels comfortable talking about it with her parents who are more tech savvy. She also feels like a "cool" mom and talks about gaming regularly with her teenaged kids and their friends.

Those in their thirties seemed to show the highest level of frustration and shame about video game play. Only one interviewee in his thirty's (a PhD student at a notable university) did not feel stigmatized and said that his fellow students, co-workers, and girlfriend all play video games. The others in their thirties told me that they definitely felt stigmatized for gaming and regularly concealed their gaming from co-workers and certain non-gaming family members. The thirty-somethings expressed that the stigma was unfair and that society thinks of video gamers as childish, immature, and addicts who should be doing more constructive and productive activities.

The younger players, in their twenties, viewed gaming as a normal part of life but also concealed their gaming from parents and older co-workers and employers. The predominant stigmatizing words that I heard repeatedly while speaking with video game players of all ages were lazy, childish, and waste of time. Interestingly, nearly all of my interviewees play at least

twenty hours per week, and only one reported that she played for about eight hours per week.

Interviewees also did not seem to feel distressed about the hours they spent gaming but seemed

to feel distressed when discussing video game stigma and how they conceal their gaming from

non-gamers for fear of being labeled as childish, lazy, time wasters.

5.2 Results and Discussion: Field Surveys

Survey participants were 81.5% male and 17.5% female. Most were of European

ethnicity, 85.4%. Regarding SES, 41.0% reported as middle class, 24.7% as upper middle class,

and 20.1% lower middle class. The majority of respondents had at least some college education;

38.1% college degree, 37.9% some college, and 12.9% reported advanced degrees. When asked

about their religion, 42.4% reported atheist and 23.7% agnostic; there were non-Catholic

Christian at 18.5%. Respondents were grouped into three age categories 18-27 (46%), 28-37

(35.3%), and 38+ (18.7%). The minimum age was 18 and the maximum age was 66 for a mean

of 30.70, standard deviation of 9.67.

These video game players reported playing mainly on computers (83.7%) or consoles

(14.4%). They reported having played an average of 22.68 years beginning at about age 8. The

average number of days played was 6 days per week (*SD* = 1.09) and 20 to 30 hours per week.

5.2.1 Hypothesis I: Diverse Good Life Models?

I hypothesized that video game players of different generational groups and members of

the broader American society hold conflicting cultural models of what it means to live the "good

life" and spend time appropriately. I found this to be a null hypothesis.

I used the identical ten items from a PEW report on USA and the good life (OECD) as I

did not have a sample of non-gamers to compare ideas about the good life with video game

players. A reliability analysis of the ten items showed that if I omitted the item pertaining to

religion, the Cronbach's Alpha would increase from .64 to .68. Because many participants were atheist (42.4%) or agnostic (23.7%), I omitted the religion item to construct the Good Life Scale because gamers who are not religious may not consider Religion to be important for a good life.

I conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the mean scores for the Good Life variable across the three generational groups. I found no significant differences between the three groups for the Good Life, $F(2, 414) = 1.02$, $p = .361$. Consistent with the qualitative results, field survey results showed that participants from the three generational groups of video game players understood similar cultural models of successful living, meaningful time appropriation, desirable personality traits, communication and relationship practices, and economic motivations.

5.2.2 Hypothesis II: Stigma, Addiction, and Generational Differences

I hypothesized that low cultural consonance manifests through stigmatization, impacting video game players' subjective well-being, perpetuating symptoms of behavioral addiction such as withdrawing from non-player friends/family and concealing their interest in video games. Furthermore, I hypothesized that this phenomenon impacts players differently due to their generational positions in history and society. These hypotheses were partially supported.

First, the seven items (see Stigma items in Appendix II) related to stigma were subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) with a Direct Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization, using SPSS version 24. PCA revealed the presence of two components with eigenvalues of 2.84 (Family/Friends Stigma) and 1.27 (Social Stigma). The two-component solution explained a total of 58.80% of variance with component one contributing 40.62%, component two contributing 18.18%. The pattern matrix showed that the components were related to (1) family and friends, from work, school, and online, (2) media and society. So, I

created two variables, one for stigma from family and friends, and one for stigma from society.

The two types of stigma were correlated, $r = .25$, $p < .001$.

Next, I tested the correlations between the hypothesized variables across all ages. The descriptive statistics and correlations between all the variables are shown in Table 1.

Family/Friends Stigma and Addiction were significantly correlated, $r = .34$, $p < .001$, and Social Stigma and Addiction were significantly correlated, $r = .21$, $p < .001$. Family/Friends Stigma and SWL were negatively correlated, $r = -.17$, $p < .001$, Social Stigma and SWL were not significantly correlated, $r = -.08$, $p = .11$.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Age, Type of Stigma, Addiction, SWL, and Status

Variable		Correlations				
	age	F/F Stigma	Social Stigma	Addiction	SWL	Status
	$M = 30.67$	$M = 3.08$	$M = 5.01$	$M = 3.33$	$M = 4.38$	$M = 4.39$
	$SD = 9.66$	$SD = 1.08$	$SD = 1.22$	$SD = 1.16$	$SD = 1.42$	$SD = 1.31$
age	--					
F/F Stigma	.07	--				
Social Stigma	-.11[*]	.25[***]	--			
Addiction	-.25[***]	.34[***]	.21[***]	--		
SWL	.09	-.17[***]	-.08	-.21[***]	--	
Status	.28[***]	-.07	-.09	-.15[**]	.52[***]	--

Note: F/F Stigma = Family and Friends Stigma, SWL = Satisfaction with Life, Status = Cultural Consonance; [***]$p < .001$; [**]$p < .01$; [*] $p < .05$; $N = 414$.

I was looking to discover whether players whose family and friends stigmatized them as deviant showed increased involvement with video games leading to so-called addiction symptoms, perhaps to find social acceptance and cultural consonance within gaming communities. Survey results showed that younger players revealed more symptoms of behavioral addiction and lower cultural consonance (Status).

I also looked at how stigma around video gaming might influence players' decisions to play video games for longer periods of time leading to addiction symptoms. Survey results showed that family/friend stigma was positively correlated with symptoms of behavioral addiction, and younger people were more likely to experience symptoms of behavioral addiction as evidenced by the negative correlation. In 2011, Snodgrass found that actually playing video games with friends or family decreased problematic play, and my study also found a correlation between stigmatization by family and friends and symptoms of behavioral addiction (Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009). With this in mind, it is reasonable to conclude that negative stereotypes and stigmatization of video game players might intensify their motivations to withdraw from those who stigmatize them, and motivate players to connect even more frequently with video games and the video gaming community— where they feel accepted, esteemed, and enjoy a sense of cultural consonance, or fitting-in.

Survey results also showed that video game behavioral addiction symptoms were associated with low satisfaction with life (SWL), and low consonance (Status) with cultural models of the good life (e.g., regarding employment and living conditions). In other words, all players indicated that they thought the good life was related to having a good job and good living conditions, but not all players reported having a good job and good living conditions.

SWL and Status were also positively correlated. Cultural consensus of the good life was clearly recognized and agreed upon by all, but low consonance in the areas of job satisfaction and housing, for example, might have an impact on players' overall subjective well-being (SWL). I also looked for a correlation between satisfaction with life (SWL) (Diener, Larson, Emmons, & Griffin, 1985) and social stigma but found no correlation. However, family stigma was negatively correlated with SWL. If people feel stigma from family and friends, they are less likely to feel satisfied with life. Alternatively, if people are dissatisfied with life, they may also be experiencing conflict with family and friends in many domains.

Table 2:Family/Friends Stigma and Social Stigma by Age Group

Age Group	Variable	Correlations		
		Addiction	SWL	Status
18-27	Family/Friends Stigma	.31***	-.21**	-.15*
(*n* = 191)	Social Stigma	.13	-.09	-.09
28-37	Family/Friends Stigma	.42***	-.18*	-.04
(*n* = 146)	Social Stigma	.21**	-.04	.05
38 over	Family/Friends Stigma	.36***	-.11	-.06
(*n* = 77)	Social Stigma	.30***	-.10	-.25*

***p < .001; **p < .01; * p < .05; Status = Cultural Consonance

I was also interested in whether the types of stigma might be different in three different age groups. I conducted a set of ANOVAs and found that there were no significant differences between the three groups for Friends/Family Stigma, $F(2, 412) = 1.05$, $p = .350$, SWL, $F(2, 413) = .51$, $p = .602$, or Gaming Frequency, $F(2, 414) = 1.86$, $p = .158$. There were some differences

for Social Stigma, $F(2, 412) = 2.40$, $p = .092$. Addiction was significantly different, $F(2, 413) =$

11.85, $p < .001$. T-tests showed that the youngest group ($M = 3.61$) scored higher on Addiction

than either the oldest group ($M = 2.98$), $p < .001$, or the middle group ($M = 3.14$), $p < .001$.

Next, I tested the correlations between the hypothesized variables, by age group. The

correlations are shown in Table 2.

Finally, I tested a path model with six variables using Mplus 7.4 software. Path analysis

can be helpful by providing a graphic representation of the data and also to show the associations

between the variables when all variables are considered at the same time. Using path analysis,

the coefficients represent only the *unique* variance between the pair of variables after controlling

for all other correlations.
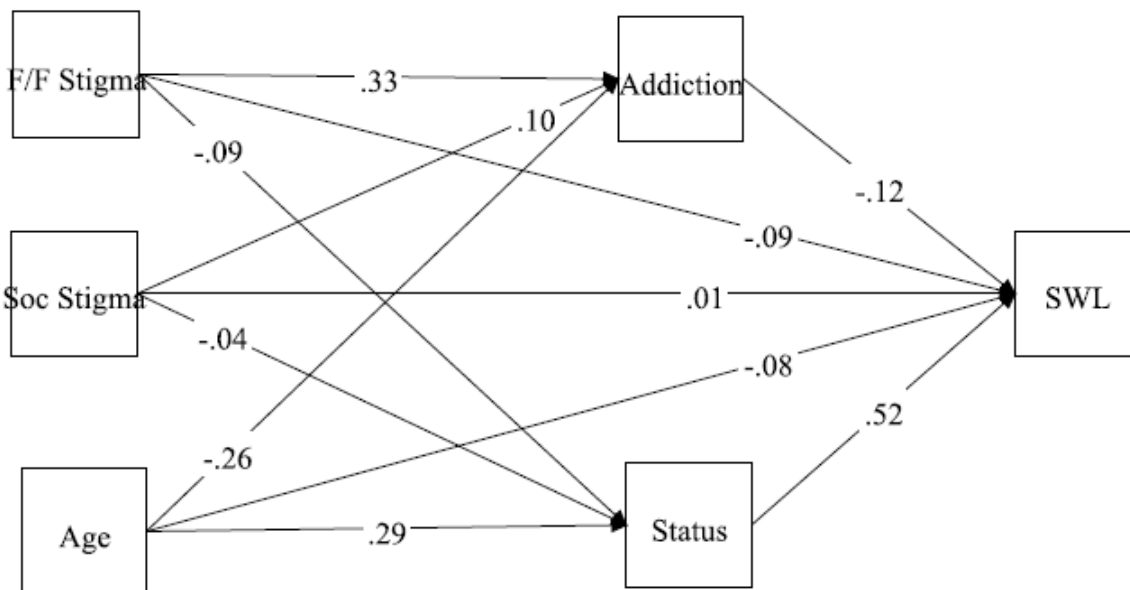
Figure 1: Full Path Analysis Model

Path analysis key: F/F Stigma= Family & Friends Stigma, Soc Stigma = Social Stigma,

Addiction = Video game Addiction Scale, SWL Scale, Status = Cultural Consonance (a

subjective measure of participants perceived standing relative to society's social expectations).

I evaluated the model fit by examining the chi-square goodness-of-fit test, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). An RMSEA less than .05 (.08), CFI greater than .95 (.90), and SRMR less than .05 (.08) indicate good (adequate) model fit (Kline, 2005). I found that the fit of the model to the data was excellent, $\chi^2(1) = 1$, $p < .01$, RMSEA = .05, CFI = 1.0, SRMR = .01.

The Mplus output can indicate whether the *total* effect of Family/Friends Stigma, Social Stigma, and Age on SWL is significant. The total effect includes all the possible pathways. For example, the pathways from Family/Friends Stigma include: (1) the effects through Addiction, (2) Status, and (3) SWL.

The Path Analysis showed no significant total effect of Social Stigma on SWL, $p = .651$.

The total (negative) effect of Family/Friends Stigma on SWL was significant, $p < .001$. Most importantly, the output showed that Family/Friend Stigma was positively correlated with Addiction which, in turn, was negatively associated with SWL ($p=.013$). The path from Family/Friends stigma through status was not significant, $p = .090$. Overall, there was a negative effect of Family/Friends Stigma on SWL.

Age had a positive indirect effect on SWL ($p = .054$). Younger people scored higher on Addiction and Addiction was associated with lower SWL ($p=.06$), so that the pathway was significant, $p = .016$. However, younger participants also had lower Status scores which was associated with lower SWL, $p < .001$. In other words, being older is associated with less addiction and higher status and these two variables are, in turn, associated with higher SWL.

Status and Addiction were not significantly correlated, $p = .314$.

Additionally, and as several interviewees had described other video game players in a negative light, I wanted to understand how video game players model other individuals within

their own subcultural community. So, I used the terms that interviewees had free listed most frequently to describe the average video game player, both positive and negative, and asked survey participants to select the terms they agreed with. As shown in Table III below, there were significant differences for the terms dedicated, intelligent, and confident. Survey results showed that respondents between the ages of 28 and 37 seem to have a less positive view of other video game players than the other two groups.
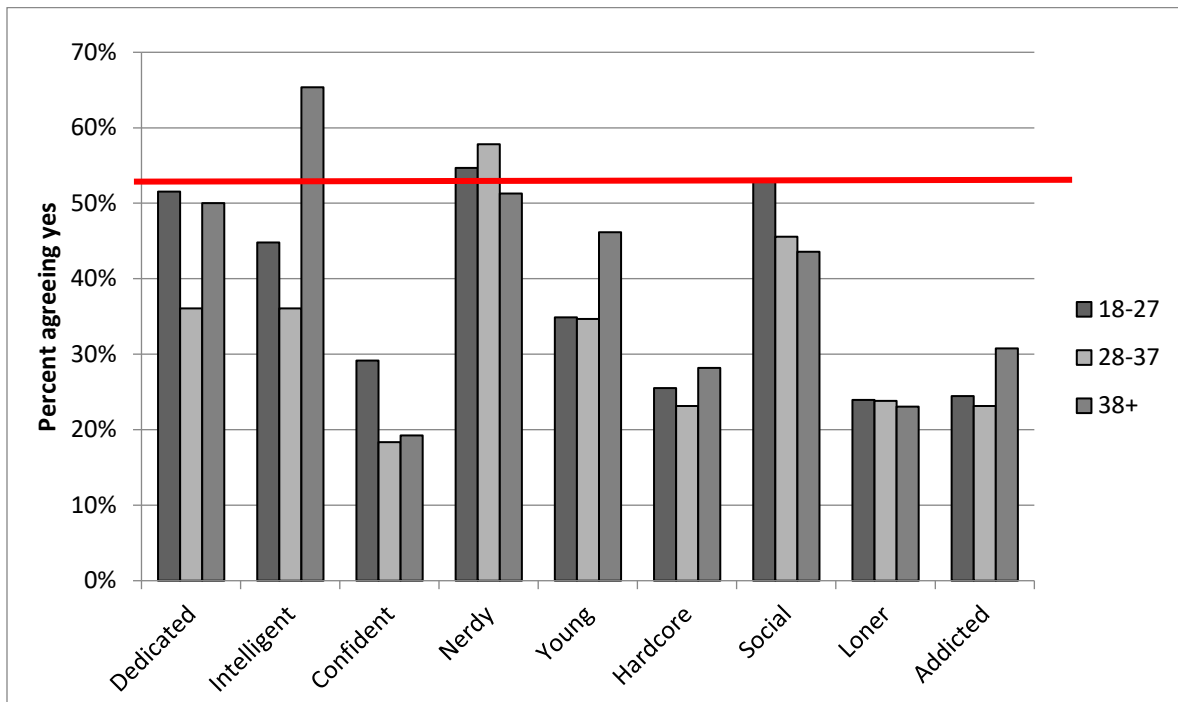
Figure 2:How Video Game Players Describe the "Average Gamer."

5.2.3 Chapter Conclusion

These findings might be understood by recognizing that Millennials have GenX and Boomer parents and perhaps other older family members, and perhaps these younger players feel more stigmatized by their parents and older relatives. Contrarily, GenX and Boomer video game players might be seen as "cool" to their children and younger family members. Additionally, GenXers and Boomers are more likely to be financially established and suffer less stress from

familial expectations around models of the good life, but still experience stigmatization by peers, such as friends and coworkers.

While the models of success and the good life were similar across all sample groups, it may be that Millennials experienced less consonance when considering the financial aspects of the good life model. This was to be expected because Millennials (under age 36) are still young and working towards financial stability, owning a home etc. Perhaps, due to the current economy, US job market, and rise in housing costs, even hard-working, video game playing, Millennials are finding it difficult to get ahead financially. However, due to a consensus around living the good life and the financial aspects of that model, video game players seem to be impacted by the notion that they are lazy, unproductive members of society, i.e., deviants. Millennials also appear to suffer more from stigmatization by parents and older family members who do not understand video gaming as a newer technology that will, no doubt, become an acceptable and normal household activity in the same way that radio, television, and rock-and-roll became socially normalized over time.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

"…why people do things in a particular way

must always be in terms of the historical and social

environment in which they live…" (Boch 2012).

Video game players often times feel labeled as social deviants and stigmatized as lazy, unhealthy, time wasters, and other negative stereotypes. In this thesis, I questioned how conflicting cultural understandings in academia as well as popular media sources might influence this stigmatization of players, and found that players attempt to manage stigma by concealing their interest and engagement with video games, an activity that they truly enjoy. Furthermore, stigmatization alienates players from unsupportive non-players and sets them apart as social deviants, with notions that players are either prone to violence, are lazy time wasters, or even that their intensive interest in gaming should classify them as addicts, thereby impacting the subjective well-being of players from different generational/age groups.

Furthermore, video gaming research is a critical issue and time is of the essence as internet gaming behavioral addiction is currently listed under Section III of the DSM-5 as a "condition warranting more clinical research before it might be considered for inclusion in the main book as a formal disorder" (APA, 2013). It is for this reason that I provided examples to show how these misunderstandings might inform inappropriate medical diagnoses of so-called "addiction" (Kardefelt-Winther, 2017).

This study also aimed to understand how conflicting cultural models around video gaming influences stigmatization and lowers players' cultural consonance, or feelings of fitting-in, thereby impacting players' subjective well-being, even eliciting currently defined

"symptoms" of behavioral addiction such as withdrawing from "real-life" (stigmatizing) relationships and concealing their interest in video gaming for fear of judgement (APA, 2013).

Additionally, it was central for this project to examine how video game players from different generational or technological cohorts might experience low cultural consonance within their non-gaming social networks because of their interest in video gaming. More simply, I looked at how the relationship between cultural models of living the good life might influence low consonance, thereby impacting the subjective well-being of video game players across different generational/age groups, as recent work suggests that people who do not experience cultural consonance, i.e., do not fit-in and are not in-sync with cultural expectations, often-times experience distress and are at risk for health problems (Dressler, 2000; 2005).

I hypothesized that video game players of different generational/age groups and the broader US culture might cognize contradictory models regarding what it means to live the good life and found that when comparing video game players of different generational/age groups there were no significant differences in the way these groups modeled the good life. For example, interview and survey participants agreed that housing, job satisfaction, income, and health are important aspects of living the good life. However, Millennials, as opposed to many people of older generations who might own homes, have established careers, and have some financial stability, might adapt to their situation by immersing themselves in video game play where they can achieve goals, earn rewards, find social acceptance, and experience cultural consonance within video gaming communities.

I also hypothesized that cultural models of normative and deviant behavior (stigma) impact video game players' subjective well-being and perpetuate symptoms of behavioral addiction, and found from survey responses that younger players exhibited more symptoms

of behavioral addiction when correlated with stigmatization by family and friends. In other words, survey data showed that behavioral addiction symptoms decreased as age increased and this was correlated with family and friend stigmatization.

6.1. Expected Project Significance and Intellectual Merit

This study aimed to benefit participants by illuminating the emic perspectives of those who enjoy playing video games. I also intended to provide academia and the public with a better understanding of how individuals within subcultural communities might experience distress from stigmatization. My hope is that this thesis might bring clarity and understanding to those who knowingly or unwittingly stigmatize video game players and other individuals who do not fit-in with socially constructed cultural models. If individuals are stigmatized for enjoying a hobby such as video game play—how much more might our society stigmatize diversity in all areas of life? Additionally, with the increase of global mental health initiatives, understanding emic perspectives is crucial for mental health workers and policy makers to recognize how conflicting cultural models do indeed influence stigmatization and impact the subjective well-being of those who are deemed as "different." Likewise, mental health workers will no doubt benefit from exploring cultural models (D'Andrade, 1995), cultural consonance, (Dressler, 2000), stigmatization (Goffman, 1963), and cultural context when determining diagnosis criteria for proposed behavioral addictions such as video gaming.

By examining video game players' perceptions of stigmatization with special attention to players from different generational groups, the results of this study demonstrate how future video game research can benefit by including and comparing individuals from various generational/age groups and not focusing solely on teens and young adults, as GenX and Boomers also deal with video game stigmatization and stigma management. Most importantly, this thesis demonstrates

how popular media and the medical community might sometimes relay negative messages to the

public that influence the stigmatization of millions of people who play video games regularly

without problem.

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APPENDIX I SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Section 1: INITIAL NARRATIVE

1)   Please tell me your age?

2)   What is your occupation or means of livelihood?

3)   When did you first begin playing video games and what got you started?

4)   Does anyone else in your immediate or extended family play video games?

5)   What is the best part about playing video games?

6)   Overall, is your online play somehow linked or related to specific events that occurred in your life?

7)   Have you made any changes to your attitude, personality, or approach towards work and/or social situations because of your interest in gaming?

8)   Do people at work, school, church etc. know that you play video games? (why or why not)?

9)   What are some things that you do regularly (activities, hobbies, habits, superstitions, etc.) that you feel help you relieve stress, stay grounded, or get the most out of life?

10)   What is your top priority in life?

Section 2: PROTOTYPE NARRATIVE

1)   What would you say is the average age of people who play video games?

2)   What would you say is the average income of those who spend a lot of time playing video games?

3)   Would you consider yourself to be a "gamer"?

4)   What word or words would you use to describe people who play video games a lot?

5)   What are some of the terms that gamers use when referring to someone who plays video game for long periods of time? (Please list as many terms/words as you can recall and explain what they mean to you)

6)   What are some of the terms that non- players use when referring to someone who plays video game for long periods of time? (Please list as many terms/words as you can recall and explain what they mean to you)

7)   If you were to describe what gaming is to someone who knows nothing about it, what would you say?

8)   Describe the "average" American who plays video games.

9)   On average, how long and how often do you play and how do you think this compare to other players?

10)   In what ways are you similar to other people who play video games?

11)   In what ways do you see yourself as different from other gamers?

12)   How would you define happiness?

13)   What qualities or traits does a happy person have?

14)   What does a happy person do during their leisure time?

Section 3: EXPLANATORY MODEL NARRATIVE

1)   How has gaming changed your understanding of yourself?

2)   How would you describe yourself to someone who didn't know you?

3)   How would you describe the lifestyle, values, and qualities of someone who is living "the good life"?

4)   Do you think of video gaming like other hobbies or pastimes, with which one becomes particularly engaged or interested? (if Yes, please explain)

5)   Do you think gamers might find relief from life's uncertainties by immersing in virtual worlds found in video games? (please explain)

6)   Do you think the experience of male gamers is much different from the experience of female gamers?

7)   If female: What about being a female gamer is there that male gamers could never understand?

8)   On a sliding scale between completely cohesive and completely scattered, how would you characterize the "community" of gamers in America?

9)   Do you think there is a shared gaming culture that you are part of? (If yes, how so?)

Section 4. IMPACT ON LIFE

1)   What are some of the changes you notice in yourself when you are gaming regularly?

2)   Have you ever felt anxious or depressed when you are unable to play the games you enjoy? (Please explain)

3)   Would you say that the age group, or generation, a player belongs to will affect his or her experience as a gamer? In what ways?

4)   Has gaming changed your ideas about success or "the good life"? (If yes, how so?)

5)   What area of your life would you say has the greatest day-to-day impact on your well-being?

6)   How has gaming changed your sense of wellbeing? (both positive and/or negative)

7)   Have you ever seriously considered not gaming or limiting your time spent gaming?

8)   Do you feel like your non-gaming friends and peers look down on you for gaming?

9)   How often do you socialize with non-gamers?

10)   How many other gamers do you know? Is there a sense of community?

11)   How do you communicate with other gamers? (in game, Facebook, skype etc.)

12)   Have you been surprised by anything that people have said about people who play video games? Stereotypes/stigmas

13)   Some people have spoken of intensive video game play as an addiction. (Have you ever considered that you might be "addicted" to video games or do you think people can be addicted to video games)?

14)   Is there anything else you'd like to share about you experiences as a (20, 30, 40 something etc.) gamer?

APPENDIX II FIELD SURVEY

TYPE OF GAME. What type of video games do you play?

- MMORPG's (massive multiplayer online role-playing games like World of Warcraft)

- MOBA's (massive online battle arenas like League of Legends)

- RTS (real-time strategy games like StarCraft)

- FPS (first-person shooters like Call of Duty)

- Sports games (like FIFA Soccer)

- Fighting games (like Super Smash Bros.)

- Phone apps (like Candy Crush)

- Other (8)

GAMING FREQUENCY-INVOLVEMENT. Overall, how would you rate your level of

involvement with video games?

- Not very involved

- Somewhat involved

- Involved

- Very involved

- Extremely involved

GAMING FREQUENCY-DAYS. How many days per week do you play video games?

- 1 day

- 2 days

- 3 days

- 4 days

- 5 days

- 6 days

- 7 days

GAMING FREQUENCY-HOURS. In general, how many hours per week do you play video games?

- 0-10 hours

- 10-20 hours

- 20-30 hours

- 30-40 hours

- 40 + hours

STIGMA. How much do you agree that the following people feel that gaming is a bad habit or a waste of time?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Mainstream society	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐
The media	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐
People I meet online	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐
Members of my family	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐
My offline friends	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐
People I know at work or school	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐
The most important person in my life (e.g., spouse, partner, friend)	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐

SATISFACTION WITH LIFE. To what extent do you agree with the following?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some what Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Some what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
In most ways my life is close to my ideal.	•	•	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The conditions of my life are excellent.	•	•	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am satisfied with my life.	•	•	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	•	•	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	•	•	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

ATTENTION CHECK. Sometimes people rush through surveys. This is a verification page, please choose somewhat agree.

- Strongly Disagree

- Disagree

- Somewhat Disagree

- Neither Agree nor Disagree

- Somewhat Agree

- Agree

- Strongly Agree

LONELINESS. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I often feel that I lack companionship	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I often feel left out	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel isolated from others	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is no one I can turn to	•	• ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

POSITIVE/NEGATIVE AFFECT. In the following questions, please describe your mood in general. Please fill in one number to show how much you feel that way in general.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Interested	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Alert	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attentive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Excited	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Enthusiastic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Inspired	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Proud	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Determined	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strong	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Active	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Distressed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Upset	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Guilty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ashamed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hostile	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Irritable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Nervous	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Jittery	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Scared	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Afraid	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

VIDEO GAMING ADDICTION. How well do each of the following statements describe you?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
In the past 12 months, have you often played video games longer or more frequently than you intended to?	•	• □	□	□	□
In the past 12 months, have you made any attempts to either cut down, control, or stop your video game play?	•	• □	□	□	□
In the past 12 months, is there anyone else who would say that you have had difficulty controlling your video game play, regardless of whether you agreed with them or not?	•	• □	□	□	□
In the past 12 months, would you say you have been preoccupied with video games?	•	• □	□	□	□

In the past 12 months, when you were not playing video games did you often experience irritability, restlessness, or strong cravings for it?	•	•	□	□	□	□
In the past 12 months, did you find you needed to play video games more often to achieve the same level of excitement?	•	•	□	□	□	□
In the past 12 months, have you often lied to people about your video game play or often concealed the extent of your video game play from other people?	•	•	□	□	□	□
In the past 12 months, have you often played video games to escape bad moods or other troubles?	•	•	□	□	□	□
In the past 12 months...please choose "describes me moderately well."	•	•	□	□	□	□

HEALTH. Relative to the average person in the US, how physically healthy are you?

- Far below average

- Moderately below average

- Slightly below average

- Average

- Slightly above average

- Moderately above average

- Far above average

FINANCES. Relative to the average person in the US, how much money do you make?

- Far below average

- Moderately below average

- Slightly below average

- Average

- Slightly above average

- Moderately above average

- Far above average

LIVING CONDITIONS. Relative to the average person in the US, how nice are your living conditions?

- Far below average

- Moderately below average

- Slightly below average

- Average

- Slightly above average

- Moderately above average

- Far above average

EMPLOYMENT. Relative to the average person in the US, how satisfied are you with your job situation?

- Far below average

- Moderately below average

- Slightly below average

- Average

- Slightly above average

- Moderately above average

- Far above average

AGE. How old are you?

SEX. What is your gender?

- Male (0)

- Female

ETHNICITY. How would you BEST describe your ethnicity?

- Euro-American (white)

- African-American or Black

- Hispanic, Latino, or Chicano

- Asian-American

- Native American Indian

- Middle Eastern

- East or Southeast Asian

- Multiple (8)

- Other (9) _____

SES. How would you describe your social economic class?

- Lower or working class

- Lower middle class

- Middle class

- Upper middle class

- Upper class

EDUCATION. Highest level of education

- High school

- Some college

- College degree

- Advanced degree

- Technical school

ENGLISH FLUENCY. How well do you understand English?

- I do not speak English (0)

- I understand most English words

- I am fluent in English

RELIGION. How would you BEST describe your faith tradition?

- Atheist - none

- Agnostic (uncertain)

- Catholic

- Christian (non-Catholic)

- Native American Traditionalist

- Muslim

- Jewish

- Latter Day Saints (Mormon) (8)

- Buddhist (9)

- Spiritual but not Religious (10)

- Hindu (11)

- Other (12) _____