

Laura Haning  
Rhet 105 April  
4, 2006 Long  
Essay

## **Halo 2: Overtaking Video Games and Technological Entertainment**

After a quick couple of knocks on door number XXX I crack open the door and peek in to ensure that I am allowed in. No naked boys indicate a safe entrance to me, kind of. This all depends on what one considers safe. Immediately my nose detects an unfamiliar smell. The combination of used gym socks and stale food comes to mind, but also the fragrance brings to mind something foreign.

Although the smell is not good it is not necessarily bad, but just an awkward smell that I am not yet used to. Initially the smell is disturbing to me, but what becomes even more disturbing is that after being in the room for only a few minutes I have grown accustomed to it and no longer notice the smell. I now understand why when I first enter and comment about the awkward smell the boys look back with an awkward stare like they have no idea what I'm talking about.

Once I work my way past the weird aroma I find the residents of the dorm room, Subject Two and Subject Three. Most commonly you will find both in their computer chairs, or as Subject Three likes to call his, the captain's chair. More often times than not Subject Two has begun gaming before I ever get to the room, and he is engaging in online Halo 2 with Subject One, another freshman who is two doors down the hall. Unlike the original, Halo: Combat Evolved, Halo 2 allows video gamers to play online with or against other real people, rather than just a computer. With an internet connection X-Box Live, the gaming system the boys play Halo on, is more technologically advanced than ever and has transformed the gaming world forever. I knew there was something special about Halo 2 and X-Box Live, but to find out the many capabilities of this new technology was an utter shock to me.

Laura Haning  
Rhet 105 April  
4, 2006 Long  
Essay

Subject Two has been a bountiful use of information including that the ever so popular Halo 2 is a first person shooter (FPS) combat game with many different options. An FPS means what a player sees is the same view as the game's character would. A gamer can perfect his skills offline by himself in a mode called campaign. In this way he is simply playing this game like all other video games. X-Box Live enables players to play with one another on teams of up to 8 players (Halo 2). Through the internet a gamer has the option of playing with people he knows down the hall, or across the country, or playing with random people by wearing a headset players can communicate with one another, much like a telephone, but the sound is resonated through the television speakers. Most often a true Halo 2 gamer will play with people he is familiar with so that they can communicate with one another freely and be aware of the capabilities of their partner(s). When playing online winning and losing will affect a player's ranking. The maximum ranking, which Subject One informs me is impossible to reach, is 50. Each performance in every game determines if a player loses or earns points toward his ranking.

Within these online games there are many different options of play. A player can play every man for himself, but the only two games I have ever observed this group playing is Team Hardcore and Team Slayer. Within Team Hardcore there are a variety of games. The two favorite games within this mode are Capture the Flag and King of the Hill. The guys told me in Capture the Flag one team guards their own flag while trying to capture the other teams and return it back to their safety zone. I only found Subject One and Subject Two playing this game one or two times and as I recall it was less intense, and therefore less entertaining for me. In Team Slayer mode it is intense where the teams are at war with one another and fight to the death. The first team to 50 kills wins (Halo 2). Because there are not 50 players on a team, Subject Two told me that the players come back to life after being killed, or "spawn" to continue fighting. From

my perspective Team Slayer seems to be the most intense and Subject One himself said that when

playing Team Slayer there is to be absolutely no talking. Team Slayer is top notch serious time; it is not about fun, it is about doing well and winning. While Subject Two cares about the game and may be in a zone he is able to carry on a light conversation and does not get furious at a little talking like Subject One.

It is immediately apparent when going into my field site exactly how intrigued the players are.

Although Subject Three's Halo interest only decreased as this observance has gone on due to Sims, his new computer game he picked up, the first few visits I commonly found him and Subject Two playing together. In this instance they talk to each other and help coach each other to do the best that they can. The coaching and/or bickering that goes on amongst them is seemingly asinine, but so significant to them. This communication with one another is exactly the type of initial assumption about gaming and gamers, along with others, that the boys fulfilled.

Before the ethnography all began I had my preconceptions about gaming that I drew from previous experience and common TV or movie scenes. I would picture a dark, messy room with an odd-smelling stench. A group of teenage boys would be chowing down on chips and pop while huddled around a semi-circle hovered around the television shouting at the game or one another. Finally, I noted that that I could picture the group sitting there long enough for the smell to become worse and they obtain a greasy appearance. Believe it or not, many of these assumptions and images I had about gaming proved to be true. I have already mentioned the odd-smelling room, but the majority of the time the room would also be dark. Most often the boys will game the most during the night time, and usually the lights are not on. It seems so cliché but more than once I noted a pizza box on the floor along with more than enough shoes to wear for a week, accompanied by dirty clothes, pop cans, papers, any all sorts of trash.

Laura Haning  
Rhet 105 April  
4, 2006 Long  
Essay

All of these were aspect I expected, but of course there were items found I was not expecting also. To help mask the smell there was constantly a bottle of Febreze on Subject Three's desk that upon my request he would use. He did however claim that it could only be used when absolutely necessary. If it were used all the time they would grow accustomed to it and then it would not cover the smell at times when they needed it the most. As time went on Subject Two was usually playing online with Subject One, instead of Subject Three, and when doing so he can be found hunched over in his chair with his elbows not so much resting, but more like jabbing into his knees. His headset that allows him to communicate with his teammate(s) and trash talk to his opponents has obviously been neglected due to how much duct tape it is wrapped in. With Subject Three clicking away on his computer and Subject Two deeply concentrated on Halo the scene in the room is intense.

I take a seat on Subject Three's bed only after clearing the maybe clean, maybe dirty pile of clothes.

After my initial visit I noted that the intensity was the same thing that shocked, intrigued, and disturbed me. Before the project began I noted that one possible similarity between the gamers and I was a competitive nature. I consider myself very competitive in general and I seemed to believe that gamers were competitive with their games. This definitely proved to be a correct correlation of similarities. Through the internet and Halo 2 players are competing with other human beings, which is one factor the guys claim make it more competitive. Subject One told me that a person can beat the computer easily after he becomes an expert, but because he is actually competing with other people online it becomes very competitive. Both Subject Two and Subject One claim that it is the competitiveness that draws them back so frequently and plays a role of an addicting factor. "It's so addicting because there's always people better than you and there's always room to improve. It's probably the most competitive game I've seen in my entire life," stated by Subject Two. Subject One threw in his two cents by saying,

“And your friends are always saying they’re better than you.” They said that it is always a new challenge. A gamer is always improving and playing new people and attempting to improve his ranking. They do not just play a level and advance to the next until they reach the end. Players engage in combat against others and continue to play game after game to do better do so as long as they wish. A competitive spirit will always be striving to do better than the last time and continue playing so long that some may begin to classify this time invested into the game as addiction.

According to Schlimme’s article gamers will allow the psychological effect of the sunk cost fallacy to overtake their minds and drive the addictive cycle further. The sunk cost fallacy is when people believe that because they have invested time and energy into a project they should continue to do so until their goal is reached, otherwise all that previous time spent has been wasted. In retrospect, the time already invested is a sunk cost that should not be considered for future decisions, because it is time one cannot get back, but this logic is overlooked by gamers. This is yet more evidence that their competitive nature is what continues to drive them to want to play more and more, which some may try to pin as addiction.

There are many viewpoints today about video game addiction. According to an article called “Video Game Addiction: Do we need a Video Gamers Anonymous?” addiction can be classified as the chronic disease of the inability to control the use of a psychoactive substance/behavior. By that definition these guys would not consider themselves to be addicted and neither would I. Addicted is a term used so loosely today. People so freely say they are addicted to something that they love and enjoy, but are they really going to experience a life altering change if they have to live without it? In most cases, most likely not!

Addiction has been linked to college students allowing video games to occupy their entire days and nights. Almost half of students who play video or computer games online say that

gaming distracts them from studying, and that 9% use gaming a means to avoid studying or homework (Weaver). Many college students can also be found playing video games rather than attending class. However, from both personal experience and observation I have found that many times it is not that a student is skipping class to play games, but rather for personal preference.

Occasionally I choose sleep over class or decide a class is not necessary that day and end up spending my time doing other activities like chatting online, a result of staying home, but I do not stay home as a result of these activities. Subject One completely takes off Mondays and Wednesdays. He claims it is not to Halo though. It is true that he is not playing Halo instead of going to class. He maintains that these classes are “stupid” and attendance is unnecessary, so he makes better use of his time. Knowing Subject One’s lazy character I believe he probably skip those classes regardless if Halo existed or not.

It is important to mention some interesting details about Subject One and his gaming habits. I chose to use his room as my field site a couple times throughout this semester, and when I did he always told me to step into his office, as he likes to call his room. The first time I observed him game I was in for a great shock. I entered a room similar to Subject Two and Subject Three’s. I found clothes were piled on the bed, in the corner behind his desk, and strung out across the floor. His entire wardrobe seems to be kept everywhere but his closet. He says that the floor is there for a reason, and that if it is clear you are not using it. He too has adopted the “gamer position” with the hunched over elbows on the knees. The overhead light is not on, but just a desk lamp in the back. No harsh smell taints this room that can most likely be attributed to his roommate’s cleanliness. While gaming Subject One says he is “tweakin out”. While the word tweak is commonly known slang its meaning has been altered to many different definitions by the males on the

fourth floor of the dorm. Shockingly a light pop rock song is playing in the background.

Throughout the visit there is a solid mix of techno, pop rock, and country, yes country, playing in the background. I notice some Dixie Chicks and some SheDaisy, and he later admitted to loving Kelly Clarkson. The country is all light while the techno is much like something one would expect to hear at a campus bar. These are not the typical music types I expected to hear from the stereotype of a gamer. While Subject One's actions sometimes go beyond the stereotype this music style is definitely unique. I was prepared to listen to perhaps a little techno with a collection of rock and more adrenaline pumping music. I was taken by surprise by the play list. However, this mostly soft and easy listening music should not be confused for the environment of the room nor the context in which Subject One participates in Halo.

As intense as the scene gets in room 463, it had not even prepared me for the tension in this room. It is immediately obvious that Subject One takes his Halo extremely seriously and it is something near and dear to his heart. While Subject Two may carry on a light conversation with me while in his room there is no speaking to Subject One unless I want to be yelled at. Subject One's roommate is Subject Five, but known on the floor as BlackBalls. Prior to living in the dorm Subject Five was never known as anything but his given name. The name had already been created on Subject One's X-Box Live system and when Subject Five was registering to join the madness that is Halo Subject One would not allow him to make a new name, but forced him to register with BlackBalls. Regardless, "Blackballs" will occasionally chime in with some input to help coach Subject One and the most common response from Subject One is, "Shut the fuck up, Blackballs. You don't even know anything." A simple conversation would seem distracting to Subject One, and while his background music may be soothing his gaming is anything but. It is as if when these guys slip the headset on and get the controller in hand they transform into completely different people. As vulgar as Subject One's statements may be it is absolutely hilarious to witness. The extreme and sometimes offensive

languages he uses in gaming was one of the many things I noted as shocking and disturbing to me. Of course the language he uses is a result from his intensity over the game, which I also noted as very surprising to me initially. There may be a little joking and laughing going on in room 462, but in Subject One' room you will not hear anything but loud profanities, game talk, and communication. Subject One is constantly coaching, and fiercely yelling at Subject Two telling him what to do, and informing him of what he is doing through the headset, using the same telephone-like technology through the internet I mentioned earlier. Just as much as Subject One communicates with Subject Two he is talking trash to the opponents who are sometimes 50 years old and sometimes 12. Each game takes about 15 minutes and after about every other game Subject One can be found barging into Subject Two's room to critique his play and discuss the game. Subject One told me when he is playing in Team Slayer there is to be absolutely no talk. That is top notch serious time. Then it is not about fun, it is about doing well and winning. Subject One considers himself the top-dog in Halo and I believe most acknowledge him in the same way. While his skill and passion drive this behavior he can sometimes become obnoxious even. It seems like if they love this so much it should be something that is fun and they enjoy, but while playing with all of the yelling and screaming it is hard for me to determine exactly what kind of fun they are having.

How did something that was supposed to be enjoyable turn out to be something so intense? I compare the way these guys look at gaming to how an athlete looks at his sport. A person does an activity because he enjoys it, but to be successful, which is the main goal, it has to be worked at and taken seriously. It is not just about fun and games. It is about winning.

One factor that was important in realizing how these guys see themselves was through the interview. I quoted Subject One as saying "I think I play Halo a lot, but I'm not like a video game enthusiast. I play one game." Whether he plays one game or twenty different games if he

spends the amount of time he does a day, which we figured to be three hours on average, it seems that you are a video game enthusiast. While his stats he retrieved online for me report him playing a total of about eleven days in three months and two days this does not log time spent playing offline. A discussion between Subject Two and I about gaming and Subject One we determined that these are quite incorrect considering they say Subject One once played 13 hours straight, even if he denies it. They see themselves as a couple of average young men who are passing the time, having fun, but doing something that is not just fun, but also important. They admit they fit the stereotype of gamers as far as being males who spend hours gaming. They say they spend hours doing it because they sit down to play and the "time just flies". But do they chose to stay in and play video games rather than go out for a night on the town? No.

"Halo 2 is everywhere. It's more of a mainstream thing now," Subject Two told me. This means it is becoming more popular and therefore more respectable as an acceptable pastime. Subject Two said he has read about J.J. Redick and Adam Morrison, two of college basketballs biggest stars, can be caught gaming together on Halo. X-Box Live's internet connection allows them to play together while one attends Duke and the other Gonzaga. It is an average leisure activity for young adult males to do that is socially acceptable, but the fad is spreading among age and gender.

There is also much debate about children who are socially misfit to turn to video games to engage in place of group activity, or that playing video games will cause a child to lack in the development of social skills. Because today it seems everyone from the cool kids, to the nerds, to the jocks are playing Halo, it must be a social activity. Maybe it is only because I know so many people do play video games, particularly Halo, that I have come to believe it to be a

normal leisure activity, the same way my subculture has done. *Halo: Combat Evolved* and Halo 2 have revolutionized the video game world along with the social world.

*Halo: Combat Evolved* was so popular that the anticipation for Halo 2 resulted in a record 1.5 million preorders of the game. Halo 2 had also landed another record selling 7 million copies worldwide one year after its release in November of 2004. For the first time ever the video game market produced greater total revenue than the movie industry. This lead has yet to be broken either (Halo 2). Halo 2 has not only revolutionized the video game world, but also is having a total impact on technology all together. Perhaps there was not only a large increase in the purchase of video games, but also a resulting decline in movies. In the past years entertainment attention is possibly just being shifted from television and movies and being replaced by video games. While video games are overtaking television there were always particular times when it was certain field notes could not be taken. Subject Two has three shows a week that he watches that include *24*, *Prison Break*, and *Lost*. These are all intense, dramatic, action filled shows that compare to his game much like his gaming is. Subject One on the other hand refers to *24* as “gay” but cannot miss his *Desperate Housewives* on Sunday evenings. He claims he just loves the drama. Subject One continues to prove to be a paradox. By witnessing his gaming habits other details of his life become an utter contradiction. The issue is that Halo is always there and readily available to play whenever they want, whereas these shows are only on at a certain time. I wonder if they had to choose between watching their shows and playing Halo which they would choose. While technology could allow these guys to tape or Tivo the shows, I believe after all the anticipation of the playing of the show they would not want to wait any longer to watch it. This is yet another bit of technology influencing their lives.

Laura Haning  
Rhet 105 April  
4, 2006 Long  
Essay

When thumbing through the different notes I have taken along with all the conclusions I have drawn from them, I found one of the most beneficial aspect of them to be the three questions Fieldworking suggested I ask myself after every field visit. "What surprised me?" "What intrigued me?" "What disturbed me?" many times I found repetitive answers, but that means something, and all the other conclusions I drew were helpful to determine what it is I have gained from this experience. Although many different aspects and documents I have concocted help identify how my views, opinions, and ideas changed through every step of the way.

More than once I found myself responding to the three questions with the same answers. While my overall opinion of my subjects has not changed significantly there are small aspects about their characters that I would have never otherwise noticed before. It is crazy, but sometimes I will find myself sitting in their rooms watching and listening to them without taking notes, simply because I want to. The words that are blurted out of their mouths at some times are unbelievable to me. Subject One is so passionate about the game that he talks so quickly, mumbling so many different words, but then he will blurt out some obscene expression that someone can hear all the way down the hall. This is no exaggeration either. The hallways of the dorm form a square and Subject One' room is in the middle of a long hallway, and Subject Two said that one day he was in the next short hallway and could hear Subject One yell some vulgar language. When he went to Subject One room to tell him, the door was shut. Now I know these boys are college students and we do not all tend to have the cleanest language, but some of the statements that come out of Subject One mouth are just astonishing to me. I ponder where he even comes up with putting the things he says together.

Although these are dirty statements, I have brought in my friends before to listen and watch the guys play because it is so entertaining. Occasionally I will find myself laughing uncontrollably at the way Subject Two and Subject Three talk a million miles a minute and say

everything twice. "I'm gonna go, I'm gonna go." My personal favorite statement from Subject Three and

Subject Two's room is "Nade 'em! Nade 'em!" Nade is short for grenade so this statement just means to throw a grenade at the enemy, but hardly ever will one hear that statement be said only once. If a person associates in this environment long enough, he may begin to repeat short statements himself, as I have noticed I occasionally do. I asked how all of this repeating words started and they all said they did not know, but that it has now turned into a habit.

Prior to this experience I would have never known about Subject One dirty mouth and extreme passionate and intensity while playing, and in the beginning I did not understand it. Throughout every step of the way I found myself gaining more and more understanding of just why he was so deeply involved. I have said it before and I will say it again, the game is so competitive. They are trying to earn bragging rights, constantly trying to be better for their own satisfaction. It is their competitive nature that drives them to take it so seriously. I can greatly relate to this because I will do something and to others it may not seem like I am having fun, but I enjoy it because of how competitive I am. I love to win, just like these guys do. It is like a rush of satisfaction when we have worked hard for something to achieve what we desire. While Subject One is definitely the most passionate about Halo 2, and Subject Two a close second, I have noticed more and more gaming on that floor than I ever would have before.

Subject One and Subject Two can be found gaming the most, especially Halo, but I have come across a bout eight other guys on the floor playing some type of video and/or computer game at least once this semester. Because of this, and because gaming and Halo have become more of a "mainstream thing" everyone sees what they are doing as totally normal, as have I. While some may play more than others gaming has become a normal thing for the young male adult to do. Not only are the young male adults playing anymore though. Many children are beginning to

engage in playing video games at younger ages all the time. Also it is not uncommon to find a middle aged man getting wrapped up in Halo's competitive temperament either. Even females are beginning to enjoy video games more than ever. While women have always been noted as playing a computer game on occasion such as solitaire or minesweeper, more and more young women are getting involved in Halo due to its extreme popularity (Weaver). In the interview Subject Two talked about a girl he had been told to look up on facebook by a friend because she was a Halo gamer too. While we have seen facts of Halo dominating the video game world, and even technological entertainment, it is also beginning to become more popular overall in general. It is drawing new found fans in middle aged men, teenage girls, and young children, and instead of watching television and movies they are now playing games instead.

Through observance, experience, and research I have found that the gaming these guys do is nothing but normal. Perhaps they play a little more than others, but probably not near as much as some. It is a social gathering for them and chance to do something that they enjoy and get their adrenaline pumping. Addicted? No. Would they be devastated if Halo were not around to play? Probably, but I do not believe that they would have psychological effects from it. Halo 2 is the most popular video game to ever into the market, and to me it is now understandable why.