Redefining the Stereotype: Video Games as a Center of Socialization
Among College Students
ANTH 411_06-04

EVOKE

About the Ethnographer
Anthropology major. Possible videogame nut?

So, what's my stake in this project?

To share a very personal story, I played Final Fantasy XI, an MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role-playing game), for about 2 years. While playing this game, I had a number of social relationships with people in the game, but the most important one is "Cie"

I met "Cie" through my linkshell (a group of people, kind of like a guild), and although we didn't talk much, apparently he had an attraction to me ("You didn't annoy me", he said).

The turning point happened in May 2005 when my hard drive died. I was in my dorm's computer lab, in IM contact with a computer sci friend who could hopefully get my laptop back up. And out of the blue, Cie contacted me over IM to make sure that I was all right. What happened from there was a week of long conversations over instant messaging and the realization that we were both deeply attracted to each other on an intellectual and emotional level. Unfortunately, after a week, I had to leave the dorms and go back home with no internet. That entire summer was spent talking on the phone to each other and sending photos back and forth over cell-phone.

On exactly Halloween 2005, when the apartment lease expired, Cie took a chance and moved the 1000 mile difference between Florida and Champaign. The rest, as they say, is history. We've been dating long-distance for about a year and a half and actually dating in real life for almost a year.

While Cie and I are less into video games than we were when we met, the truth it without games and the social connections they provided, neither of us would be as happy as we are now.

EXPLORE

Question
What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?
The question I'm most interested in right now is how are video games, and the culture associated with video games influence the social life on campus? Where is it used as a social glue? How is the stereotype of the typical 'gamer' (antisocial, intellectual, unhygenic, obsessed with video games) enforced or defied on campus through these interactions?

Plan
How will you go about answering your inquiry?
My plan is to use specific observation and interviews to paint a portrait of the ways video
games are used on campus in a social context.

I have done two interviews so far, the first one with my friend "Meg" and the second one with a "Dee" someone who works at the undergrad library in connection with the gaming documents page.

I have also done two observations, the first one at the UIUC Gaming night at the Undergrad, and the second one at the EB games the night of the launch of the game Final Fantasy XII (a highly anticipated release for fans of role-playing games). I have a third observation planned out at the Illini Union to watch DDR, and I will use a modified time allocation study to see how people use the Dance-Dance revolution machine, and how long people watch, and how long do people play.

Finally, as a sort of impromptu addition, I've noticed that some of the people in another class of mine will spend the little five minute breaks before class talking about video games, and I have some snippets and topics of conversation written down. So while not exactly observation or interview, they are quite interesting.

Each episode is very specific, and while they will not be able to fully encompass the video game culture of the campus, I do believe it will be enough to show how video games are used in a social context.

**OBSERVE**

**What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?**

Informal Observations:

In one of my classes, the TA and four or five of the male students would have short conversations at the beginning of class regarding video games.

Most of the video game talk revolved around a game called Guitar Hero, which is a game where the players 'play' various songs with the use of a guitar shaped controller. And in fact, I was asked by one of the guys in this class if I had seen him play in the tournament on Gaming Night (I hadn't).

While much of the talk was technical (about new types of controllers, features of the new Guitar Hero game that was about to be released, about which songs each person found difficult, and what difficulty level they played on), I also heard an interesting statement that the TA played the game with his son, but would eventually stop when his son could win against him regularly.

At one class before Thanksgiving break, there was talk about the new gaming consoles being released, and how people were standing in lines for almost a week in order to get them on their release dates, with resulting comments about how people sell their places in line to others, or how they buy extra consoles to sell over online auction sites.

And on yet another occasion, there was a mocking review by one of the students about the latest release in a popular series of football games. "It's all about the details" when discussing minor graphical improvements.

The interactions that fascinated me the most, were the ones between the TA and the students, as they seemed to connect through their mutual enjoyment of these games, and
the talk of using a video game as a father-son activity definitely fall into a use of video games that had not quite occurred to me.

**Dance Dance Revolution on the Time Allocation:**

This is modified from the Time Allocation study that was part of our reading. Instead of following around one person for a period of time and recording their activities, I did a very short version of Time Allocation on a place, specifically the Dance Dance Revolution machines down in the Illini Union Rec Room.

Background: Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) is a video game in which the player uses his or her feet to respond to commands given by the video game. The control pad is on the floor, and has four arrows (usually up, down, right, and left) that the player must step on in time with the music being played. The place where I observed had three of these machines, although one was out of order when I observed. The machines were the kind found in arcades, where the control pad is hard and elevated, with the crossbar at the back for keeping balance. This is compared to the home version where the control pad is soft and can be folded away for easy storage. Around the machines are tables and couches, many of them positioned so that people can observe someone playing DDR.

I did my observation on Tuesday December 5th between 2:00 p.m. and 2:45 p.m. When I arrived, all three machines were empty, and the only people in the DDR area of the recreation center were people who were talking or studying. At 2:06 a white male enters and goes to a machine and puts in a coin and this key type object. This person also takes off his pants (he's wearing shorts underneath), and places his belongings off to the side.

The subject then chooses a song from the menu and chooses his difficulty. The first song starts at 2:08, approximately 2 minutes after he arrives and lasts until 2:10. When this song ends, he selects another song and difficulty level. The second song starts at 2:10 and lasts until 2:12. And the third and final song for this game starts at 2:13 and ends at 2:15, where he puts in another coin and starts the process over.

He repeats the process with each song lasting about 1:30-2:00 minutes, and his second session lasts from 2:15 to 2:21.

Sometime during this session, an Asian male walked into the room and dropped a coin on the console.

When subject 1 finishes the second session, he puts on his coat and leaves at 2:23, and subject 2 gets on the console. He selects his songs as well, and at 2:25 the first guy leaves the recreation room, and the second subject starts his first song.

The song lasts from 2:25-2:27, but this subject takes longer to choose his songs, sometimes going back and forth between two songs. So his next song starts at 2:29 and it ends at 2:30. The third song lasts from 2:31-2:34.

Sometime during the second song, the first subject returns and puts a coin on the console and leaves.

At 2:34 the first subject returns, and picks up and puts away his coin, and then reinserts his key and pays for the game.
This time he plays from 2:35-2:43, and when he finishes and I have to leave, he is preparing another round.

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Temporally, the first thing I notice is that the songs themselves naturally divide into periods of time, with each song lasting between one and a half minutes and two and a half minutes. And that the arcade sessions usually last about eight minutes, with the extra time factoring in to choosing songs and looking at one's results after the songs. I also noticed that the first subject wanted to go multiple times on the same machine at least three times, while the second subject seemed content with his single turn.

Another thing I noticed was the tendency of people in the area to look up and watch for a little bit when someone played. Usually these looks weren't long, and most people chose to continue either with studying or socializing while watching either one of the subjects play, and as far as I could observe, the people watching did not know the players and vice versa.

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To get a better idea about time allocation on these machines, I think I would need to look at different times and situations. For example how does a group of people using DDR for social purposes use their time compared to these people who I think were using it for a workout (both were carrying water bottles and towels and came individually)? And how does the use now at the end of the semester compare with time use at the beginning of the semester? And how would it differ on the weekends compared to a weekday? Or evening into daytime?

The time allocation works for segmenting activities and making the researcher aware of how time is used in different parts of the procedures, and in that is good for understanding an unfamiliar process. Although I do not think it is so good for understanding what the process (in this case DDR) means to those who participate in it, both as spectators and participants.

Partial Transcript of my interview with Dee.

Has your perception of how people play video games changed?

It's grown a bit, I think. I understand a lot more because I was --the types of games I was familiar with are the ones you play at home, Playstation games or something. Especially these days the internet games, the massive multiplayer online games is a real big thing, a real big part of everything, and so I'm learning about those types of games, and a lot of other types that I haven't played before.

How would you respond to people who are concerned that video games, and particularly offering a collection of videogames at the Undergrad might have a harmful effect on students?

I encourage them to look into the research into that which does not generally show that to be the case. We actually have an article posted up on the website, a couple of them. Dmitri Williams who's the researcher who's coming to talk at our gaming night on Saturday, has done some interesting research about, for example, new kinds of social groups that form through things specifically World of Warcraft play, and massive multiplayer online games where people form new communities, virtual types of
communities. There's also evidence on both sides, one of the other common things people talk about is violence in video games, and so the research on that is pretty interesting as well, and showing both sides of that issue. I would say, as with anything we offer here. People say the same thing about print books we have, we have books on a lot of controversial issues and topics that take one side or another, gun control, for example. Having a book that says there shouldn't be gun control doesn't mean we're advocating that everyone go out and get a gun, that's sort of up to people to look at and make up their own mind, and as they do research on the topic, so they can get an understanding of the topic. I would say that videogames are no different in that respect, it's just another type of information that's conveyed in a different way, and it's really up to individual people to use it responsibly.

Do you think the library is trying to promote a particular type of way of using video games?

I think we're really just trying to put them out there, and we're trying to let people know about some of the ways that we're seeing them used on campus. In that respect, and really, and I think there's a lot of potentials for video games that people are and are not currently using them for, and so we certainly hope that people are creative with the collection, and try to find new and interesting ways to use it, so I would say that we're mostly people aware of ways that we've heard about video games being used.

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I originally conducted this interview before I had narrowed down my question to cover socialization and stereotypes, and so a lot of the Dee's responses, while informative and interested ended up not being relevant to the discussion at hand, with the above stuff being the most relevant, I believe.

The questions about how video games are used and his perception of other gamers I think reflect a plurality in the ways that video games are being used, at the university, and perhaps in the larger world. Even Dee, who in an earlier portion of the interview does say that he's does occasionally play videogames, found out how large a factor online gaming plays in the world of video games as a whole, which I think connects to the idea that people can use different types of video games in different types of ways. For example someone might play or watch a role-playing game, but have no interest in online gaming, or use a dancing type game (DDR, being the most famous) to get a workout while not wanting anything to do with video games otherwise, while someone else might just like playing solitaire on the computer at work and not even consider him or herself a gamer, and yet another person might embrace the whole 'gaming culture' and the associated image and stereotypes.

I included Dee's response to the concerns of negative effects on video games and asked for it, at the basis of the comments I recieved from my fellow researchers. Like Meg, he seems to emphasize personal responsibility, in particular with looking at information and research avaiable in order to make an informed and individual decisions about the content of a particular game. I also notice that he considers video games to not be content in themselves, but rather another way in which information is conveyed, and one that he places analogous to books.

In the rest of the interview, we discussed the gaming documents collection and website themselves, and I learned that much of it was made as a response to student and faculty needs, and that the library hopes that what they have available and show on the website reflects what is needed and wanted by the university community and how video games
are used here at the UIUC. For example, Dee keeps in touch informally with many of the
gaming groups on campus, and responds to faculty requests for video games. For
example, he spoke about the a professor in Aviation who wants to use flight simulator
games for her class in Human Responses. When asked about any other information he
wanted to add, he talked about the PLATO project, where people are working on
preserving and archiving video games in a way that researchers in the future can access
and study video games even when the consoles are no longer available.

On the night of Monday, October 30, I had the opportunity to do some special observing
down at the Electronics Boutique (EB games). The midnight launch of Final Fantasy XII,
the lastest game in the popular Final Fantasy series of role-playing games, and the first
solo, non-sequel continuation of the game since 2002, opened its doors at 11:00 p.m.

I had one single question as Cie and I drove down to the EB Games last night, "Who the
heck goes to the midnight launch of the game?" While I did have the game on pre-order
(had a copy reserved before the official release), if it were not for this project, I would not
have thought attending a midnight launch would be worth it, especially since I could not
actually play the game until Tuesday evening. So my informal hypothesis is that only the
'hardcore' gamers would attend. I wasn't even sure if there would be anyone attending a
midnight launch.

Cie and I arrived on the campus around 10:40, and gathered around the door at about
10:55 at night. The original crowd was perhaps 10 people, mostly white males, as I
believe I was the only female in the group when the doors opened. We waited outside on
Green Street, and people who passed by turned their heads to the crowd and stared for a
second before continuing on their way. The doors of the EB games opened at 11, and
everyone stood in line to pay for and recieve the copy of their game although no one
could actually leave until midnight because the game was not technically released until
October 31.

I'm sure EB games had vested economic and practical reasons for holding this 'midnight
launch'. According to one of the clerks working there, the available pre-orders (200 in all)
had been sold out. And so a midnight launch would prevent crowding and long lines
earlier in the day. Also, lined up in front of the counter were strategy guides for Final
Fantasy XII, both regular and special edition that the clerks were promoting. The special,
limited edition (complete with different covers and an artbook) was especially promoted,
with a 20% discount when purchased with the game. About 3 clerks, two at the counter
and one mingling around with the customers were there to run the event/control the
crowd. The store is decorated with posters of new releases, and there's a cardboard
display of FFXII (without the games) in the corner. The clerks who are working the
launch are wearing Final Fantasy XII t-shirts.

I made the assumption when I went in that most of the people who would arrive at the
midnight launch would arrive when the doors opened. This was a mistake. I'd say about
20 people had arrived by 11:10, and by this point, Cie, who had been waiting until the
line shortened, chose to join, seeing as the line of people only got longer. By 11:30 I'd
say about 40 people had arrived between those who were waiting in line and those who
had paid for and purchased a game and were now waiting until they could leave the store.
Shortly after, the doors to the EB were propped open and the line of people pooled
around the door. At that point, having the door open was as much a matter of comfort
(over 50 people in the store causes a lot of body heat) as it was to relieve some of the
crowding of the lines. The main set up of this event had a flow to it. The back was was
filled with people in line, and this single line split into two at the center of the store.
Then, when a person went to the counter, the clerk asked for their phone number to make
sure that the person actually had the game ordered. The customer then paid for the game (the clerk reminds them they can't leave the store until midnight), and then either went to the right or the left. The people who went to the left, would either involve themselves in playing the games on display, the demo version of Guitar Hero 2 (a game where the player 'performs' the musical number on screen with a guitar shaped controller) was on all three demo consoles, or they would simply crowd by the door, waiting to leave the store. Those who went to the right side of the store seemed to only be interested in the game, and the people here were more likely to find a less crowded part of the store and sit down either to chat with their friends, take a look at the merchandise. One person was looking at the game manual of FFXII, another group of people were looking at the strategy guide for the new Neverwinter Nights game (a computer game that emulates the popular tabletop role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons), and three people were sitting in the corner of the store, just talking. By midnight there was probably between 70-100 people who had either already paid for the game and were waiting to go, or were waiting in line to buy the game.

So, who the heck goes to a pre-order? Like I said the majority of the early crowd were white males, but shortly into the event, some white females showed up. Two black men came in to play around at the demo consoles before leaving. Some Asian/Asian-American males also showed up as well. One Asian girl even dressed up wearing a white cat ear headband and with a little red ball on top in order to resemble a Moogle, a creature that is a staple of the Final Fantasy franchise, although she and a late-comer (someone who was still outside the doors at midnight) were the only ones to dress up, something which disappointed some of the more experienced gamers, especially considering it was almost Halloween. People who passed by inevitably looked into the windows at the overflowing EB, and one man who might have been homeless wandered in and asked people what was happening. By midnight, most of the people there were white males, but there was a good amount of Asian men, one Asian woman, and about 10 or so white females.

I had hypothesized earlier that only the hardcore gamers and Final Fantasy fans would show up to get a copy at midnight, and I believe I was mistaken in that. While some people dressed in the 'gamer uniform' jeans, and a dark blue or black t-shirt or khaki's and cheap collared shirts, there were some people who wore more fashionable clothing, although these people arrived later and looked uncomfortable in the crowd. One person in a group of three even wore a jacket for the X-tension chords, one of the a capella singing groups on campus. So while 'hardcore gamers' or 'nerds' did make up a sizable portion of sales, they were definitely not the entirety of the crowd.

It's funny, since this was a launch of Final Fantasy XII, I would have expected more conversations in the crowd to revolve around the game, but there wasn't. Games were talked about, the recent release of the latest Xenosaga game (the last in a trilogy of RPG games) came under criticism ("I was upset"), and the group of people with the Neverwinter Nights 2 strategy guide discussed Dungeons and Dragons. Early in the night, Cie had a discussion about MMORPGs, particularly World of Warcraft and Final Fantasy XI, which he has experience with, with one of the other people in line, who turned the conversation into a comparison of how endgame (activities for high level players) pretty much stank in all the MMORPGs, at one point some people talked about emulators (virtual game consoles that can be used on the PC). People also talked about their classes, and how they would not have time to actually play because of class. Overall, though, it was a very social and convivial atmosphere. Patrons talked with each other, and the store clerks all seemed to be on friendly terms with the patrons, with some of the patrons singling out a single clerk to interact with over another.
One of the things I saw here, especially talking with the early arrivals, is an awareness of the nerds. When I talked to one of the people about doing my Anthropology project on video gamers joked: "Don't include a section on hygiene."

I definitely had a blast, although at midnight, I was eager to get out of that store and cool down a bit.

Gaming Night Observations:

On Saturday, October 21, my boyfriend and I spent about half an hour at a lecture about video games. The presenter was a man by the name of Dmitri Williams, who presented his lecture to an audience of about 30 people, mostly white males of university age, although there were some Asians and a couple of black people. Most people were dressed in jeans and a black t-shirt and those who wore jackets either wore sweatshirt-type hoodies or trenchcoats. A couple of people were dressed up as 80s rockers complete with big-hair wigs.

The lecture took place in the back area of the undergraduate library, on the side completely opposite from where the door goes down. In fact, just by looking into the doors, it was difficult to see that there was any sort of event taking place, much less video game night. There were a few TVs behind the counter with video games, but those had been in the library all week, so I don't know how many people who did not know of game night previously would have thought anything relating to games was going on at that moment.

Dimitri stood infront of the room that would hold the DDR tournaments, and in the background, shining through the window, I can see the arrows of the DDR screen moving up, and apparently people are dancing on the pads. To test them out, perhaps? The tournaments are not being held in the main library, but rather in two rooms off of the main part of the library. Sometimes when the door opened the sounds of 80s type rock music would play. There were also video games set up just outside of his little lecture areas, so people in the back took turns playing games while Dmitri talked. Dmitiri seemed to know his audience, and while he talked he used jokes liberally to amuse the audience and keep their attention on what he was saying. A security guard wanders the area and keeps an eye on the gathering, the first time that I've seen guards in the library.

As far as contents go, Cie and I missed the main part of Dimitri's lecture and happened in during the Q and A from the audience. The first question asked about the connection between violence and videogames, and Dmitri answered this idea about the cultivation theory, that what we see cultivates our interpretation of the world. There was nothing he said specifically about connecting violence and media, going so far to say that something as arbitrary as a person's astrological sign was a better predictor of behavior than how much television a person watched, and about drawing a comparision to astrology, Dmitri said, "That's just mean."

Dimitri does say however, that immersion in a certain world will change a person's perception. He drew on an example in his research where people who played a certain type of game were asked a set of questions about how likely certain types of crimes were compared to a control group. Almost crime levels were percieved to be the same, except for the 'attack with a weapon,' where people who had played that game thought an attack with a weapon was much more likely than those in the control group.

Another question asked about girls in video games. Dimitri answered this while talking about his daughter getting barbies for her birthday. Boys, he says, are encouraged to build
and innovate while girls are encouraged to make things look pretty. This attitude seems to offend him although he was sure to say that there was nothing wrong with girls playing with Barbies. He believes that this encouragement for boys to build and innovate is important because the gaming industry is male-dominated, with only Maxis (the company that makes that popular Sims) game, making an effort to have a gender-balanced team. "That's why Wil Wright (the founder of Maxis) makes a lot of money." He goes on to talk about the difference between the typical online player and what people think is the typical online player. The typical online player is a 45-year-old woman who doesn't actually think she's a gamer and plays flash-type games (such as card games, or mahjongg or other similar low graphics games), while most people think of the online gamer as a male in his teens or twenties playing a game like Counterstrike (a first person shooter type game) or World of Warcraft (the most popular MMORPG).

A third question refers to 'good side-effects' of video games, and to this Dimitri gives two answers. The cop-out answer he says is to talk about the actual improvements of hand-eye coordination and the ability to track multiple objects in peripheral vision that scientists have found. The actual answer is something more mixed. Games are good learning tools, he says, and this goes both ways. A video game actively involves and challenges someone in an environment that encourages experimentation, something that many schools lack. He talks about a kid who spends his entire day bored in school and then goes home to play video games, and is actually more challenged by the video game than he is during school. So video games are powerful learning tools for both good and bad things, so it's a double-edged sword. He also points out that games as a learning tool, have to be good games, not just 'firing the rockets by adding together numbers to get the right answer'.

Yet another person asks about concerns about using a game to indoctrinate people into a certain set of beliefs, citing examples of the video games that organizations are using to recruit people. For example the army has a video game out in hopes of upping enlistment. Dimitri brings forth the argument that context overrides content, and I believe this is his overall stance on the link between video games and actions. If someone in Iraq or another Arabic country plays a video game about hunting down George W. Bush that does not mean that the person playing the game will actually try to assassinate President Bush. But, if that person was playing that video game in a context where people they like or admire talk about how cool it would be if something like what happened in the video game actually took place, then there would be an impact on the behavior. The cannot games themselves cannot really indoctrinate someone to a point of view or motivate them into action without there being outside influences also pushing that point of view.

The last question talked about the stigma of gameplay, which Dmitri turns into a history lesson. Once upon a time, video games, arcade games were popular, were huge, but then around 1982, 1983, the market crashed, and one of the major reasons he cites is the flop of the game based on the movie E.T. The game was horrible, and since it was such an important game and a major launch for Atari, the market sort of flopped with it. When the first Nintendo console came out in 1985, it couldn't even be called a video game, it was instead called an 'entertainment system'.

Dimitri talked about the changing opinion, and he says that opinions of the game will shift as members of the older generations die off and people who have lived their entire lives with video games become prominent. He says that there's almost no video gameplay among the older generations, for example baby boomers and older, while people from Generation X and younger have been playing video games. Dimitri also says that online games will not ever be as accepted here as they are in say South Korea where there's a much larger prominence of internet cafes and where there hasn't been anything like the
E.T. flop to lend stigma to the game. He asked if there were any South Koreans in the audience and a couple of Korean students raised their hands. He actually asked them if what he said was accurate, and I have a feeling that he came to a conclusion that is different from their experience.

My boyfriend and I headed out after the lecture, and in the car he began deconstructing Dmitri's lecture. He believes there is a bit of accuracy problems in the information, particularly about the gaming history and why it crashed, although some of the more outrageous anecdotes (one about burying all the game cartridges in the New Mexico desert for instance) he confirmed as being absolutely true. He then told me that we would look for that book about Video Game history he read. We didn't find it though.

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I don't know how much commentary I can offer without my own biases coming through, although I suppose if I deconstruct where these opinions come from, that would perhaps be acceptable.

I consider the questions asked to be concerns in the video game community. Like Meg, many of these people are precisely aware of the stereotypes and stigmas associated with gaming, and many of the questions such as asking about the benefits of video games, the chances of getting indoctrinated, and the stigma associated with gaming are concerned with validating playing video games against the negative stereotype. I think that Dmitri took a sympathetic position on these issues, talking about video game acceptance coming with time and making sure to emphasize that there is no connection between video games and actual acts of violence that he has found. But he does leave things for open, acknowledging that there is a potential to learn negative attitudes and behaviors from a video game.

There is a validity to the concerns of negative influence from video games, and as a gamer, they should be explored. The problem is that I'm not sure how many of these concerns are grounded in empirical research, and whether something should be banned at the encouragement of people who do not seem to have had any experience with video games outside of an activist context or from urban legends about how video games made someone commit an act of violence against someone else, without further looking into and testing the actual impact of these games.

The question about gender in video games is not so much about acceptance, I don't think, but since the majority of gamers are male, there seems to be an almost mythological quality to the 'girl gamer'. A lot of the places where gamers interact, especially online, allows for confusion of gender, for example there is really nothing about an online interaction that can confirm someone's gender without actually talking to that person on the phone or meeting them face-to-face. Most games are developed almost exclusively by men for men, and so it's possible that this idea of the girl gamer being rare is justified, but from personal experience, I believe it's a matter of girls experiencing games in a different way than males. HoP, for example, was almost exclusively female with perhaps 3 men among the 30 members, and many of my own online interactions with video games happen with other women. This changed with my involvement with FFXI. I became a minority, so much that even though my character was female, I, as a player, would still be referred as male by many people until I said otherwise. In fact, Cie's character is female as well, and when we would let strangers that we partied with (fight monsters with) know that we were a couple, the majority guessed that Cie was the actual female because his character was a mage/support type while my character fought with physical weapons. But overall, I don't think the idea of the female gamer is as rare as the legends make her out to
be, even when not expanding the definition of video games to the computer games that many people play on their computer to just waste a few minutes.

Also, as a follow-up, although I did not actually see the Guitar Hero tournament, the following Tuesday, a person in my English class came up to me and asked if I had seen the tournament. It turns out that this student had actually won the tournament (he was one of the people wearing the big 80s wigs). This mentioning of the news brought the people in my English class (mostly males and even including the teacher) into a discussion about Guitar Hero, and how it's turning into something huge here on campus. I know that the video game store on Green Street also has a demo set up.

Partial transcript of my interview with Meg:

J: Since coming to the university what has been your involvement with the videogames and the like?
M: Uh well, I do a lot of playing at home more than anything because I'm awfully busy here but I also play a lot of DDR in my spare time even at the university.
J: I'm guessing that like the DDR that's sort of a social...
M: Oh yeah definitely... um last year we did it in my room a lot and we'd invite my brother and other friends from like around the floor or other floors and stuff it's within the building or even just friends from outside who are interested. But this year it's been my brother's room and my roommate and I will go over there and other people he invites other friends of his and stuff. So it's kind of a big social get together.
J: I'm wondering do you ever go down to the DDR in the... (Illini Union)
M: Yeah. I haven't done it yet this year, but last year we used to do it. The fact that it costs money is a little bit of a deterrent. *laughs* But the machine there is a lot of fun to use. The other problem is it's occupied a lot of the time. We prefer to do it on our rooms when we can cause at least then we won't have to wait in line *laughs*
J: I suppose my next question is whether or not you think games have an intellectual or social aspect to them.
M: *laughs* I think that's pretty obvious. Um... I don't know how they can not have a social aspect to them. I mean even stuff I play alone, I discuss it with people. I've made a lot of friendships off of video games. I think you know this.
J: Final Fantasy! Kingdom Hearts!
M: *laughs* Yes, Final Fantasy. Kingdom Hearts especially. Cause you can get into forums online and stuff. I know like my brother is really into the GameFAQs boards and he spends a lot of his time posting there. I mean you can meet people through talking about games. Especially their plots, that's what I in about games more than anything. And then like DDR is like a big social event where everyone gets together and does it together. RPGs are really good for discussion, more than like playing at the same time, but it's fun to watch people play too. (conversation omitted)

J: I don't know if I should ask about HoP, considering that would be the sort of inside...
M: Well yeah, it's a form that I started with a friend. *softly* it was mostly her. It was uh to discuss a video game, and it kinda grew and we have a whole community of people. You're in it, I'm in it, and a lot of other people are in it. And we also do a game sort of loosely related to the video game, but mostly just us because we all like writing where we roleplay characters and yeah. It's a big roleplay. We put em in situations and basically post back and forth and I mean more than anything we just like to have our characters interact and it's really good help for writing and character design and it doesn't even have that much to do with video games anymore but it all stemmed off of that. That was the thing that brought us together in the first place and sort of the thing that orients the places where we put the people and everything. And there's even discussion on the board in
J: Last question how have you gotten intellectually involved in video games?
M: How about emotionally involved? *laughs* No I love RPGs, I love the plot. I like playing games. I do enjoy playing games, but I'm not the sort of person who wants a game to just uh like shoot things. *laughs* I really love role playing games where you have a really developed plot and characters and a very emotional story and you know I get really emotional and into it. The games are really moving experience. And you want to keep playing to keep advancing the plot even if you are not a high enough level and everything kills you, you want to do it anyway because "I want to know what happens next." and um... it can be a big draw and time when you are playing a game for the first time but as long as you're careful with that... um then I like that you can take stuff away from it. I mean a lot of games have like social messages and stuff especially like Final Fantasy...(conversation omitted from transcript)... Wow, look there's an allegory! I like games that you can look into like that, and that have really good characters. And you can do a lot after playing a game other than playing it again. I mean you can discuss it with people and you can write stories yourself or draw pictures or play roleplays and whatever else. And obviously like getting into discussions and actually trying to use characters yourself or create your own and do things with the world is an intellectual things with this.

J: Anything else you want to say?
M: I think video games get a bad rap sometimes that they don't have they don't have like intellectual, like people think that big gamers are people who sit in their rooms and play video games and never talk to anybody or do anything and games can be used to enhance their social life and to do things intellectually. I mean a lot of writing. Writing is a big thing in the university and you can do that off of games so yeah just a little plug for video games as long as they're used properly and you're not consuming your life with them. Still do your work.

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Meg is a student at the university and also a friend of mine. At one point we were both involved in the same videogame-based community (HOP), which as can be noted in the interview branched out. Meg does not consider herself to be a huge gamer, something that came up as a concern of hers when I was setting up the interview over IM.

Meg is mainly involved with two types of video games, the role-playing video games (particularly the Final Fantasy and Kingdom Hearts) and Dance Dance Revolution. These she talks about in different contexts. The Dance Dance Revolution is involved much more with her 'real life'. She plays with her brother and other people on her floor or in her buildings, or her friends from the outside. She mentions in an untranscripted part of the interview that she hears about DDR being used for gym classes and wonders why her high school couldn't have had them because she would have been more into participating. She also talks about the DDR in the union and how even though the machine is fun to use, it costs money and requires waiting in line which are big disadvantages to doing it in her room or her brother's room. The discussion about the roleplaying games gets into the social dimension of videogames. Meg does not talk about gameplay of Role Playing Games, but prefers to look at plot and characterization, and the worlds as part of her interest.

The video game activities she talks about are not always centered on the video games. In
her discussion about HoP, for example, the video game is the almost incidental way that the members of the community were brought together, and are now not the driving focus for keeping the forum moving. A lot of people Meg plays DDR with, her brother and her roomate, are people she would be in regular contact with anyway. DDR is to her, another form of social activity.

This is another difference between the DDR and the RPGs in Meg's view of them. The DDR is mostly enjoyed while she is directly playing it, or watching someone else play it, while the majority of the RPG enjoyment comes from watching what happens, but then taking what happens and turning into something else. Meg talks about discussing RPGs, writing fanfic based on the characters in her favorite RPGs and doing a roleplaying game based on the world of the RPG. So even though she mostly plays or watches RPGs away from school, she takes enough away from them to remain involved with the game and her particular community at any time.

Her final statement about video games getting a bad wrap is based on a popular stereotype of the gamer being the antisocial kid living in his parent's basement and never seeing the light of day. This she contradicts with drawing from her own social and intellectual experience with video games.

"As long as they're used properly" Throughout the interview a common theme from talking with Meg is time and money. She talks about having to pay extra to use the DDR in the union as being a deterrent (since she has access to her own copy of the game and the dance pad needed to play), as well as having to wait in line to play. Also, when she talks about the RPG, she brings up a little bit about time management and how someone needs to manage their time when playing because it can take up a lot of time. At the end of the interview when doing a plug for video games, she uses the phrase 'used properly' and then follows that with 'not consuming your life with them'. A mention for 'do[ing] your work' comes in as well. Video games as a leisure activity should not be a priority in life over doing what needs to be done.

I think this is very reflective of the type of gaming promoted at the undergraduate library, although said in a much more direct way. Gaming is a hobby, possibly an intellectual pursuit worth looking at, but games should not be the entirety of one’s life.

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I believe a follow up interview would have Meg talking about specific kinds of games, particularly those that she is not interested in, such as the first person shooter games, or other types of MMORPGs. I think to narrow down what her idea of acceptable gaming is in a more specific context would be incredibly reflective of what 'casual gamers' are like compared to the stereotype of a gamer.

The Main UIUC Gaming Collection page is formatted in a clean three-column layout. The header is the same one used for the UIUC undergraduate library, indicating that it is part of the Undergraduate library. Below this are a group of images from various video games: Pong, Super Mario, A fighting game, and Dance, Dance Revolution.

The left most column has the header "GAMING RESOURCES" and has under it, links to About the Collection, Games and Consoles, Suggest Games to Buy, Gaming Night, and Gaming Literature.

The top link in the left most column is about the collection, at it contains a mission statement, the goals of the collection, and finally the types of materials they contain and
the rules for using these materials.

The second link details some of the games and consoles (all of which are the more recent systems) which are available at the Undergraduate Library. The first half of the page are games which are ordered but not available yet, while the second half are games which are already available for check out.

The third link, Suggest Games to Buy, is a request from the library for people to suggest additional games to add to their collection.

The fourth link to the Gaming Night, is an announcement of the development of this gaming collection and a short recap of the Gaming Night where they celebrated the inauguration of this combination between academics and gaming.

The last link provides reviews of four journals/magazines, and then a bibliography for other Gaming related resources.

The middle column is GAMING @ UIUC and that header contains links to Classes related to Gaming, Campus Gaming Groups, Gaming Research, and Donate Games to the Library.

The top link in this column are links to the classes, four so far, which have recently used video games as a teaching tool. These links go to the UIUC online class schedule page which details the course and the meeting time.

The second link is a list of the student organizations which are involved with gaming here at the University of Illinois.

The third link is not fully up yet, but posts a link to the listserv discussion where academics in video games is discussed here at the UIUC.

Finally, the "Donate Games to the Library" solicits donations of games, consoles and strategy guides to the collection, gives contact info and links to the acceptance guidelines of the UIUC faculty.

The final column are links to news about research done with and events involving video games in the context of the UIUC. The current links on this page are

* Game Design Lecture October 4th
* Study: Some Games May Enhance Sociability
* Guitar Hero Gaming Night Date Set!
* UIUC Study: No strong link between games and violence
* Suggest Games to Buy

Finally, the bottom part of the page gives information as the page as part of the library system as well as giving the last time it was updated September 5, 2006.

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Today I completed a short interview about (12 minutes total) with a friend of mine who uses video games as a part of her social life. "Meg" is a senior in college who is fairly active in an informal gathering of people who like to play DDR as well as an online community which started from the basis of an RPG. Since I know Meg from other associations, I simply asked her over IM whether or not she'd be willing to do the
interview. She was, and so this afternoon, she and I and Mr. Boomstick (my recorder) had a little talk.

In general terms, Meg and I talked about her involvement in video games since she entered college. She is too busy to really play video games except at home, but the discussions and things like gathering together with her friends to play DDR (Dance Dance Revolution) still happen during class. In particular, she emphasized the potential for discussion, and how gathering built around a particular videogame can branch out into a community that isn't focused on that game. While she did think there were social and intellectual components to games, particularly in the role-playing video games she enjoys, she also brought up within the context of an answer an emotional component to playing as well. She claims that she feels that video games get a bad rap and the people who play them are portrayed in a negative way (as people who do not have lives outside video games), and she'd like to put in 'a good word' for them. Video games when used properly and not taken to extremes can be helpful in enriching the social life of students and thinking about issues that might not normally come up in college life.

Overall, I suppose I cheated a little in this interview by talking to someone I was already familiar with, but I think the fact that she and I know each other and have relations helped bring forth a lot of insights, for example the emotional connections brought in by video games. Because Meg has a group of friends who also game, this also opens a group of potential gamers to interview. I started out with just a small amount of questions and let the interview dictate what Meg wanted to talk about instead of coming prepared with a long list of questions.

DISCUSS
Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data
This is the UIUC Gaming Documents page, as put together by the Undergraduate Library. Besides giving information about the game collection in the Undergraduate Library and gathering together all the research and groups involved with games on campus, the UIUC Gaming document page makes several implicit assumptions about Gaming.

The UIUC Gaming collection was created to support a wide variety of campus interdisciplinary programs, scholarly research, and student needs involving video games.

The existential assumptions, as defined by Fairclough on page 55, made by the library on the "About the Collection" page, is that a need for games (and video games in particular, as opposed to RPG sourcebooks or board games) exists on campus, for both academic and social purposes. If one was to read further down the page, they specify the scholarly needs for videogames and the subjects they feel the Gaming Collection would be a resource for. Speech Communication, Psychology, Technology, Information Science and Computer Science as well as other disciplines. In addition, they assume that a need for access to this material exists outside of curriculum into the needs of both individuals and student organizations.

The major propositional assumptions made by the library are the definition of games as Video Games. Perhaps this is a definition of the type of media, for example board games would not be an easily classified medium while RPG Sourcebooks for tabletop roleplaying games (another form of 'gaming') could be included with the books. Second, the library makes a propositional assumption that Video Games can be an educational and/or social resource. Evidence of this is not only in the "About the Collection" page,
but also in the links to the many student organizations which revolve around one or more video games as well as the advertisement and recap of the first ever 'Gaming Night'. Further more, the fact that games can be an academic subject is apparent in their "Gaming Literature" page which lists various academic journals concerned with video games. Among one of the ones the page goes into detail about is the Games & Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media. It labels the academic persuit of video games to be 'Game Studies' and the work published within as 'groundbreaking'. This makes a value judgement that video game studies are 'innovative' and that this innovation is a good thing. This is the first entry on the page which also includes non-academic gaming magazines such as "Electronics Monthly" and "Computer Gaming World" which focus on the Furthermore, the library uses this page to link to classes specifically linked to gaming which have been taught on campus.

Overall, the values brought about by the UIUC Undergraduate library is that video games, when put into a social or academic context, are a positive thing. The entertainment value of videogames is downplayed when it is not put into a social context, for example putting the reviews of the Entertainment Gaming magazines below the Academic journal and the promotion of the student organization which revolve around gaming as well as events which mix gaming with social activities. In particular as text which says "This is perhaps the best combination ever- video games and an academic library!" on the Gaming night page makes the assumption that games combined with academics is a good thing, something which is desirable for both video games and academics. And that accessing games through this resource is beneficial for the university as a whole.

Even the studies on the page seem to promote video games as a positive resource: "Study: Some Games May Enhance Sociability" as well as "UIUC Study: No strong link between games and violence." The social aspect of games is represented in the news about a Guitar Hero Gaming Night set up and an upcoming lecture on October 1st.

They are through this site, generally promoting games as a positive resource and setting themselves up as a central gaming resource both socially and academically here at the U of I, but they are placing video games to be better in certain context than in others. For example academic use of videogame resources is better than simple entertainment use, and social use of video games is better than solitary use.

**REFLECT**

**Link**

Connect with other resources and materials.

The Fairclough reading provided a good way of looking at the webpage from a textual point of view. I did indeed find the three type of assumptions he lists on the page hidden in the Gaming Documents page. For example the assumption that a need for the collection exists is present in the mission statement. In addition, there is also the assumption that 'game' in this library means video game. Also the assumption that there is social and academic use for video games. Further more, they present the assumption that the University of Illinois can be (propositional assumption) a center for academic research and social activity both involving games, and that people who use their sources will be using the resources of the collection to further their pursuits of academic studies or group events.

Finally there is a value judgement in the idea that videogames in an academic and/or
social context is more desirable than videogames in a purely entertainment context.

Their emphasis on videogames in an academic and social context might be reflective of several shared assumptions as seen in the Balshem reading. For example, the emphasis might not be a value judgment, but rather a challenge to a commonly held assumption that video games do not have a redeeming social or academic point. So through emphasizing this over the entertainment value, the Gaming Document site puts forth a new assumption that games are academic and social, and therefore worthy of further study.

Another shared assumption might be that since this Gaming Documents library is connected with the University of Illinois, there must be an academic purpose to archiving videogames and systems. So even if the Undergraduate Library does not mind or even encourages students to use their resources for recreational purposes, they cannot present this face to the University without losing its funding because right now it does place itself as an organization that has just started and is now growing.

**Implications**

*Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?*

Over the course of the semester, and the observations and interviews that I have done, there seem to be a few recurring themes that people discussed, in regards to how video games are used in socialization, and the ways that the gamers at the university seem to be aware of the stereotypes around them, as well as the oppositions of the people behind them.

First, for those who play them, games are an absorbing medium. Both Dee and Dmitri Williams made a point that games are powerful learning tools, with Williams using the example of a simulator that has the students reenacting the circumstances leading to the start of World War II, and that this learning effect can be for both positive and negative ends. Williams also mentioned that children who go to school seem not to be challenged, and so go home to play games that do challenge them. With this said, with games as such a powerful learning tool, his audience of mostly video game playing students were concerned with the idea that games could be used to indoctrinate someone. Meg also mentions in her interviews that games can also be absorbing emotionally as well as mentally. I get the impression from my interaction with her that on some level, when she plays a game with a storyline and characterization, she becomes invested emotionally with her favorite characters, as she speaks about wanting to advance the storyline to find out what happens next, even if it necessarily expedient to do so, and in an untranscribed portion of the interview, she expresses a desire to feel sympathy for her favorite characters.

Second, games can become an incredibly social medium. Not only are online communities forming through the advent of online video games such as World of Warcraft, but they are also forming, like in Meg's case, over single player console video games, where she does say that she's met a number of her good friends. And beyond this, there are a number of ways that games promote social interaction outside of an electronic network. For example, there is the interaction between the TA I mentioned and his son, as well as the interaction between the TA and the students in his class. Beyond this, there was the tendency for people to watch and interact in the Illini Union over the Dance Dance Revolution machines. In more formal terms, there are schedule events such as the Gaming Nights sponsored by the Undergraduate Library or the Launch Parties at the EB games, which gather together people who play video games around certain events. While I'm sure there are some people who can and do represent the gamer shut in stereotype,
there is certainly no lack of interaction between gamers that I've noticed.

Third, there is an awareness, especially among gamers about particular stereotypes and negative connotations that are associated with an interest in video games. At the question and answer with Dmitri Williams, many questions asked had to with these negative connotations and stereotypes, including asking what the positive effects are of video games and where said negative connotations came from. There were also questions about females in video games, which seem to be somewhat rare on campus. There were mostly men at the gaming night, and mostly men at the Final Fantasy XII launch party. As well, one of the people I talked to at the launch party, mentioned in jest that I should not put in a hygiene section into my paper, possibly bringing out the whole stereotype that gamers have poor hygiene and don't shower, which I think draws on the larger image of the gamer as a man who has no social life, and does nothing but play video games all day.

Finally, there was an emphasis in both of my interviews with people using and absorbing video games in a responsible manner. Meg talks about playing them in moderation and not neglecting school or work in order to play them, no matter how tempting it might be, while Dee makes a point of using one's own discretion and judgment when dealing with the information provided through the video game medium, and that it is the responsibility of the individual to act or not act upon this information.

Overall, I would make a tentative theory that video gamers may express some of the stereotypes, and the other negative concerns that are associated with video games are important and valid concerns that do have basis in reality, but that this reality is in itself very distorted, and that the very awareness of these negative associations have an impact on the gamers and the communities they form, more so than with other types of recreational activities. But I think, from what I've observed, that while people who embody or otherwise promote the stereotypes are a minority at the university when compared with the other people who use video games.

There are many implications to this research. For example, there is the implication that video games, like other types of pop-culture phenomenon are worthy of academic study. This might imply that courses which use or focus on video games will be or are being offered in the university.

Another implication of this site might be that the gaming community at the University of Illinois is widespread and influential enough to get the resources to work with the Undergraduate Library in putting together this collection, or that the person in charge of this collection is in a position of power at the Undergraduate library that he or she is able to pull the strings and speak up for his particular community of gamers.

Third, like many resources at the University of Illinois, if this archive does grow to a good size, more classes might be willing to change their curriculum in order to use the resources it provides. Like the internet, videos, and other forms of media, computer or video games might become a more commonly used resource for teachers in their classes as they become more available and well known.

OTHER
A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.
Redefining the Stereotype: Video Games as a Center of Socialization Among College Students
Research Proposal
With the advent of new media and new forms of entertainment, there seems to be a debate on whether these types of media promote socialization among fans or leave them in an isolated state. There is also, among my interactions with many video game playing, and non-video game playing people a stereotype of the typical gamer: single white or Asian male, academically accomplished but socially awkward, dirty, jobless, and still living with his parents. My research question looks to combine both of these issues to get a look at how video games are being used in social contexts, and how these uses reflect or deny the stereotype.

As background to this information, I will look at research done by people who have studied video games, such as the University of Illinois Dmitri Williams, who does his research in speech communication, and looks at the the particular the online social communities that form over massive multiplayer online games, and how the Internet is influencing the ways people choose to socialize. This will provide background into how technology and socialization are being associated in academic writing and will give me a frame for looking at socialization, as well as being alerted to current issues in video game research. If I were to take this project further, I would consider seriously finding a subscription to the Games & Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media which is an international journal dedicated to the research of Video Games and society, because although there has not been a way to access the journal through the university servers, I do believe that will be a rich source for background information.

Since I am looking at how people who identify themselves as gamers, or consider video games to be an important part of their recreational life in order to examine a stereotype, I believe it would be necessary to look at a wide range of video games and video game fans, both male and female, This would counteract a common criticism of television and video game research where many different types of genres and participants are viewed as a single variable, when in reality they are significantly different. So my question would expand in to asking how does the stereotype represent different types of players who play different games for different reasons. My preliminary research has presented this as necessary because there are many different ways to use and experience video games, from social networking, to the inspiration to creative and intellectual discussion, to physical exercise, so that it is impossible to study only one type of gamer to generalize how gamers use their video games in a social context.

My demographic would be college students, and would be people who either through a survey or other method have caught my attention as having some involvement in video games, although I think in order to look at potential racial and gender difference in the experience of video games as a social medium, that I should also look at people who's racial identity is different from the white or Asian archetype, as well as looking at women as well as men.

There would be some small compensation for interviews, perhaps $20 or so to motivate people to particpate. Also, despite the difficulties involved with reading body language and tone and coaxing out responses, I would be open to conducting interview over instant messaging for the purpose that some subjects might be more comfortable with talking online compared to face to face, and because it is much easier to schedule interview for both the interviewer and the interviewee compared to phone or face to face interviews that require more strict and exclusive scheduling, although I would prefer to have some face to face interviews as well.

In addition to interviews, I would also ask to observe these different individuals or groups as they play the video games, and watch their own interaction with either the game itself
or with other people who are playing or watching the video game at the same time. Where the central location of a subject's social group is online, I would ask for the address to important websites so that I can observe the activities and analyze the documents that are associated with that websites. Part of these procedural observations would also include a time allocation study, taking a look at how long a person does video game activities and how often, and as it would be unfeasible to follow any person around for a week or month, I will rely on self reports to determine time allocation, using the observed session as a basis for analysis.

My main form of methodology will be ethnographic research based on case studies and the resulting observations and interviews, and while I may use surveys or questionnaires to get demographic information, I do not think they can adequately encompass the questions of stereotypes, perception, and socialization that I want to examine while still remaining straightforward and fairly closed-ended, that I would rather ask survey type questions as part of the interviews rather than use the paper or the phone to ask questions.

The most difficult part of my research will be defining terms and situations, namely the questions of “What is the stereotype of the gamer?” and “What counts as social activity?” For the purpose of my study, I will interview or survey a few non gamers, either people who do not play video games, or who do play them occasionally but do not see them as a significant part of their recreational life, what they perceive to be the typical 'gamer'. Who is this 'gamer', how does he look, dress, act? What are his activities like, and what kinds of games to they imagine him playing? And then ask about where they are basing their image, whether it's in the news or through fictionalized media images.

The second question is what counts as socialization. Though debate is still going on about whether group activities that revolve around electronic media count as social activities, for this study social activity counts as activities that involve two or more people in physical, emotional, or mental contact and foster some sense of belonging. In this sense of the idea, I do count Internet or other non face-to-face contact to be social activie, and it is beyond the scope of activity to assess the quality of said social contact compared to people who center their recreational actives around another type of activity.

Overall, I believe I will find that the ways of using video game in a social context are so diverse that one really cannot create one image that manages to encompass the entirety of video game players on campus. And so, I do think that one type of gamer might be the truth in which the stereotypes are based, but that other types, or even less extreme versions of the same type might actually be quite different than what the non gamers perceive them to be.

Since I want to take down a text document in Plan, but cannot for some reason, here's the text that was in that area.

I came across the Gaming Collection page while searching for a document to analyze. The virtual tour of the university brought me to the Undergraduate library page. The link to the Gaming Document collection caught my eye because the idea of video game collection in the university seemed interesting and well, kind of out of place.

Right now, the plan with the document analysis is to look at the webpage itself with all the internal links, and the look at where it choosing to link to from the outside.