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Escapism in Digital Gaming

Technology has been and continues to be one of the most common methods of entertainment, not just in children but now in teenagers and adults more than ever before. Specifically within this genre, the development of video games persists in attracting individuals and immersing them into a unique and magical world where just about anything is possible. On a similar note, our world continues to be submerged by people feeling stressed and overwhelmed by everyday life, struggling to survive paycheck-to-paycheck, suffering from pandemics and the injustice of our government, and so on. As a coping mechanism to avoid these problematic downfalls, many turn to the virtual world of video gaming as a form of distraction; this concept is known as escapism, or the escape theory.

The escape theory can be viewed as the tendency for individuals to turn to certain behaviors and habits to avoid the unpleasantness of real life, in this case, video gaming. I am personally a fanatic of the capability to be able to fantasize about one's life, and how the human mind combined with the virtual world is all it takes to feel like you are fully present in a space that doesn't exist. In this paper I examine the relationship between individuals who regularly play video games and its effect on their everyday communication. In particular, how and why people use video games as a means of escapism. I gather data using a survey and will analyze the responses using some of the sources from my literature review. Collecting this data will allow me to answer my research question: How does the use of video games as a form of escapism affect one's communication and overall daily life?

Literature Review

In “Digital Games and Escapism” by Gordon Calleja (2010), he mentions different opinions and perspectives to argue that video gaming is essentially escapism and therefore provides a unique view about it. He states, “I will argue that this association of digital games with escapism is problematically reinforced by two binary relationships that underpin the formal qualities of games” (Calleja p. 336). The first binary relationship is the virtuality of digital games in that they are computer generated as opposed to a world of physical realness. The other binary relationship is the artificialness that defines games (p. 336). Calleja goes into more depth on the contrast between a digital, computer-generated world and the real world in which we live in. Calleja brings up an important note that “the problem with binary oppositions is that they create either/or relationships that ignore the richer middle ground” (Calleja p. 338).

Calleja then goes into that secondary binary relationship of the actual “gameness” of digital gaming that deals with the concept called the “magic circle” which is “the spatial, temporal, and psychological boundary between the games and the real world” (Calleja p. 340). It is both a physical and metaphorical boundary where the natures and rules of the real world are suspended, and thus a new reality is created due to those individual and unique rules. Calleja continues to mention that “in digital games, the distinction is void because the only space that one can act in is traversable space” (Calleja p. 341). In other words, the magic circle in terms of spatial boundaries does not exist in video games and is therefore not relevant because the only way to get out it would be to essentially turn the game off. He then mentions that there are situations in which this magic circle tends to diminish or lose its “strength”, such as when a game is being played that ends up feeling like work or a chore.

Players like to be challenged and engage in activities that are not related to what they do out in the real-world, which is why the power of the magic circle is so complex and dependent on what each individual person is looking for in their “escape”. Calleja finishes his discussion with yet another important point that “reality is always relative to the social, cultural, geographical, and personal context in which it is discussed” (Calleja p. 349). He also connects this definition to escapism and mentions that one person’s escapist hobby may be another person’s “real-life”, very bland chore. Calleja concludes that “I am arguing that no particular medium or activity can be labeled as being escapist in itself” (Calleja p. 350). It’s not the activity itself, but rather the social and personal context that lies within it.

The next article “Escaping Reality through Videogames is Linked to an Implicit Preference for Virtual over Real-Life Stimuli” by Jory Deleuze, Pierre Maurage, Adriano Schimmenti, Filip Nuyens, André Melzer, and Joel Billieux (2019) aimed to test if individual’s motives for escapism are related to a preference for the virtual environment of video gaming. A classification system created by Yee was used to interview over 3,000 MMORPG players to find out the most common motivations for playing video games. The top three motivations were related to achievement, immersion, and social interactions (Deleuze et al., p. 1025). Participants were first recruited by an online survey being sent out to all students who attended the Université catholique de Louvain; the final sample used for the study was a total of 273 participants. Each person first completed several questions addressing variables such as age, gender, education level, etc., and their estimated hours played per week of their favorite game or games in general. Then, the participants completed more questions that measured their gaming motives and the extent to which they play their favorite online video game in a positive or negative way.

An AMP (The Affect Misattribution Procedure) process was created that presented the viewer with different images in which they had to respond with “pleasant” or “unpleasant”. There were 44 images that depicted a real-world environment, 44 images that were screenshots from a video game, and 44 blank images (used to neutralize any biases). These three categories of images alternated between each other and were used as “priming cues”, and would only show on the screen for a brief second before switching to a Chinese pictogram that didn’t mean anything to the viewer. An immediate notable discovery was that “participants rated targets following virtual environments more positively than targets following real-world pictures” (Deleuze et al., p. 1027). It was also found that “escapism was the only motive that significantly and positively predicted cAMP, thereby indicating a higher preference for virtual environments in comparison to real environments” (Deleuze et al., p. 1027). A noteworthy concluding comment was that “It would also be interesting to test these stimuli with non-players to see whether an effect due to the novelty or ‘fun aspect’ of it would be enough to activate positive implicit attitudes among them. Hence, future studies should include a control group of non-gamers” (Deleuze et al., p. 1029). Including participants who may not play video games regularly still have a chance of experiencing a sense of escape and pleasure from non-real worlds, and thus including that “neutral” category could impact future results.

The third article, “Seeking a Sense of Control or Escapism? The Role of Video Games in Coping with Unemployment” by Yu-Hao Lee and Mo Chen (2022) focused on escapism in video gaming during the impact of COVID-19 in terms of unemployment. Lee and his team argue that “video games could be used as emotion-focused coping to either help unemployed workers escape from unemployment stress or provide boosts to their sense of control, which indirectly supports their problem-focused coping strategies” (Lee et al., p. 7). Participants were recruited

from Amazon's Mechanical Turk in which there is an automatic filter for unemployment, and out of this group they were looking for unemployed workers who play digital games on any sort of platform. The final sample size ended up being 401 participants. A series of questions were asked in which the participants were asked to rate their responses on a number scale. An example is, "Participants were asked to report their experience when playing video games on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)" (Lee et al., p. 8). This scale was used for the "sense of control" category, in which the questions asked to rate were "When playing games, I feel in control" and "Video games allow me to control my interaction".

The categories in which participants were asked to rate their feelings using the Likert-type scale included the following: sense of control, escapism, autonomy, competence, relatedness, job-search efficiency, job-search behavior, perceived wellbeing, changes in game time, economic strains, self-esteem, social support, and job-search locus of control. An immediate notable result is that "increases in game playing behavior were positively associated with an increased sense of control and escapism" (Lee et al., p. 12). It was also found that sense of control did not improve job-search efficiency, but it did improve perceived wellbeing in participants. In terms of escapism, it was found that it did not affect a person's job-search efficiency, but it was in fact connected to a decrease in wellbeing. Also, unemployed workers' perceived wellbeing was positively connected to their job-search efficiency, and this was positively associated with job-search behaviors also. They conclude with the thought that "video games can support reemployment efforts by providing unemployed workers a sense of control and improving their wellbeing", but also "if the game playing is used for escapism, it may also hurt unemployed workers' reemployment through reducing their wellbeing" (Lee et al., p. 18). Depending on the intentions behind unemployed workers interacting with video games, they can

either learn from the experience for future job-seeking and employment or use it to simply continue to escape the stress and problems of life.

In the fourth article, “Adults’ Consumption of Videogames As Imaginative Escape From Routine” by Mike Molesworth (2009), he draws from the lived experiences of consumers to understand and argue the support of adult gamers’ consumption and their potential motives behind them. A total of 24 adult gamers were interviewed that “ranged in social backgrounds, professions, and domestic arrangements in order to understand experiences of consuming videogames” (Molesworth, p. 379). It took Molesworth nearly five months to finish the interviews due to it being fieldwork study. Four main themes emerged from these interviews with the adult players regarding their gaming in the context of escapism: nostalgia, daydreaming, media-derived fantasies, and virtual tourism. Molesworth talks about his results in terms of six specific interviewees in which particularly stood out to him and provided the best quotes to explain the four categories.

The first resulting theme from the interviews was nostalgia. Molesworth quotes an interviewee who talked about nostalgia in video games that brings escapism, stating that “He is drawn to play them to recapture an experience he remembers as pleasurable, but the experience doesn’t live up to the memory that it allows him to access” (p. 379). He also explained that the issue with nostalgic gaming is that players realize sooner or later that life has moved on and they can never actually go back to those moments (p. 380). Nostalgia in gaming brings players back to easier times, likely when they were younger and had little to no adult worries, thus missing their “happier” times. The second resulting theme was daydreaming. Molesworth comments on a few interviewees who use video gaming to achieve things that they can only dream about in real life, such as driving top-class sports cars and being able to speed on the road, or modifying a car

as many times as desired using highly expensive parts (p. 380). In multiple ways, online games seem to be a path for players to access these daydreams and, in a way, keep them “real” enough to satisfy them since they are unable to happen in real life.

The third resulting theme was media-derived fantasies. Although like daydreaming, in this case “games may give them more direct access . . . they allow players to become the heroes of fictions, or to experience these worlds firsthand” (Molesworth, p. 381). These fantasies are purely unrealistic unlike daydreams, and online games allow players to achieve things they could never do in real life. An example that Molesworth took from an interviewee was that when she plays the game *The Sims*, her character can have a beautiful house, unlimited food, not having to work, etc. because it’s a game and she also uses cheat codes (p. 381). Being able to act out unrealistic fantasies in a virtual world and live a “perfect” life is yet another reason for escapism in video games. Lastly, the fourth derived escapist theme was virtual tourism, the concept of nothing more than simply wanting to be in some other place or feel something new and exciting (Molesworth, p. 381). An interviewee stated about virtual tourism that “sometimes the effects are just so beautifully done and so detailed in the way that they have been produced . . . yeh, the aesthetics of it is also something that’s important” (Molesworth, p. 381). Sometimes a player’s motivation for escapism in video games is to simply exist in a world they are not used to; in other words, Molesworth says that “here the pleasure is in the unknown; the excitement of not knowing what comes next . . . rather than actualizing the imagination players are asking for their imagination to be stimulated” (p. 381). Videogames are powerful resources for managing everyday life, and their popularity says a lot about the society we live in.

The fifth article “Video Game Escapism During Quarantine” by Eian Prinsen and Damian Schofield (2021) focused on the motivations and reasonings behind people who play

video games because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to quarantine. Their study collected thorough information regarding video game genres and the play time of users and how self-isolation affected these concepts. Prinsen and his team hypothesized that because of the pandemic, “people will increase the time spent playing video games”, “people will try new genres of video games”, and “people are more likely to try to find a console during quarantine” (p. 39). A total of 32 participants were recruited from gaming-themed social media pages to make sure there was a general mutual interest for them as well as to ensure each person owned at least one type of gaming device. Using Yee’s Gamer motivation survey, player’s top three gaming motivations were identified, followed by answering general questions about game platforms used, favorite genres and important elements in what they played, gaming habits before versus during the pandemic, and a few open-ended questions regarding the participant’s favorites games and even new games they may have started playing during the pandemic (Prinsen et al., p. 40).

In terms of play time, the survey showed that 18 out of 32 participants claimed they noticed an increase in their play time per week since the beginning of quarantine, and the remaining 14 did not see a decrease in playtime but remained the same (Prinsen et al., p. 40). The top three choices (playtime of 20 hours per week or more) all doubled in size during quarantine. In terms of genres, roleplaying games was the most popular (25 out of 32 chose it as one of their favorite genres), followed by shooter games (16 out of 32) and survival games coming in third place (12 out of 32), with gender not really being significant to this (Prinsen et al., p. 41). When the participants were given a text box to enter some games they played during quarantine, the most common answers ended up being nearly all roleplaying games or having roleplay elements in them, and even when compared against life simulation games, were still preferred (p. 42).

Regarding the results of participants being asked what motivated them to play games during quarantine, escapism was the most popular with 20 out of 32 participants selecting this for their answer.

In terms of the most preferred gaming console, the highest ranked category was mobile gaming, such as a mobile phone or some sort of handheld console (28 out of 32 participants). A final noteworthy result from the study is the results of Yee's motivation survey compared to when participants were freely asked what motivated them to play games. Through Yee's survey, the most popular result for game-playing motivation was socialization (Prinsen et al., p. 43), but when participants freely answered, socialization came in third to last out of 6 total results. This could indicate that there could be a subconscious thought that although people think they don't need to rely on socialization to remain busy and stimulated, because of the pandemic they were craving it more than ever. Prinsen therefore states a principal conclusion that "video games, roleplaying in particular, offer a potential mechanism for players to escape real-world issues and cope with stressors" (p. 44).

The final article "Four Pillars of Healthy Escapism in Games: Emotion Regulation, Mood Management, Coping, and Recovery" by Mehmet Kosa and Ahmet Uysal (2020) focuses on the argument of healthy forms of escapism in video games and how escapism can therefore be beneficial and create positive experiences for players. Kosa and his team focused on studies that reported positive results of escapism and identified and explained these themes of healthy escapism, categorizing them into the four categories: emotion regulation, mood management, coping, and recovery. Beginning with emotion regulation, they talk about how "games are vast playgrounds for players to select and modify situations to their likings" (Kosa et al., p. 66). Their research discoveries also showed that people who regularly play games use emotion regulation

strategies more efficiently than irregular gamers. Therefore, they suggest that “games can be used for teaching emotion regulation for gamers who are not able to regulate their emotions, which might consequently result in the reduction of problematic gaming” (p. 66). Games are a safe space for players to practice and experience different emotional situations that can benefit them in the actual world.

For mood management, although like emotion regulation, mood is seen as a longer, extensive feeling rather than emotion that is more “moment to moment” (Kosa et al., p. 66). Kosa and his team found that through their research, the moods of boredom and stress of individuals improve through videogaming due to a game’s constant steady task demand of different levels and varieties (p. 67). They state that “research suggests that games help players manage their moods by providing agency, optimal levels of task demand, and making players feel competent” (Kosa et al., p. 67). For the coping category, this is seen as taking efforts and finding ways to diminish problems and overall be able to push through stress. Their research showed that consistently engaging in video games helps relieve stress by allowing players to feel a sense of empowerment. They also suggest that depending on whether engaging coping strategies or disengaging coping strategies are used (e.g. walking away from issues versus confronting them in some way) will affect escapism on problematic gaming. The results from the final category, recovery, suggest that playing games seems to be a more successful way to relax compared to stereotypical “stress-relieving” apps. Also, media that tends to be interactive provides better recovery experiences through improved cognitive performance as well as increased subjective vitality (Kosa et al., p. 69). Overall, the lines of research studied by Kosa and his team suggest that depending on the way escapism is viewed and which route is taken, escapist motivations can have beneficial outcomes if not used to avoid and procrastinate.

As stated earlier, many of these articles mentioned what is known as escapism (the escape theory), and the consistent upbringing of this concept supports that it is an active result in those who regularly play video games. These sources help set the ground layer for the data that will be gathered because they provide previous information about video games and how people already currently view them. It's clearly seen that there are many reasonings behind the escapism motive when engaging in the virtual world, but its communicational effect towards the "real" world was unclear; that is what I seek to answer through my survey. It is safe to say that how one communicates in real life must be different than how it is communicated in the virtual world, with the most obvious reason being that one is face-to-face while the other is not. Whether one is more successful than the other is debatable, and that is what I desire to learn more about.

Research Method/Ethical Issues

For my imposed research question, I published and sent out a survey where only people who regularly play video games (at least 3 to 4 times a week) and are 18 years of age or older were qualified to take it. Since my research question focuses on the relationship between the impact of video games in everyday communication, those who rarely take part in gaming or not at all would be irrelevant to my study. The structure of my online survey questions begins with the two qualifying questions about being at least 18 years of age and being a regular video game player. Next are demographic questions that include the topics of age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and employment status. Following the demographic questions, I include several basic personal gaming questions about the participants, such as their favorite video game genre and what type of gaming console they prefer. After this section of questions, I use the Likert-Scale question format to get even deeper into the personal lives of the participants and their relationship with video gaming, and how they believe it impacts certain areas of their lives. This

section I believe to be the most important in my survey because the Likert-Scale allows for participants to be able to choose from a variety of distinct levels for each prompt (with options ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”), therefore providing more accurate and specific information and results. I conclude my survey with a final open-ended question that asks participants if they believe video gaming has affected their communication either positively or negatively, and to provide an example.

Once my survey was completed and published, I first sent out a post with information about my survey along with the link to my Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook. Prior to publishing my survey, I added myself to as many survey exchange groups as possible on Facebook to increase the number of places in which my survey post is seen. This is where most of my responses came from, and I therefore had to complete many others’ surveys in return after they completed my own. However, I also added myself to two video gaming groups on Facebook that consisted of members who are gaming fanatics, and I also received many responses to my survey through these two group postings, with a big benefit being that I did not have to take anyone’s survey in return. I only received many comments from these video gamers stating that they had completed my survey and were happy to help in an area that they too, love.

Due to moral and ethical rights, the participants who took my survey all remained anonymous and names won’t be released to the public at any point. Although the topic of video games may not seem to need confidentiality restrictions, gaming serves as a crucial escape to many individuals from hardships they might be enduring and could be mentioned in the survey. I wanted to be sure that the volunteers felt comfortable including any information they felt the need to tell, especially in the open-ended question at the end. Also, certain questions I chose to include in the survey in the Likert-Scale section are more personal and may be sensitive to some

individuals, such as asking about participants' relationships with family members and their status on their mental health and well as physical health. As someone who seeks to escape from life struggles in many ways, I already know my personal boundary between engaging in those escapist methods (like video games) to calm myself down and relax, and when I begin to go overboard and the motivation becomes avoidance and being in denial of what needs to be done. Seeing what others believe to be a positive and negative impact in life when it comes to video gaming and its effects is a distinction that flourished quite clearly through my survey, something that, like many instances, ends up to simply depend on personal belief and individual situations.

Analysis

As stated earlier, my research question asked: How does the use of video games as a form of escapism affect one's communication and overall daily life? After two days of posting my survey on multiple social media platforms of mine as well as several survey exchange groups and video gaming groups, a total of 86 participants completed the survey past the two initial qualifying questions. However, the total number reduced to a total of 81 responses after the demographic questions ended and the first series of video gaming questions began. Also, there were three sections, or parts, to the Likert-Scale section, and the third and final section only had a total of 80 responses. The final open-ended question was also not answered by all participants and only 65 people typed something in the response box. The reasoning behind this slight diminishment of participants who closed out of the survey without completing it is unknown, and my only current theory is that the survey started to feel long rather early in the process.

Beginning with the demographic results, out of the 86 participants who answered all these questions, a majority were in the 18-24 age group (53 out of 86 people) followed by the 25-34 age group (23 out of 86 people). In terms of gender, 38 out of the 86 respondents identified as

male and 39 out of 86 identified as female. Six identified as non-binary, two as transgender, and one as “other”, in which was typed in the box they identify as “attack helicopter”. After a bit of research, I figured out that this term comes from a meme that was created to mock gender and sexual identification. Out of the 86 responses, the most common ethnicity was Caucasian (55 out of 86 people) followed by Hispanic (17 out of 86 people) and then Biracial coming in third (9 out of 86 people). For education level, the most popular choice was “some college” (41 out of 86 people) followed by “high school graduate” (17 out of the 86 participants), and in third was 12 people who completed a four-year degree. For the last demographic question of employment status, the top response was “employed full-time” (30 out of the 86 participants), followed by 26 respondents stating they work part-time, followed by 21 people who chose “student”.

Going into the notable results, the multiple-choice question that asked participants what their favorite video game genre was had a top response of “role-playing” (22 out of the 81 responses), with shooter games following closely behind as a top genre (19 out of the 81 responses). This result mirrors one of the results from an article mentioned earlier in my paper that helped create the backbone for my study. In the fifth article that I mentioned, Prinsen and Damian’s “Video Game Escapism During Quarantine”, their survey also contained a question that asked participants to pick their top video game genres. Role-playing games were also the most popular choice in their survey (25 out of 32 participants chose it as one of their top favorites), also followed by shooter games (16 out of 32 people). Both my responses and theirs showed role-playing and shooter games as the most well-liked genres. Prinsen’s final quote from this article may provide an explanation to the reasoning behind this choice and seems to connect with the escapist motive; he says, “Video games, roleplaying in particular, offer a potential mechanism for players to escape real-world issues and cope with stressors” (p. 44).

Moving into the notable results from the Likert-Scale section of the survey, one of the questions asked if participants believed that playing video games takes away valuable time that could be spent engaging with the real world, in which the top responses were “neither agree nor disagree” (24 out of 81 responses) followed closely by “strongly disagree” (22 out of 81); to keep in mind, the options for all the Likert-Scale questions are: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree. Given that these were the top choices, it can be inferred that there is no regret in choosing to play video games at those given moments and is worth spending the time for. Going more towards the health side of a person’s life, another question declared that one’s mental health is positively affected by video games, in which the most popular response was “somewhat agree” (27 out of 81 responses) followed closely by “strongly agree” (24 out of 81). On the social skills side, another question stated that “video games have turned me into a more introverted person”, where the top choice was “strongly disagree” (34 out of 81 responses) followed by 20 out of 81 people selecting “somewhat disagree”. With these two choices accounting for most of the responses, the idea that video games therefore do not negatively interfere with a person’s social skills is supported.

The third and final section of Likert-Scale questions focused more on the escapism connection to video games. For the question “I play video games as a way to escape from the harsh realities of the real world I live in”, the top response was “somewhat agree” with 38 out of 80 respondents choosing this option, and “strongly agree” coming in second place (14 out of 80 people). The next question stated, “video games help me forget about my everyday problems”, in which the top two responses were also “somewhat agree” (35 out of 80) followed by “strongly agree” (26 out of 80). The next question “I play video games to avoid negative feelings” also had the top choice of “somewhat agree” (22 out of 80 respondents) followed by a tie between

“strongly agree” and “neither agree nor disagree” (17 out of 80 people). The last listed question in this section, “I am overall satisfied with how video gaming has altered my life and everyday choices” once again had the same top two responses of “somewhat agree” (34 out of 80 participants) followed by “strongly agree” (21 out of 80). All four of these questions had top two responses both involving agreement, with all questions relating to the concept of escapism and its effects on their lives. The other final question that was listed in this third grouping was “The relationships I form through video games are more valuable to me than relationships I have in the real world”, in which the top two responses was a tie between “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree” (24 out of 80). Although it can be concluded through this information that escapism is indeed a vividly present factor behind the playing of video games, the participants still value their overall relationships with people in the real world much more than those that develop in the virtual worlds they engage in.

This connects to two of the six articles mentioned in my literature review where escapism was also a present factor in the results. In the fifth article, Prinsen and Schofield’s “Video Game Escapism During Quarantine”, they too conducted a survey in which one of the questions asked participants what motivated them to play video games during quarantine; the top response was the option of “escapism”, in which 20 out of the 32 participants chose this option (p. 42). Also, the third article from my literature review, “Seeking a Sense of Control or Escapism? The Role of Video Games in Coping with Unemployment” by Lee and Chen used Likert-Scale questions in their survey as well, separated by category in which one of those was escapism. Based on the results from those escapist-related questions in their survey, they too made a conclusion that the increases in game playing behavior they noticed “were positively associated with an increased sense of control and escapism” (Lee et al., p. 12). My own research along with these two articles

contain a similarity in terms of the escapism-related questions that were asked, yet they went out to completely different human beings and found such similar results that escapism is a clear motive for video gaming.

Lastly, there were some clear patterns found within the responses in the final open-ended question of my survey that asked, “Given how much time you spend playing video games, how has it affected your communication (either positively or negatively)? Please provide an example”. A total of 65 participants answered this final question, and a first noticeable pattern is that multiple participants stated that playing video games has helped control their anger and when arguments and stress occur, both in the virtual world and in the real world. This ties into yet another result from an article in my literature review. Kosa and Uysal’s article “Four Pillars of Healthy Escapism in Games: Emotion Regulation, Mood Management, Coping, and Recovery” argued that video games serve as a healthy form of escapism in many ways, categorizing these reasonings into four categories, one of which are emotion regulation. They suggest based on their findings that “games can be used for teaching emotion regulation for gamers who are not able to regulate their emotions”, implying that video games are a good environment for players to experiment with different emotional situations that will benefit them in the real world (Kosa et al., p. 66). This was a noticeable pattern in multiple responses within my last question; for example, someone stated, “I feel like video games help me with my anger. I can’t rage quit when having a conversation with someone so I don’t do it while gaming”, and another participant said, “It has helped with problem-solving and talking through disagreements and arguments” (anonymous survey response, 2023).

When looking at the open-ended question results as a whole, a majority of participants responded with a positive impact, and in second place was many participants responding with a

short “neutral” statement simply stating that they don’t feel their communication has been affected either positively or negatively. Some other mutual patterns in the responses included being able to simply share a common interest with many others and therefore feeling more confident when conversing about it. Many also stated that video games have allowed them to make new friends and overall feel like their communication has improved because of these relationships. For example, somebody’s response was, “It has helped me have stronger communicative abilities, such as building overall morale at work and promoting teamwork. I am in a leadership position in my career, so these skills come in handy”, and another respondent commented, “Meeting people and voice chatting with random people is a good skill to have since in the work force you’ll often work with people you don’t know” (anonymous survey response, 2023). There is a consistent common trend in participant’s responses that their overall communication has increased and they are able to take certain skills and strategies that naturally come from video gaming and apply them to their external lives.

A final pattern within the last question that was unexpected is that multiple people mentioned within their responses that they were autistic. A total of five participants directly stated within their response that they had autism, and it’s likely that more of these respondents may also be autistic but did not mention that throughout the survey since it was not prompted at any point. From my current personal knowledge, those who are on the autism spectrum tend to have symptoms that include delayed cognitive and learning skills, unusual and spontaneous emotional reactions, and have a harder time with overall direct communication. My assumption is therefore that many people with autism play video games to help them better these skills, but also because it serves as a safe space that helps them to focus on an activity and engage with peers through a common and shared interest. Four out of the five people that mentioned they had

autism responded with something positive, claiming that video games have helped them become more aware of what they are saying and how they are saying it when communicating and responding to situations.

Conclusion

My objective for this research project was to investigate the concept of escapism through playing video games and how it affects a person's communication in everyday life. The analyzation of the results of my survey have led me to the conclusion that video games are commonly used as an escapist method from life and its obstacles that may arise at any given point. However, I also therefore argue that, at the very least, the participants who took my survey continue to value their relationships in the real world more than in the virtual world where nothing is technically "real", and that boundary and distinction between the two environments remains clear and unquestionable. It can also be concluded that people who regularly play video games have an improved sense of communication because of the skills and practices that develop within the virtual world. Although this may have been the general consensus, the few outsiders who believe video games impact their lives and communication negatively will always remain. At the end of the day, just about anything can be up for interpretation and everyone's lives and preferences remain unique to them.

There will always be times where a gamer may spend an excessive amount of time playing, whether it's due to there being bad weather outside, they are having an extra stressful day, a new game was just released, or maybe even just a bad mental health day. In situations as such, a resulting factor is likely to be a lack of communication and interaction with the real world. For example, one participant responded to the final open-ended question by saying video games have a negative effect on their communication, stating, "You're more busy with games

rather than communicating with your family about daily stuff” (anonymous survey response, 2023). However, I do believe that although this is bound to happen in some cases by default, it is likely to become a regular issue only if the person allows it to happen. The balance between time spent playing video games and engaging with the external world will always be different for each person. As long as it is at a level of balance that they are personally comfortable with, that is what’s important. The possibilities of what is capable within the digital world are endless, and there can always be steadiness and balance between time spent gaming while still living and appreciating the beautiful world that we live in.

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