ABSTRACT

THE GAMES MEN PLAY:
HOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE MEN USE VIDEO GAMES TO CONSTRUCT MASCULINITY

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Employing a critical discourse analysis as a methodology, the study provides information regarding the intersection of male student development, video games, and two-year higher education institutions. Using a sample of 13 participants, this research study examines how male students at two-year higher education institutions use video games to construct their masculinity. This study provides evidence that college men construct multiple definitions of masculinity by playing video games. Further, the benefits explored include academic and workplace strategies for success. Finally, opportunities for two-year institutions to further engage this student population is included.

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THE GAMES MEN PLAY:
HOW COMMUNITY COLLEGE MEN USE VIDEO GAMES TO CONSTRUCT MASCULINITY

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Introduction

The common assumption and conception regarding video games and gamers has expressed the opinion that gamers are overweight, socially awkward, and live in their parents' basement, or they are hyper-violent and aggressive members of society just one bad day away from expressing their rage and anger in an outburst of destruction. More importantly, video games are gateways to lives filled with apathy, violence, and dissatisfaction (Kimmel, 2008). Video game players are also male. Video games are not, according to this belief, a structure and conduits for learning, progressivism, or productivity. For example, Andres Brievek, speaking in his defense of the worst mass murder in Norway since World War II, explained that playing video games such as *Modern Warfare* and *World of Warcraft* prepared him to execute his attack (Associated Press, 2012). He learned how, it could be said, to terrorize and murder because of video games. Especially in the wake of video games and violence controversy from the mid-1990s, when games such as *Mortal Kombat* allowed victors to dismember and execute defeated opponents, and the infamous Columbine Shootings of 1999, where *Doom* was cited as a reason for the school shooting that claimed the lives of 17 students and one teacher (Kent, 2001), video games, it appears, have been the modern, non-artistic scapegoat that the public blames for all violent behavior and threaten to trap men in a lifestyle of violence and debauchery (Ebert, 2010; Kimmel, 2008; Wark, 2007).

Despite these perceived negative attributes, research and events that open up space in the public discourse to provide counter-narratives about video games. These counter-narratives posit that video games—for better or for worse—have been sites of learning and they should be treated seriously because of it (Gee, 2004; Jenkins, 2006). For example, Paxton Galvanek used the skills learned in *America's Army* (a game that uses authentic military training to simulate modern combat) to stabilize the life of a man injured in a roll-over accident until paramedics could arrive (Cavelli, 2008). He learned to help, not kill, through video games. Also, Tony Hansberry—a 14-year-old boy—developed a new technique for using a vertical stitch, as opposed to the traditional horizontal stich, for patients' post-hysterectomy (Scheff, 2010). Doctors tested Hansberry's technique and discovered that it reduced recovery time, pain, and post-op complications, and they could only surmise that his video game experience gave him both the analytical thinking and hand-eye coordination necessary to perform this surgery. Clearly, learning and development has been occurring within these video game communities, and this learning and development has impacted socio cultural concerns.

Just as video games and gamers have been constructed and deconstructed, so, too, have been definitions and conceptions of men. As sites of learning, these video games are considered cultural artifacts that provide semiotic referents for gamers to use in constructing their definitions of masculinity (Cassell & Jenkins, 1999; Kimmel, 2008; McGonigal, 2011). In the previous examples, all of the cases described are men, and they comprise the primary social group envisioned when discussing these communities. More so, the examples depicted representations of men acting upon others negatively in the case of Columbine and Norway, but positively by stabilizing the wounded in a feat worthy of the Good Samaritan and developing new surgical

techniques. There is a social interaction involved. Importantly, central to these stories is the motivation for people to commit acts of healing versus acts of harm. Thus, the question that has emerged from the intersection of video games and masculinity is how men, when engaging in the diegesis of video games, learn to imitate behaviors that are then replicated in their personal and professional lives.

Certainly, many modern video games have been rooted in traditional masculine stereotypes based upon aggression, competition, and winning, but they also have depended on traditional male cultural values of standing up for what is right, protecting the weak, and helping others. These video games are cultural texts that participants use to define their masculinity, and these texts affect their development. Interacting with these texts has introduced gamers to referents that are used to (de)construct meaning about what it means to be a man. Men use these texts to construct their own definition of masculinity within Lotman's (1999) Semi-sphere (1999), which is the term he defines as the process of how meaning is created through and with the interaction of others and cultural artifacts. Rather than meaning being created in a vacuum, it is created through the exchange of ideas. More so, Gee (2004) described how this interaction promotes literacy development, as gamers use these texts to understand the social reality around them. In effect, video games become part of the lifeworld, which, briefly defined, is the place in culture used by members of society to compose their epistemology, and carry with them the potential to influence how gamers who encounter them construct their reality (Habermas, 1985). Thus, their impact on the lifeworld of these gamers affects the external process of reciprocal determination by which an individual obtains information from an external environment, uses it to develop an epistemology, and then affects the external environment (Bandura, 1985). In this

case, men process information from video games; through mimesis, this interaction between text and gamers then influences their actions, behaviors, and world-view. Then these actions, behaviors, and world-view become the framework for which men use to view, construct, and affect the world.

Video games have become semiotic repositories from which gamers draw upon cultural information and values to construct larger social categories, such as masculinity. Directly to the point was Gee and Hayes's (2010) study regarding how women learn in video game communities. The authors researched and interviewed several women who exhibited growth and social development in online video games. Depicted in this study were women who led online discussions in chat rooms, created and sold virtual goods, and used these communities to affect social change. Members of these communities do more than just passively interact with the games and their communities. They learn skills and use them to become, broadly speaking, producers through these cultural artifacts and semiotic mediations; regardless of the specifics, video games develop skill sets, which men use to produce cultural items of value. Learning is promoted, not demoted, within these communities. Following this line of reasoning and research, it stands to reason that men undergo a similar, if not the same, process as women when they experience video games.

Based upon this brief overview provided about masculinity and video games, there has been a clear exigency that requires further study about how men are affected by experiencing video games and how development occurs because of it. The role that video games play in challenging these negative male stereotypes and masculinity has been debated among researchers and society. Within this semiotic domain and discourse community, there is a specific set of

habits and customs that communicates specific meanings to participants, and this communication constructs definitions of masculinity and social habits associated with it.

Video Games and Higher Education

One emerging area has concerned the relationship of men and their experiences with educational institutions; however, there also has been a concern with how video games are constructed and applied in these educational institutions. Given the importance of technology and video games, K-12 schools in Chicago and New York have been incorporating media and video games into their curricula to enhance students' success (Hall, 2013). Complementing this trend, the Quest Atlantis Project has been another example of how higher education can use video games successfully to enhance classroom learning (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble, 2010). Both examples used video games intentionally designed to demonstrate an educational topic or concept. Students are able to learn and practice skills and concepts necessary for success as students and professional members of the workforce. Higher education institutions use video games as a method of teaching, yet there are narrow parameters for how they do it. This use of video games has placed learning on practical skill and cognitive development. There has been a gap concerning how students construct epistemology about abstract, socially defined concepts—men and masculinity, for example. More so, little research has examined this development outside of formal, specifically designed constructs. It has ignored an obvious statement about video games: people play them for fun, not necessarily to learn a specific concept.

Few researchers in higher education have studied the field of college men and masculinity, but they have provided a permeable framework that guides the study of college men

and masculinity. First, Kimmel (2008) devotes an entire chapter to video games in *Guyland,* and he indicts video games as a site of purgatory: men do not develop into adulthood, but they do not regress to boyhood either. Due, in part, to video games, men have remained trapped in a luminal state from which they do not possess the skills or desire to escape. He argues that in college, the lure of video games distracts men from academic and social activities that, in his opinion, are more beneficial to men's development. Rather than turning outward for companionship and networking, video games encourage escapism as students use them to soothe anxiety and fear. These video games then reinforce traditional or pre-conceived notions of masculinity and support—not challenge—the status quo.

Second, Davis (2002) applied these gender roles to research development in his study concerning gender-role conflict. He argues that men possess fear and anxieties about being men. In turn, men, when faced with this fear and anxiety, react in ways supporting social power and prestige. Based on gender-role conflict theory (O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Washington, 1986), Davis's research uncovers that college men struggle to define their masculinity—especially when bombarded with many social norms from the media and various peer groups. This struggle causes men difficulty in assimilating into a peer group as they try to maintain their own unique construction of masculinity. It is their struggle to define their masculinity that has caused many of the problems related to men and masculinity development (Davis, 2002). Men, possess difficulty in determining, defining, and developing their own masculinity; they experience gender-role conflict. Students, therefore, arrive at higher educational institutions with pre-conceived notions of what it means to be a man, and when these constructions are challenged or found to be unacceptable, their development arrests and causes negative and detrimental

displays of masculinity. College men follow the norm because it affords them opportunities for social power and prestige, and in doing so, they end up replicating negative habits and behaviors.

Providing a racial lens, Harper and Harris (2010) studied men and masculinity from the perspective of male students of color. Their research demonstrates the lack of options presented to male students; for example, they noted the dominance of Black men in college sports. Men of Color, for example, are faced with the preconceived notion that they can only be athletes. These college men lack the perspective to develop other forms of masculinity apart from these preconceived expectations. The result of the authors' research outlines myths surrounding college men and masculinity. As a result, Harris and Harper proposed a model gender myth that describes how these gender stereotypes produce negative effects. The authors defines this as the model gender majority myth to explain these cultural assumptions about masculinity. The five components of this myth are as follows:

1. Every male equally benefits from gender privilege
2. Gender initiatives need not include men
3. Undergraduate men do not receive harmful stereotypes.
4. Male students do not require male-specific resources.
5. Historical dominance and structural determinism ensure male success. (Harper & Harris, 2010, p. 8)

This model gender myth has expressed the concept that men are held captive by preconceived, often negative, stereotypes about being men. The social expectations and assumptions trap them, and when trapped, men often perform the stereotypical masculine role, which only serves to perpetuate the stereotypes and myths about college men.

An important overlap among researchers has been the notion that men are in conflict about how their masculinity could and should develop. These researchers have argued that masculinity is not a monolithic construct and all men should not be treated equally. The Center of Masculinity and Men's Development (2012) at Western Illinois University has articulated this point: "Research is clear that men are in crisis, particularly men from underrepresented populations. Considerable disagreement, however, exists about how to most effectively support men's engagement and development, while maintaining focus on social justice" (para. 1). Masculinity is a nuanced and multifaceted social construct, and it should be treated as such. Yet, although this research articulates this concern, much of it either ignores or minimalizes the role of video games in the construction of masculinity. Likewise, if male students learn to be men through higher education institutions, video games should also be studied as a part of the institutional culture.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this study concerns the gap created by the lack of understanding about the relationship between college men's development of masculinity and their experiences with video games. Given the heavy social connotation about the connection between video games and men, this process of how video games construct masculinity needs to be studied and understood. Currently, the perception of video games is that they hinder men from the development of epistemology and skills necessary for success in college, the workplace, and adulthood (Kimmel, 2008). As documented, video games can be a site for learning and development as well as a vehicle for social interactions (Gee, 2004; Jenkins, 2008; McGonigal, 2011). Thus, this perception must be challenged and changed. This gap and lack of

understanding creates an opportunity to examine how masculinity is constructed and what habits are developed from playing video games. Counter-narratives challenge the perception that video games are detrimental to society; more so, there has been a need to understand how men construct their masculinity to develop healthy definitions of being a man.

Quite frankly, current research has not explored the notion that video games are sites of reproduction and can promote positive constructions of masculinity. The research, further, has not connected the semiotic domains of video games to the development of men and masculinity, despite their being labeled a problem afflicting men. Additionally, two-year institutions of higher learning examins as sites of reproduction can promote development of masculinity. Working from the assumption that video games are sites of reproduction beneficial to society, and from the assumptions that many (college) men play video games, this study examined how participating in the discourse of video games has produced constructions of masculinity.

Further, current research about video games and college men has also not focused on two-year institutions but, rather, has been focused overwhelmingly on how masculinity is constructed at four-year institutions, despite obvious differences in the student population (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2010). This oversight is even more striking when considering the current national conversation regarding jobs and the national skill gap. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's 2013 report, it was estimated that 80% of jobs in the next decade will require at least a two-year degree. Given that two-year institutions focus on associate degrees and certificates, this gap is noticeable. Along with the variations in student population, two-year institutions can also possess different, stronger, relationships with business

and industry (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). There has been a question regarding if and how two-year educational communities can harness video games to help their students achieve success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research how two-year college men use video games to construct their masculinity. It situated itself at the intersection of college men and masculinity and video games to research and uncover the critical gender constructions embedded in this overlooked aspect of popular culture and their impact on learning and development. The study synthesized research from bodies of knowledge concerning hegemony, popular culture, and college men and masculinities to analyze how men at two-year institutions use video games to construct their masculinity. As part of popular culture, there have been vital questions concerning epistemology and hegemony embedded in video game studies. There has been a growing body of research concerning college men and masculinity, the connection between video games and masculinity has yet to be explored. Prior research about video games and college men has encompassed four-year institutions of higher education, not two-year institutions.

Male students have received little attention in terms of research and scholarship in higher education. Moreso, there has been a paucity of research studies concerning the student development of students at two-year institutions, let alone male students. Harper and Harris (2010) urged for more research to be done in these organizations. My study was an answer to that call. Additionally, Harper and Jackson (2011) pronounced that two-year organizations must become respected institutions of higher education—the snobbery and elitism used to look down upon them is counter-productive and damaging to students' education and development. In

addition, given the emphasis on workforce development, job re-training, and open enrollment philosophies, two-year organizations house a unique student population of the various demographics in the surrounding communities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The diversity of the student population encompasses race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and professionalism, as students from a variety of social positions have thrived in two-year organizations, and the interaction of all of these populations has needed further examination.

Research Questions

This study used the following research questions to guide inquires:

1. What do men experience when they play video games?
2. What cultural myths and archetypes about men and masculinity are produced or reproduced by video games?
3. How is masculinity constructed through experiencing video games?
4. What impact on learning is produced by video games and occurs through this construction and development of masculinity?
5. What role, if any, do two-year institutions of higher education serve within this construction of masculinity with video games?

Rationale and Significance

Higher education researchers (Capraro, 2000; Davis & Laker, 2004; Harper, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2008; Laker & Davis, 2011) have equated negative student behavior of male students with issues in the development of their masculinity. Problems with excessive drinking, sexual assault, poor scholarship, and violent behavior (among others) are due to false conceptions of manhood and masculinity. Additionally, men often that believe their

vocational and career paths are limited, and they frequently encounter difficulty expressing their emotions and seeking guidance (Mahalik, Perry, Coonert-Femiano, Catriao, & Land, 2006). This false belief system was defined and explored in Kimmel's (2008) *Guyland*. He summarizes the results of interviews conducted over 30 years and how false beliefs have stunted men's development: "Guyland sells most guys a bill of goods telling them that a constellations of behaviors are the distilled essences of manhood, which could not be farther from the truth" (p 23). This false belief has been enshrined in mythical conceptions of masculinity, but men have not been taught how to develop forms of masculinity that helps them break free from these negative, harmful myths. According to research (Laker & Davis, 2011; Harper & Harris, 2010; Kimmel 2008), men have been trapped by the cultural constructions of masculinity because, although they do not want to replicate these constructions, they receive little assistance in constructing and developing masculinity apart from it. My study was significant because it researched available avenues to free college men from these negative cultural constructions.

The roots of these mythical constructions of masculinity have been based in stereotypes and archetypes of traditional masculinity. Masculine stereotypes and archetypes receive some definition in David and Brannon's (1976) *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*. This anthology solidified social constructions of men and masculinity to discuss the need to avoid femininity, workplace success, sexual prowess, confidence, aggression, and how men are socialized into "learning how to be a man" (p. 233). Whereas the authors' anthology started this discourse about men and masculinity, Pleck's (1982) *The Myth of Masculinity* provides detailed evidence about how men develop differently from women and are faced with their own unique sets of gender-roles and challenges. His research defines many social norms influencing masculinity

and shaping its construction that distinguish it from femininity. These differences become the categories from which men and masculinities are studied: violence and aggression, vocation and being a family provider, and men's inability to express their feelings and be intimate. They are, of course, in line with many of the problems and concerns facing present-day male college students. Overall, the significance of this study is to illuminate how men construct their masculine, gendered identity from experiencing video games and what ramifications it contains.

Hegemonic Masculinity

An important aspect compounding these gender problems and concerns has been the idea of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2005). Whereas certain masculine acts may appear normal, Connell asserts that these traditional pre-conceived definitions of masculinity are not socially neutral or natural. This is a significant aspect because men do possess a gendered identity, which makes them vulnerable to issues of power and prestige. Men's construction of masculinity can be constructed via hegemonic forces, and this construction impacts their meaning-making structures. Within the broad category of masculinity, are competing forms of how masculinity is defined, and thus numerous power dynamics determine which forms of masculinity are replicated and which forms are marginalized. Hegemonic masculinity, he argues, depends upon the traditional roles of masculinity (for example, being competitive, being aggressive, and being stoic) because these are the social values that perpetuate and support corporate industry and the military. Further, they perpetuate racism, homophobia, and chauvinism. Due to the pervasive influences of hegemonic masculinity, men frequently encounter gender-role conflict when attempting to challenge it. Quite simply, men do not understand how to develop various forms of masculinity because hegemonic masculinity is the

only form of masculinity they have experienced. It is unnatural or not masculine, for example, to talk about their emotions. It is the only form of masculinity they know; thus, they cannot conceptualize alternative definitions of being a man. More so, hegemonic masculinity is privileged in society: men performing hegemonic masculinity are granted power and prestige over those who do not.

Researchers of college men and masculinity have attempted to challenge hegemonic masculinity in order to promote development of other types of masculinity. Addis, Mansfield, and Syzdek (2010) and Harris (2008) use the term 'positive masculinity' to challenge hegemonic masculinity and the social constructions it carries. They argued that more depictions of men behaving well and functioning as role-models and leaders in society can open up new avenues for men to encounter. The hermeneutics of these encounters guide men to develop constructions of masculinity that challenge and change power structures replicated by hegemonic masculinity. Rather than interpreting images of men as drunken, lazy, violent idiots, they need to interpret images of men as responsible, proactive, community leaders. By taking in positive examples, men internalize them and produce values associated with positive masculinity. Moreso, they understand the multiple definitions of masculinity and can overcome gender-role conflict to assist in their development.

In this study, my interpretation and application of this concept to the study of college men and masculinity is that habitus produces more behaviors and responses aligned with positive masculinity and shift away from hegemonic masculinity (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Undercutting many of the programs and organizations dedicated to resisting negative traits of hegemonic masculinity is the creating of a new unconscious condition that replaces hegemonic

values (i.e., violence, sexual assault, drinking) with positive values (i.e., community leadership, egalitarianism, mutual respect). Thus, the habitus of hegemonic masculinity and positive masculinity compete within the discourse of men and masculinity. As Connell (2005) argues, hegemonic masculinity remains centralized because of its social power and prestige, despite its negative aspects. People creating new constructions of masculinity must navigate this conundrum of maintaining their identity as they attempt to adopt aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Central to this idea are the habits and assumptions about men reproduced by hegemonic masculinity: there are particular traits and actions that separate hegemonic from positive masculinity.

All Men Can Be Students, But Not All Students Are Men

A significant aspect to this study is how it challenges a critical assumption made about men and masculinity: that their gender-roles and development have already been analyzed and considered. Building on Davis and Laker's (2004) argument that many seminal studies about students in higher education use men as participants, but do not focus specifically on men and masculinity, this study focused specifically on how men construct their masculinity as a gender. In short, prior research has focused on student development, not men's development. These previous studies, such as Perry (1970) and Chickering and Ressier (1993), failed to take masculinity into consideration when analyzing their data—they were interested in men as students, not men as men. This epistemological oversight has marginalized men because it gives the false construction that men have been analyzed and studied, which connects to the model gender majority myth. Although their participants were men, the construction of masculinity and its impact on student's development was not the focus of these studies. Much like other aspects

of society, men are not monolithic, and neither are their masculinities. The complexities, tensions, and assumptions are worthy of analytical research. More so, Harris and Harper (2010) further challenged this assumption by suggesting that these studies have drawn from a student population that quite simply does not exist in modern higher education. In the past decades since these studies were conducted, student demographics have expanded to include students of color, gay populations, special needs populations, and others[1]. Therefore, not only have men and masculinity not been adequately studied, populations that deviate from the mythical norm—White, hetero-normative, able-bodied, financially secure, thin, and male—have not been included in this research (Lorde, 2007).

The Need to Study College Men as College Men

Along with challenges to hegemonic masculinity and the negative social norms associated with it, the field of men and masculinity has addressed how these demographics are changing and what they mean for student development. Certainly, as the contextual and temporal nature of students change, there will be need for studies to research and examine (a) this behavior, and (b) the effect it has on student development. For example, whereas men were once responsible for the professional sphere, what happens when vocations once considered traditionally masculine are no longer available in the *man-cession* (Rampell, 2009), a term given to describe the rapid loss of manufacturing jobs that were once traditionally held by men, which created a disproportionately high number of men unemployed or under-employed, from either women joining the workforce, technology mitigating the need for non-robotic workers, or outsourcing to other companies. Further, Faludi (2000) extends an argument that men have been

[1] I do not mean to exclude any specific population from this list. These examples are chosen to represent how student demographics have changed. Certainly, as time progresses, the student demographics will continue to change to include other marginalized populations.

betrayed and are suffering negative effects from public polices and social programs. Suffering men, she argues, have not been the focus of the public agenda, and their concerns and needs have often been ignored or marginalized. Rosin (2012) traces the rise of women in traditionally men-dominated fields (business and being the primary income in a household, for example) to articulate a world existing after the end of men. As men's place in a dynamic sociopolitical world, women's position in that sociopolitical world also must continually be researched and examined. The social constructions that gave rise to current constructions of masculinity are no longer present; they have changed, thus, changing how masculinity is constructed.

One area of Western culture that has received frequent blame for stunting male development and growth are video games and gaming communities. Certainly, the image of men playing video games permeates the cultural consciousness to the degree that video games are accused of everything, including the low enrollment and graduate rate of college men (American Association of Community College, 2012). Kimmel (2008) asserts video games have been a place of escapism for male students who cannot, or will not, face their changing responsibilities. Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley (2007) devote an entire anthology to the relationship between video games and adolescents, and what can be done through public policy to reduce this negative behavior. If these arguments sound familiar, they contain similar rhetoric to the Red Scare that suggested communists were going to overthrow capitalism, an argument used by Wertham (1953) to describe how comic books seduced innocent children into a life of homosexuality, depravity, and immoral behavior, and the policy used by the Breen Office to create the Hollywood Production Code to prevent indecency in cinema. Cultural scapegoats are nothing new.

Curiously, men are facing economic uncertainty and tribulations in the job market, their enrollment in institutions of higher education has not been indicative of this trend. In short, they are not enrolling in higher education institutions at rates symptomatic of these shifts in the professional and domestic spheres. When community college demographics were examined, based on Fall 2008 demographic data, women enrolled at a 58% rate, whereas men enrolled at only a 42% rate (American Association of Community College, 2012). Yet, traditional-aged men are considered at risk and in danger of not completing college programs (American Association of Community College, 2012).

The Potential Value of Video Games

There has been a body of researchers and literature that suggest video games have benefits to support the actions of games like Galvanek and Hansberry. Video games are not the cause of arrested development and shifts in masculinity. This body, while small, has provided insight into how future studies can and should focus on how video games help learning, not impede it. Kutner and Olson (2008) *Grand Theft Childhood* denounce the claims that video games are bad, and suggested that video games promote community and social development. Myers (2003) outlines the latent semiotics involved with playing video games and their important effects on gamers; Gee (2004) examines the various semiotic domains within video games that promote literacy and development; and Jenkins (2008) describes the participatory culture in these digital communities that encourage consumers to become producers. Clearly, these studies have challenged the assumptions that video games are a Scylla-like whirlpool that lure men to their apathetic demise. Video games, much like any other multi-modal, social text, can be used to promote learning and development.

What cannot and should not be understated is that video games are part of the popular culture topos; they are rich narratives that provide meaning-making processes that align with literature and film (Jenkins, 2008). Because of this alignment, video games can and should be studied to determine how male students—in the context of higher education—learn from these texts, and how these texts can be used to promote critical consciousness, liberation, and social justice (Davis & Harrison, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

Given that current research in the field of college men and higher education has focused on the deconstruction and dismantling of hegemonic masculinity, this study uses a conceptual framework rooted in the notion that culture can be used either to promote or subvert hegemony. Video games are part of students' lifeworld, and these games are used to construct students' epistemology regarding social categories and concepts. This construction, in turn, affects their meaning-making structures and lens used to view the world. Thus, issues of hegemonic control are central to the warrant for the study and the framework used to conduct it. As hegemony has colonized the lifeworld, the actions, habits, and epistemology constructed from it come to support the dominant class maintaining the status quo.

The Colonization of the Lifeworld

As Habermas (1985) describes, the lifeworld is where "language and cultural tradition take on a certain transcendental status in relation to everything that can become an element of a situation" (p. 124). In other words, the lifeworld consists of the habits, rituals, and ways people communicate with one another to make meaning or produce action. It is the pool of information and repositories that people use to make decisions and form assumptions that define their views

and opinions. A danger occurs when elements of popular culture subvert the lifeworld by causing people to mistake fantasy for reality. Habermas warns, "When stripped of ideological veils, the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from the outside—like colonial masters coming into a tribal society—and force a process of assimilation on it" (p. 354). What happens is that outside elements, such as video games, for example, create a false consciousness that colonizes rational thinking in such a way that the false consciousness becomes assumed as true; masculinity is associated with war and conquest because that is all with which masculinity is associated within these cultural texts. Through the process of colonization, hegemony becomes normalized and unquestioned; criticality gives way to complacency.

Due to this colonization, certain habits are replicated and imitated to become part of the cultural norming process. They are internalized and repeated with no thought or critical reflection about their meaning or action; men fight because that is what men do. These traditional elements of masculinity become what Connell (2005) defines as hegemonic masculinity. They are the assumed traits and values of being a man that are neither questioned nor critically examined by society. Hence, this is why examination of representations of masculinity are necessary: they challenge the power and prestige established by the hegemonic masculinity, that allows it continually reproduce and colonize the lifeworld. In order for men to challenge hegemonic masculinity, they must encounter cultural artifacts that show hegemonic masculinity being challenged.

Habitus

As part of this study's conceptual framework, Bourdieu's (2001) concept of habitus was useful to determine which traits and values have been internalized, and what affect this internalization has on the development of masculinity. He defines habitus as, "the product of internalization of the principles of culture arbitrarily capable of perpetuating itself" (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977, p. 31), or, in other words, those habits, rituals, and actions that are performed without thinking and reflecting on their purpose or function. Habitus in society affects masculinity because it determines which gender-roles and scripts are associated with it. Men and women perform specific actions and duties due to this internalized, arbitrary cultural logic: despite being circular and based in an *ad antiquitatem* fallacy, the reasoning goes that men and women act like men and women because men and women have always acted this way. The question becomes how to successfully break this cycle so that new constructions of masculinity can be formed and applied in society.

One example of this type of internalized conditioning has been how masculine attributes "dispense with justification" and become normal in our society (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 9). Men and masculine behavior are the assumed norm from which standards and values are derived. Importantly, power dynamics are internalized and invisible, but critical thinking and reflection exposes them in the lifeworld and causes them to lose their influence in society. This type of analysis shows how the dynamics work, and it can be subverted to alter how power and cultural capital are distributed in society. By becoming a normalized, natural function and process for the way society should function, men displaying these masculine attributes come to possess cultural capital and, thus, power. As part of this naturalized process, masculinity becomes a sort

of nobility that does not accept questions or criticizing and whose habitus appears invisible; masculine habits are accepted as normal and are the benchmarks against which other habits are measured (Bourdieu, 2001). Combining this with Connell's (2005) point about masculinity being fragmented and consisting of multiple definitions of masculinity, these masculine traits represent one form of hegemonic masculinity. Although masculinity is dominant and naturalized, this definition can be deconstructed to discuss other forms of masculinity. Masculinity becomes central to the actions of others, but invisible and unnoticed to men themselves. Men, unaware of the hegemonic masculine influence on their actions, reproduce dangerous and unhealthy habits associated with being masculine.

Because of this presence and centralization, masculinity is afforded the position to control how social constructs are created and defined in the lifeworld and, how it is developed from these encounters. The habitus created by society is generated by masculinity, which centralizes and privileges it, as masculinity is the norm from which other things are measured. Sites of reproduction—the family, the church, and the educational system—have encouraged this centralization and masculine domination by encouraging the habits and dispositions of masculinity (Bourdieu, 2001). Non-masculine social constructs are marginalized because they are not masculine, and the only way to move from the margins is to align with the standards based on this definition of masculinity. Hence, a double-blind occurs in that these marginalized groups are faced with a conundrum: in order to maintain their identity, they must adopt these habits, but in adopting these habits, they lose their identity.

Video Game Hermeneutics

The hermeneutics of how gamers use video games to construct knowledge has depended on the lifeworld and habitus. Gamers use information in the video games as cultural repositories to replicate habits and action encountered in the game. The games, as cultural artifices, function as referents to socially constructed definitions, many of which are based on myths and archetypes. These myths and archetypes form a collective body of information that comprises the life worlds from which games construct and develop these social concepts. Vygotsky (1978) theorizes that cultural texts allow for semiotic mediation as learners bring their cultural position to a text and are influenced by that text. Thus, according to this belief, gamers can bring their unique life experiences to these texts in which they interact with other cultural groups. This interaction allows for the deconstruction and reconstruction of cultural knowledge. Gamers both contribute to this body of knowledge and are changed by it. Making their cultural history part of this discourse, they become part of the discourse—able to be changed by and able to change it. In short, they learn from interacting with both the games and other gamers.

Summary

In conclusion, this study rests upon the intersection of three assumptions: first, masculinity, as a social construct, to determine its effects on student development; second, the need to study video games, as cultural artifacts, to determine how students' semiotic mediation affects this construction and development; and third, the marginalized voices of two-year college men and their acts of resistance to the dominant ideology in their affinity groups. The socially constructed nature of masculinity has been changing. Men are being placed into luminal areas where they do not fully understand their new roles, but their old roles are no longer appropriate.

They seek comfort and solace in fictitious worlds of video games to avoid confronting and resolving this gender-role conflict. Moreso, institutions of higher education must be complicit actors in helping students understand these new gender constructions, and they must help students apply them to their learning and development. By synthesizing these three topics together, it is better understood how college men use video games to construct their masculinity.

What follows in Chapter 2 is a review of the literature about popular culture, video games, and college men and masculinity. Chapter 3 proposes a critical discourse methodology to determine how the semiotics of the language used by participants' details how they construct masculinity and apply it to their own development. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of this data, and last, Chapter 5 provides a discussion about the findings and concludes with directions for future research. The appendix contains copies of all material promoting the study and inviting students to participate, interview questions, and any other pertinent supplemental information.

Definition of Key Terms

The following is a list of key terms and how their use is defined within this document.

Affinity group: where learning occurs through shared common knowledge and experiences (Gee, 2004).

Cultural artifacts: Elements of culture which specific meaning is attributed to by members of the group (Vygotsky, 1978).

Diegesis: The fictional world created by a narrative.

Discourse: The ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity (Gee, 2011).

Gamers: Members of a population that plays games routinely for either for fun and recreation or for competition.

Lifeworld: Rituals, habits, and customs that provide the cultural assumptions that shape understanding of life experiences (Habermas, 1985).

Man/men: The biological condition of being a man.

Masculinity: The social construction of what it means to be a man, i.e., how men should behave in affinity groups.

Semiotic domain: A set of practices that recruits multiple modalities to communicate distinctive meanings (Gee, 2004).

Semiotics: The study of signs in which language acts as a mediator between two concepts.

Semiotic mediation: Using a cultural artifact to assign and process meaning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sign: A combination of a signifier and a signified that is used to produce meaning (Saussure, 2007).

Two-year organizations: Institutions of higher education that offer a majority of associate degrees and certificates (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). Synonyms are junior colleges, technical colleges, and community colleges.

Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

I believed it is necessary to examine critically how video games, as a part of popular culture, influence gamers and what hegemonic aspects reside within them. Specifically, for this study, I was interested in examining what men who play video games learn from the experience and how that, specifically, affects their experiences as learners and as students in a higher education institution. Due to the intense emphasis placed on video games stunting of men's intellectual and social development, it was imperative that this critical connection be researched and analyzed.

Given the influence of video games and their (popular) cultural importance, they have served as an overlooked reservoir from which members of society construct knowledge. Much of the literature has analyzed television and film, and video games studies have become an emerging section of popular culture worthy of such analysis, too. In short, there has been a gap between television and film studies and video games studies; video games have occupied a space on the fringes. Especially considering the semiotics involved in playing video games—where the players actively control the events occurring in the video game as opposed to passively consuming a television or film—it is vital that questions concerning how men construct epistemology through these experiences be examined. Additionally, the epistemological construction of masculinity has not been isolated: it is woven into the sociocultural fabric and influences other affinity groups and knowledge (Gee, 2004). Simply put, video games are sites of cultural knowledge and, as such, are places where knowledge and meaning are constructed.

The theoretical underpinning to this study is that video games are a way to communicate particular actions and behaviors to gamers or, according to Habermas (1985), to understand "how speech acts can simultaneously take on the functions of cultural reproductions social integration, and the socialization of individuals" (p 64). In effect, this process of communication encourages replication of certain habits, behaviors, and meanings by bestowing members of society with power, prestige, and privilege. The unity of these actions, as the author theorized, generates cultural meaning, which is replicated within those participants of the culture. This act of empowering one set of actions and marginalizing another means, in this case, that gamers must imitate those actions that provide privilege, and simultaneously avoid those actions that do not provide it. The dialectal relationship created by this process separates them into two categories: those with privilege, and those without privilege, which produces an inevitable tension.

Chapter Overview

In investigating this tension and its effects, this chapter entails a review of the literature of three bodies of knowledge. The first is an overview of hegemony, its impact on lifeworld and culture industries, and the interchange between video games and the people who play them. Examination of this body of knowledge connects to the body of knowledge concerning popular culture and video games. As part of the lifeworld, it has been important to understand what and how learners are experiencing when engaged with popular-culture narratives. Last, this chapter examines the important body of knowledge concerning college men and masculinity and addresses the uniqueness of two-year college students. Thus, it is vital to understand how the

growing impact and influence of video games on college students, especially those attending two-year institutions, affects how students construct their definition of masculinity.

Hegemony

At the core of these power dynamics has been Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Haore & Smith, 1971). Hegemony, for Gramsci, is the ability of one class to exert sustainable power and privilege through social control in a manner that make things appear naturalized and unquestionable. This concept explains how the dominant ruling class exerts covert power over subordinate classes. Although politically based force can be used, hegemony often appears in the consent given by these subordinate classes; they unknowingly and unwittingly accept the social constructs produced by the dominant class. It is the subtle changes to the background of society that people use to construct their definition of normalcy—an invisible way in which those with social power instruct those without power to behave in ways that enforce pre-excising power dynamics (Haore & Smith, 1971). By convincing members of society that the dominant social order is the only possible social order, society becomes unable to conceive of alternative systems, and, instead, works only to perpetuate the dominant social order.

An important point that must be underscored is that hegemony is often invisible and covert; those being influenced by hegemony are often unaware of hegemony's own influence. To people under this influence, hegemonic control appears natural and unquestionable. It is, simply, the way things should be done (Morrow & Torres, 1995). More so, it is the method in which members of society accept their own powerlessness and marginalization. By accepting social constructs as natural, hegemony produces a false consciousness in which people believe there is a preconceived definition of how sociopolitical elements are supposed to be enacted. Thus, in

terms of gender-roles, depictions of White men working and White women cooking support an unequal power distribution in society because these depictions represent falsely the idea that men must occupy the professional sphere and women must occupy the domestic sphere (Agger, 2006). Men and women in society who consume these false representations believe these are the natural order for behavior, and, in turn, support (patriarchal) forms of control that seek to marginalize and dominate women. The false consciousness produced by this hegemony is that men must work and women must cook to be considered successful and normal. Deviations from the pattern perpetuated by this false consciousness are viewed as abnormal or delinquent and, as such, must be marginalized or silenced. Further, class constructions are present in these dynamics, too, because men must work for capitalist entities, which use their efforts to produce goods and services for others. So, as they engage in these ideas, men are not only marginalizing women, but they are also complicit in their own marginalization as well.

The critical aspect is how hegemony communicates false constructions of what is normal and how members of society should behave. There is a dialectical process in which hegemony is consumed, processed, and then reproduced because the constructions produced by hegemony are viewed as the paths to power and prestige. Habermas (1985) describes this process as the colonization of the lifeworld: "this concept proves itself in a theory of social evolution that separates the rationalization of the lifeworld from the growing complexity of societal systems" (p. 118). Hence, society produces systems that are unnatural processes used to exert power and control, and the lifeworld is comprised of those aspects of society that are used to construct definitions and perceptions. Hegemony resides within these systems because options presented by the systems construct limited ways to accrue power and prestige. In the previous example

concerning men and work, hegemonic effects produce the cultural notion that working long hours at the sacrifice of personal health and relationships accrues the necessary capital to purchase material goods, which then requires more capital to maintain. Operating under the guise of hegemony, the system replicates itself as more (male) workers enter the workforce to obtain the capital to purchase the goods. Inevitably, the options presented by these systems are also those that support and reproduce the system. It is the proverbial vicious cycle: workers labor to purchase goods, and then labor to maintain those goods and the social power and prestige they bring.

Poignantly, this dialectic offers insight into how the lifeworld acts as a reservoir of knowledge from which members of society construct their definition of reality and how the systems are rules and codes governing the distribution of power and control, which influence how members of society act. Embedded within this dialectic is the process of communicative action: how "speech acts can simultaneously take on the functions of cultural transmission" (Habermas, 1985, p. 33). To communicate, therefore, is to encourage action and influence culture. The dominant social order influences communicative action by injecting its hegemony into the lifeworld. It controls the process of communication to control what meaning is reproduced and how these systems are perpetuated. By controlling the reservoirs of knowledge used to construct reality and communication, it controls what members of society internalize and consider normal. Members of society internalize this hegemony and consider it normal, despite awareness of potential harm that it may cause (Habermas, 1985). The internalization becomes the effect that perpetuates the system because hegemony appears normalized and acceptable in the lifeworld. As the images and words viewed in the background of culture align to support

hegemonic constructs, they are internalized and normalized because no other constructions are presented.

Hegemony and (Popular) Culture Industries

The concept of hegemony has been central to the notion of popular culture due to how many members of the society who interact with popular culture and how popular culture constructs these definitions of normalcy. In short, hegemony and the lifeworld intersect at popular culture because of how popular culture can be used to colonize the lifeworld. This question of hegemony and culture is the praxis, the point where theory and action meet, which the Frankfurt School, a group of philosophers that sought to analyze and understand how the Nazi party exerted control and gained dominance in Germany, applied to understand how dominant members of society exert their influence over the populous as they apply their theories to produce social action. In particular, members of the Frankfurt School saw popular culture as a dangerous tool that the dominant class could use to expose members of the audience to their hegemonic philosophies through a culture industry. The term 'culture industry' refers to how cultural norms and values are controlled and replicated through popular culture; in the culture industry, the aesthetics of art gives way to a system of ontological and epistemological control (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1999). Culture is manipulated to depict ideology and hegemony that perpetuates support for the ruling class. It is a carefully manipulated hegemonic device spreading words and images of their definition of normalcy. Popular culture, then, is the hegemonic site at which the culture industry produces social constructs perpetuating concepts of power and prestige that support the ruling class. These definitions, then, are viewed as acceptable aspects of the lifeworld that are internalized and subsequently reproduced (Habermas,

1985). The hegemony goes unaware, and it exerts continually control: traditional gender roles and stereotypes are thus used to reinforce a hetero-normative, patriarchal system of control via the hegemony exerted through culture industries.

Importantly, culture industries have gained social power by controlling how their texts are interpreted. By limiting possible interpretations and marginalizing those responsible for projecting differing interpretations, the culture industries construct a definitive, inarguable meaning for a text. Using their power to control interpretations, the meaning is continually represented and reproduced so often and with such force that it comes to be the only meaning for the text (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2007). Further, as these texts produce and represent one particular interpretation, the possible epistemological and hermeneutical functions of them are also limited. Texts no longer serve to inspire and invoke the imagination; they now function as propaganda of the dominant ruling class. Thus, the escapist pleasures offered by these texts constitute a form of hegemonic control because these aspects of the lifeworld are being manipulated by the dominant class to project an ideology (Marcuse, 2002). This ideology, of course, serves to promote and ensure their power and prestige. For example, escapist fantasies projecting men as workers ensure that men construct a definition for themselves only as workers, which embed them within the capitalist systems that use their labor to produce goods and services. Because the construction of men as workers is the only interpretation projected by these texts, these texts contain a single, unimpeachable meaning: to promote and replicates this ideology, and exclude and demonize other interpretations that might offer a different construction. Hence, to control the meaning of text is to control the effect of that text on society.

Hegemony and Textual Auras

When members of the Frankfurt School wrote in opposition to culture industries and the hegemony that infects society, some sought to examine ways in which the power of the culture industry could be turned upon itself. Benjamin (2008) argued that given the ability of works of art (specifically, film) to be mechanically reproduced and disseminated, the individual work of art no longer contain supremacy and control of its own hermeneutics. He theorized that the aura of text, or its general meaning, would change based upon the culture that encountered the text and constructed meaning from it. In Benjamin's opinion, textual meaning can no longer be fixed or reduced to a monosemic meaning by the dominant class; there is always the possibility of multiple interpretations in a text. Whereas once a noted expert or learned sage would be needed to decode the meaning of a text, the ability for mass production allows more people to engage in the text and interpret its meaning critically. More so, this process destabilizes meaning in and of the text and makes it possible to resist lifeworld colonization. If a text has no specific, definitive meaning, then it is always possible for an alternative or progressive meaning to be introduced into its aura. Thus, texts dislocate themselves from a specific fixed meaning and gains an aura dependent upon the culture in which they are experienced. A change in culture represents a change in meaning; thus, when more people consume a text, there are more people responsible for the change in meaning. With the drastic change in fixed meaning, the hegemonic control over that text also changes. According to this theory, popular culture thus becomes a site where consumers can offer their own interpretation about the meaning of texts to use them to fulfill their own agenda and proclaim their beliefs, rather than popular culture being a site of lifeworld colonization, it becomes a site of resistance and progression.

Destabilization of textual aura also destabilizes culture industries hegemonic control. Given that they do not control the meaning of the text, there is difficulty in controlling interpretations of that text. This act opens up potential learning space within the hermeneutics and epistemology for that text: people encountering that text possess choices in the application of that text. Thus, despite the overwhelmingly fatalistic pathos regarding the inevitability hegemonic control present, there is an opportunity to subsume actions and habits associated with power and prestige, and use them to challenge and change the dominant social order. Encountering these texts allows for an understanding of how to accrue the necessary power and prestige to affect change, but the ideological, hegemonic constraints are no longer present that inflict a universal concept of normalcy. Rather, the ability to acquire power and prestige becomes a tool that can either support the status quo or challenge and change it. In other words, those individuals with this power and prestige can continue to gain more power and prestige, or they can use their power and prestige to allow others to acquire power and prestige.

Hegemony and Education

While Habermas (1985) established the colonization of the lifeworld, it was then left to others to analyze, research, and explain the specific process of how that colonization occurs in society. Giroux (2001) connects the philosophies of the Frankfurt School to education institutions to unmask and expose how these institutions support, not challenge, dominant hegemonic structures. Schools, Giroux urges, should be places that challenge hegemony to create a democratic, egalitarian society. Using the ability to acquire the social good and social capital required to effect change is not a natural act; rather it requires training, guidance, and mentoring to uncover hegemony and appropriately challenge it.

Additionally, Giroux (2001) posits that an important position in this colonization process is the dichotomy between work and play: "work is confined to the imperatives of drudgery, boredom, and powerlessness; culture becomes the vehicle to escape work" (p. 25). Thus, as members of society turn away from traditional work and seek escapism in play, they are unwittingly engaging in a cultural system designed to reproduce the dominant ideology. Coincidently, Marcuse (2002) notes that play is an act of escapism from which people can avoid work and social responsibilities; thereby, they become complicit in endorsing the status quo through inaction, not action. The inherent danger, then, is that as a person plays to avoid work and their social responsibilities, they are unwittingly and unknowingly consuming hegemonic constructs. In turn, the hegemonic constructs colonize the lifeworld because they represent what is normal in society and encourage its replication. Giroux argues there is no ideological distinction between work and play—both contain the requisite superstructure that maintains power relationships and social inequalities. The lifeworld is colonized in both work and play; although, engaging in play carries with it the danger of escapism, because when people play, their ideological defenses are lowered (Giroux, 2001; Marcuse, 2002).

Moreso, through play, people engage in ritualized habits and routines that internalize actions, beliefs, and ideologies. This repetition conditions people to accept hegemonic behaviors as natural and normal. It becomes habitus, and this act of internalization produces the means by which the dominant culture reproduces itself. It is natural and normal to behave in this way, or in other words, it is those habits, rituals, and actions that are performed without thinking and reflection on their purpose or function (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). They are the way things are done because they have always been done that way. For example, boys play with trucks and

girls play with dolls because they have always done so. It is abnormal, even to consider things otherwise. There is little critical thinking or self-reflection about why this occurs; furthermore, through this play and establishment of habitus, gender roles are repeated and normalized. The little boys and girls become colonized by the "hidden curriculum" and hegemony of the dominant ideology (Giroux, 2001). They do not think about their actions—especially during play—they simply do them.

Critical Consciousness

Important to these concepts has been the notion of critical consciousness: the notion that people can be liberated from these latent power dynamics and become aware of them in both work and play (Freire, 1973; Smith, 1974). They become liberated and able to resist and subvert these messages. It breaks the culture of silence and blind acceptance, which allows for questioning, reflection, and changing of the status quo. Regarding education, the educator should strive for this goal in which the learner recognizes the power dynamics embedded within the habitus perpetuated by the culture. This critical consciousness is achieved when learners understand the cultural power dynamics and meaning-making structures behind their play to critically critique the superstructures that uphold and encourage social inequalities. No longer blindly accepting the habitus of their culture, learners are able to challenge and change the hegemony by challenging and changing the way they play. Education is a site of liberation, and not a site of hegemonic reproduction. Education institutions have a duty to raise the critical consciousness within learners and lead them to question the habits and messages they are consuming (Friere, 1973). In this regard, educational institutions facilitate a learning process that encourages the destabilization of textual aura. In doing so, they also encourage learners to

gain a level of critical consciousness that recognizes how power and prestige are acquired and then encourages them to procure power and prestige to affect social change.

Given the Frankfurt School's emphasis on mass media and communication and its effect on the populous, it is important to understand the relationship and dynamics about how popular culture contains habitus and how learners can use popular culture to challenge and resist the power dynamics, especially during acts perceived as play. Giroux (1994, 2001, 2002) analyzes this important relationship between culture and learner. Leveraging their power to create popular cultural superstars, market and promote their films, and create and control their own communities, companies such as Disney, for example, are able to promote their own hegemony and influence culture to enforce their own political, imperialist agenda (Giroux, 2000). Likewise, hooks (1994, 2010) urges students to knowingly and willfully transgress against this hegemony to produce social change. Aligned with Friere's (1973) belief, hooks not only desires to raise critical consciousness, but to then use that consciousness to produce social change in favor of a liberated, democratic society. Also, both Giroux and hooks urges educators to actively challenge and question hegemony in their lectures and their activities. Fundamentally, institutions of (higher) education possess a civic duty to mentor learners how to recognize, challenge, and change hegemonic superstructures being replicated in the lifeworld. There is a moral imperative to educate learners for a critical consciousness, and to use this consciousness to purposely violate cultural norms and habitus.

An issue present within this discussion of work, play, and hegemony concerns the fact that semiotic signs in popular culture are not fixed representations; they can and should be resisted to encourage evolution toward an egalitarian society. An aura is no longer universal,

and no longer must a trained expert interpret a text. People can, and should, think critically for themselves. There must be an active choice on the part of learners in which their passions become the motivation to achieve social justice and eliminate social inequalities. Both Giroux (1994, 2001, 2002) and hooks (1994, 2010) offer resistance to popular culture as a way to understand the power dynamics by noticing the inequalities embedded within the narrative structure, analyze what social elements have been left out, and understand how these narratives and cultural artifacts can be used to promote change. Further, they extended Friere's notion of liberation and critical consciousness to education. Importantly, Giroux and hooks continued to examine the hermeneutics of popular culture. They moved the theories of the Frankfurt School into a political discourse that actively encourages resistance and change. The work of Giroux and hooks also illuminates how the (popular) culture industry produces hegemony that promotes dominant ideology, excludes or marginalizes members of society, and reinforces the status quo.

Popular Culture as Participatory Culture

When criticizing popular culture, Giroux (1994, 2001, 2002) and hooks (1994, 2010) target the television and film industry; video games have not entered their discussions. This is important because, unlike television and film, video games require active participation on the part of a player. A player's engagement in the activity is mandatory, not optional (Myers, 2003). Additionally, Giroux's and hook's theories tend to focus on the negative aspects of hegemony and popular culture. To these authors, there is little value in popular culture; it is a site of hegemonic control and domination. Although the dominant message amongst theorists about popular culture is that colonization of the lifeworld is inevitable and all resistance must be overt,

active, and in opposition to the hegemony, some theorists have seen potential for liberation. Popular culture is a vehicle for change and liberation, not just hegemonic oppression.

Popular culture, although still viewed as a hegemonic tool of culture industries, has contained pockets in which resistance and liberation are formed (Daspit & Weaver, 1999; Jenkins, 2007; Storey, 2009). Importantly, Johnson (2006) challenges explicitly the central idea that popular culture has been dumbing down the populous. He argues that the complexity and depth of these narratives have actually been promoting deeper cognitive structures and enhancing the ability to notice cultural inequalities and exigencies embedded within the narratives of popular culture. Popular culture is making society smarter, not making society dumber. In Johnson's analysis of how popular culture and mass media evolve, he traces how the narratives move away from a single narrative that contains an overt, didactic message meant to encourage the status quo to complex narratives containing numerous dichotomies and social issues. For example, whereas narratives in the 1950s replicated the idea of a patriarchal society in a simplistic structure in which the father frequently denounces the problem and restores the accepted social order (i.e., the "father knows best" cliché), modern narratives contain multiple context, sub-contexts, representations of the dominant culture, and representations of resistance to that culture. The habitus associated with modern popular culture encourages the critical analysis and dialogue about these texts.

It is important to note that these researchers have not been empirical researchers. Johnson (2006), though expressing a vital point, preformed a structural, textual analysis of several texts. Likewise, Storey (2009) and his argument that popular culture (rightly so) should be viewed within the discourse of cultural studies, makes a compelling ontological argument.

However, these are not empirical studies, representative of this underlying issue regarding the paucity of research. That said, the studies have presented a compelling idea that shape the direction of future studies into how popular culture has encouraged liberated, critical consciousness.

Poaching Popular Culture

Due to the increased cognitive ability and accessibility of popular culture, Jenkins (1992, 2007) argues that modern learners are becoming ”textual poachers”—able to subvert narrative for their own purposes and, in doing so, both participate and change the direction of the narratives. Given the ability of mass and social media, the culture industry no longer has final authority. This advances Benjamin’s (2008) concept about textual auras, because textual poachers are able to subvert meaning and use texts for their own purposes. When the authority of a text becomes destabilized, anyone can make meaning from it; consumers of texts, are thus able to change them as they participate in their creation and consumption. It is worth noting, though, that although Jenkins represented several views associated with critical consciousness, he does not situate himself in this particular discourse. Jenkins views this as a participatory culture in which the producers of culture and the consumers of culture use ideas to renew and invigorate the culture constantly; consumers of culture are now a vital part of the process (Jenkins, 2008).

Hence, the dichotomy of producer/consumer has broken down to where all members of the culture are responsible for its production and consumption, and, ultimately, the hermeneutics and epistemologies associated with the text, as evidenced by the numerous parodies, internet videos, and fan fiction websites that make the ability to challenge and resist the status quo easier.

The website www.fanfiction.net, for example, is a website devoted entirely to fan fiction, which takes established narratives in new directions. The homosexual romance between Captain Kirk and Mister Spock, though never canonized in the official television series, has become part of the meta-narratives associated with *Star Trek* fan fiction (Kappel, 2010). Rather than direct confrontation with the hegemonic epistemology in the texts, these narratives have been covertly subverted and perpetuated (Dale & Foy, 2010; Kappel, 2010). There is no longer blind consumption of these texts; rather, there is critical analysis that is able to subvert and challenge the dominant ideology. This participatory and communal process also has extended into the discourses of adult and higher education, because learners are now consumers and producers of culture.

Popular Culture and Higher Education

Following the leadership of Giroux (1994, 2001, 2002) and hooks (1994, 2010), educators and researchers have been exploring the connection between popular culture and teaching. There is, however, a paucity of empirical research directly concerning the topic of how popular culture operates within higher education. For some, popular culture is used as window to explore contemporary social problems and social justice issues, much in the vein of critical pedagogy and resistance. Concerns regarding inequalities of gender (Berbery, 2012; Reynolds, 2009), race (Bridges, 2011; Staples, 2008), or social problems (Cao & Brewer, 2008; Nolan, 2010; Potash, 2009) have appeared in relationships to cultural studies courses aligned with correcting social inequalities. More so, incorporating these narratives into the classroom is used as a way to connect and engage with diverse student populations (Marshall, 2001; Roden, 2007). Although there has often been urgency associated with social justice, some teachers have used

inequalities to illuminate cultural development (Fukunaga, 2006; Moreau, Mendick, & Epstein, 2010). The objective here is less concerned with social inequalities, and more concerned with exposing students to various cultural groups. A specific example is using popular culture to evince students the connection and application of abstract mathematics to solved practical problems (Moreau, et al., 2010).

Yet, despite the application and insistence of cultural studies and social justice, some scholars have rejected this trajectory of popular culture. There has been a call for popular culture to be used more for abstract critical analysis devoid of cultural studies (Bertonneau, 2010; Marshall, 2001). In agreement that popular culture has encouraged critical thinking and learning should be culturally relevant, researchers have encouraged the use of more historical popular culture texts. Specifically, Bertonneau proposed incorporating texts such as *Moby Dick,* whose initial aura was that of popular culture during its initial publication, but which has since changed to that of an example of canonized literature in modern culture. He argues that using these texts gives students the skills and experience required to think and not expose them to the political undercurrents of educators. Thus, understanding the historical context and backstory has illuminated many of the subtexts and meanings; it has been impossible to divorce the text from the politics surrounding it.

However, there have been a few critical concerns about how popular culture is currently implemented. First, views suggesting popular culture should be used in the abstract have not addressed issues related to cultural norming or challenges with the Western Canon of Literature. Although the emphasis on abstract thinking and analytical philosophy is admirable, it does not incorporate the surrounding culture of the text or the student. As mentioned, literature has not

existed in an isolated vacuum. Second, along with the lack of specific attention to critical consciousness and resisting hegemony, these studies have adopted a teacher/researcher-centric view of the process. The voices of the participants were not emphasized (or included) in these studies. Although important, they did not capture the organic process of how reader interacts with a text and how they construct meaning from it. Third, and most important, these studies have not been context-bound to the classroom itself and have focused on the formal teaching and learning process. As Johnson (2006) and Jenkins (2008) emphasized, learning with popular culture is an individual act and often occurs without formal guided instruction.

Thus, a gap appears due to limited exploration within the discourse of higher education that examines learning experiences beyond the classroom. Despite calls for action to use entertainment media in student affairs programming, the intersection of popular culture and learning has rarely extended beyond formal environments in higher education (Davis & Laker, 2004; Davis & Harrison, 2014). When it has extended beyond formal environments, the boundaries are typically Greek life (Tucciarone, 2006) and athletic organizations (Harper & Harris, 2010). This should not suggest an impassible void between the formality of the classroom and the informality of co-curricular programming; rather, it should suggest a bridge connecting the two. Whereas if the classroom can be defined as "work," then co-curricular programming should be defined as "play." Both, however, should act in unison to emphasize learning and emphasize critical consciousness.

Popular Culture and Adult Education

Whereas higher education has encompassed formal learning environments, research from adult educators only has explored informal learning. On the other end of the formal/informal

learning continuum, adult educators have studied how popular culture promotes learning outside traditional education venues. There also has been a small, but important, body of research that addresses these questions associated with popular culture and informal learning environments.

One strand of research from adult educators has focused on content analysis. The research promotes a systematic way in which meaning can be derived from popular culture (Jarvis, 2005; Messinger, 2012). With this content analysis, there are ways to understand meaning engage and encourages moral, personal, and literacy development (Botzakis, 2009). An important contribution from this research has come from the examination of how there has been a process used to establish particular meaning(s) through a text. Unlike the more teacher-centric positionality of the higher education research studies, these studies have offered needed focus on the hermeneutical process used to establish the meaning of a text. Learners, through this type of content analysis, understand the embedded patterns and established meanings of texts but are then able to use them for their own learning and interests. Moreso, there is an element of self-directed learning in this process, as learners follow their own interests and needs without the benefit of an educator-figure. The importance of these studies has originated from the encouragement of the learner in this hermeneutical process. This strand of research encourages the voice of the learners to emerge both in and from their experiences in the practice.

Thus, the hermeneutics of the process have become embedded in critical media and digital media studies. Closely aligned with critical theory and pedagogy, popular culture is transformed into a vehicle able to teach resistance and uncover the power and hegemonic meaning-making strategies of the dominant ideology (Tisdell, 2008; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007; Wright & Sandlin, 2009). Popular culture represents a site of public pedagogy, and consumers

deriving meaning from these texts are taught to examine critically the narrative and question their own assumptions. Not unlike the higher education research concerning social justice, these researchers have challenged the hegemonic messages being transmitted through the public pedagogy. These researchers, however, forefront issues of critical consciousness and critical social theory into their framework. For them, education about how to decode a television show or film is an act of resistance by creating critical consciousness in the viewers. Consumers, then, learn to decode dynamics of power and prestige in the text, and then construct their definition of social concepts from this deconstructive act.

Albeit either formal or informal education, learners-as-consumers have digested these popular culture narratives and used them for self-interests, needs, and agendas. Due to the decentering and loss of authorial control of meaning, these texts are open for interpretation and usage. Learners are afforded an opportunity to insert their voice and positionality into this process to affect how texts are deconstructed and interpreted. Thus, future research must encourage the voices of students to join as active participants in the learning process into the studies. The research conducted by adult educators offers a map for the bridge that connects the formal and informal learning occurring within sites of higher education. In both contexts of adult and higher education and formal and informal learning environments, the voice of the student must be centralized to understand how both are affected and also affect this learning process.

Popular Culture and Video Games

One noticeable knowledge gap in the literature concerning popular culture and adult and higher education is the lack of research analyzing the function of video games in popular culture.

Especially considering the influence and importance of digital media, the absence of this medium and its genre is striking (Giroux, 2001; Tisdell & Thompson, 2008). With revenue of $65 billion for video games in 2011, video games have been big business and an important site of this popular culture production and consumption cycle (Reuters, 2011). More so, with the increase of social media, smart phones, laptop computers, and a growing connection to the internet, more members of the populous are being exposed to hegemony through these communication tools. If popular culture—in the form of television and film—was thought to colonize the lifeworld, the injection of this new technology has been the proverbial blitzkrieg attack of the lifeworld.

The potential for video games to act as culture industry exists, too, and was, therefore examined in this study. On this point, elements of the lifeworld and culture industry simply have not been extended to video games. Much of the theory and research conducted connotes "culture industry" with television and film. Video games have not occupied a significant space in this literature base, due in part to video games and electronic media not being conceived during the time of the Frankfurt School. Yet, the distance between lifeworld, culture industry, and video games has needed to be explored. Given the prevalence of video games in present day society, it is my contention that they deserve to be examined, researched, and treated with the same seriousness of television and film as well as other parts of media studies.

To further compound the relationship between the lifeworld and video games is the aspect of play and the raising of critical consciousness. As men engage in and play video games as part of the lifeworld, they are exposed to hegemony and unwittingly internalize it through the act of play. Social control and power exerts itself silently through the escapist nature of engaging video games; therefore, strategies and approaches to liberate men (and all gamers) from

hegemony were explored in this study. Further, just as television and film have acted as cultural repositories, playing video games must be considered in alignment with these media (Jenkins, 2008; McGonigal, 2011).

The Hermeneutics of Video Games

Due to the prolific influence of video games in our culture, there have been questions of epistemology rooted in the cultural studies of video games. Much like any art form of story, video games both reflect and refract their own culture and carry with them their own particular aura that is consumed and challenged during the act of play (Hung, 2011; Jenkins, 2007). These epistemological questions, however, belie the embedded hermeneutical question concerning the process in which these games influence those members of the populous that encounter them. Gamers possess the ability to either interpret or assimilate the cultural messages within these games, or resist them and turn the video game into site of resistance. As such, it has been a fundamental question of aesthetics and hermeneutics.

This hermeneutical question has rested at the intersection between ludology, the study of play, and narratology, the study of stories. Fransca (1999) put forth a pinnacle article that teases out the similarities and differences between play and stories. Drawing upon the rich history of narratology and how this discipline offers ways in which meaning is created and constructed through stories, the author notes that games are particularly concerned with rules. Thus, in video games, there must be an element prescribed to the creation, implementation, and execution of rules. It is this adherence to the rules that makes playing a game different from just play. When playing a game, there is a goal, conclusion, or objective. Fransca's analysis privileged the notion of rules and the mechanics of the games over the notions of narrative and aesthetics. This

distinction frames important discussions about the hermeneutics of video games. Whoever designs the rules can either include or exclude aspects of culture and, more so, the creator of these rules established the dynamics of power within the diegesis of the game. As discussed, these rules can be hegemonic tools encouraging one interpretation and discouraging others. The military, for example, can establish a strong ideology built on national pride by structuring the rules to create a sense of patriotism within gamers (Wark, 2007).

Ludology Versus Narratology

The tension in video games has been a result of the tension between the rules and the story. Ludology has favored, as asserted by Fransca (1999), that games are governed by the rules, and these rules are what attracts players to them. Without the rules, the games do not exist. Juul (2005) suggests that the rules can and should be studied apart from any cultural aspects of the games. It is the rules that make games "half-real": they imitate reality, but also alter it (Juul, 2005). The rules contain an adherence to reality, but are able to reconstruct it for the purpose of game play. A person, for example, can take much more physical abuse in the video game than in reality. Galloway (2006) pushes the concepts of rules further by asserting that there is an achievable goal that players are trying to reach. In conjunction with the rules, ludology must incorporate the goals and objectives connected to the mechanics that define the goal. In his opinion, play contains a lack of goals and objectives, whereas, video games make this central. This particular definition of ludology then concerns the examination of *how* games work—rather than the narrative effect or cultural importance.

Other theorists have argued that the mechanics of a game cannot be divorced from the culture that they occupy. Murray (2005) argues passionately that ludology and narratology are

complimentary, not exclusionary. She agreed that the rules and objectives are important to video games and make them artistically unique, but to only study games based on these components is to reduce it to sheer mechanics. Likewise, Egenfeldt-Nielson, Smith, and Tosca (2008) argues that the culture of games and the culture produced by games directly affect the hermeneutics of the games. Games, similar to any other artistic text, are dependent upon the culture to define their aura. In this opinion, the cultural aspects of video games transcend the rules that define them. Gamers, then, are attracted to video games based upon their culture and story.

The question of ludology versus narratology has transcended into a grand narrative in the study of video games. Although the tension always exists, and some games emphasize the narrative more than the mechanics, or vice versa, both have been recognized as essential to video games. Rather than a strict binary opposition, it should be considered a continuum. Just as stories are not studied solely for their grammar and films are not studied solely for their visual composition, video games should not be studied solely for their mechanics.

Additionally, when analyzing the narratives of video games, questions of hegemony must be raised. For example, Wark (2007) referrs to a military entertainment complex to echo the famous military industrial complex. Although these studies broaches the question about video games' relationship to sociopolitical concepts, questions of power and prestige are also necessary to study. Moreso, because the work on ludology and narratology illuminates tensions within the discourse of video games' it, frankly, does not incorporate elements of cultural studies or treat video games as part of culture, or the lifeworld. Given their influence, video games are cultural artifacts, and, as cultural artifacts, are able to dictate how players view and construct meaning in

the world (Vygotsky, 1978). Using these artifacts exposes players to new cultures, ideologies, and philosophies. Thus, players then use these new components to affect their own culture.

Thus, the dependence on mechanics has made (video) games unique, for the rules are dependent on making them fun and collaborative for participants; however, the fact that these rules can promote hegemony and dictate the interpretation of cultural mores and norms should not be overlooked. Video games, and video games studies, must incorporate elements of critical theory to push past surface-level analysis about how they operate. The oversight of the criticality and potential influence cannot be understated and must be addressed.

Semiotics and Video Games

The the continuum of ludology and narratology has framed the discourse of video games; additionally, researchers have conceded that a unique aspect of these games is embedded within the semiotic experience of video game play. This is an important point that Bradford (2010) clearly states:

> When young people play video games, they do so as embodied subjects whose identities are shaped by the culture in which they are situated, the circumstances of their lived experiences, and the particularities of their dispositions, actions, and interests. . . . no two players, any more than readers or viewers, are the same. (p. 54)

Drawing from Saussure's (2007) semiotics theory, the value of video games resides within players' ability to control their own signifier within the game's diegesis. Unlike reading or watching film, the audience (gamer) plays an active role in the creation of the narrative. Gee (2004) outlines 32 semiotic domains occurring within the interaction of player and game. These semiotic domains represent simple actions, such as learning the rules to the game, to complex actions, such as engaging within the culture that produces the game. More so, he outlines how video games develop literacy through engagement with these multimodal texts. Gee also argued

that gamers do not just play games; they instead learn to read and experience games. Boundaries collapse during game play, and players influence the game, as the game can influence the player.

Contextualizing this theory is McGonigal's (2011) passionate argument, which alignes with Johnson (2006): that games have fundamentally changed the way people learn and experience the world. To McGonigal, gamers view reality as broken because it is boring and uninteresting. Gamers are having their lifeworld colonized to a degree that they expect a constant stream of feedback and awards for what they do in game; gamers expect this level of feedback and award for what they do in reality. Games, she argues, are constantly providing feedback about the game: it can be in the form of a high score or health or completion rates. McGonigal's point was that people experiencing these games grow accustomed to having clear, direct, and immediate feedback.

McGonigal's argument is not without merit. Gamers expect this stream of information because that is what video games provide; they are constantly aware of how they are performing based on information provided by the game. For example, by experiencing popular war simulators, gamers understand how close to death they are by how red the screen becomes during game play; additionally, being constantly aware of their scores is another way in which gamers constantly monitor and judge their progress. Thus, according to the argument, when gamers shift their identity and become learners and workers, they expect the same constant feedback.

There also have been applications to workforce and methods of productions. Gee and Hayes (2010) further extend this argument as they explored how female gamers have been able to use skills gained in the video game *The Sims* to produce items of value in "reality." Using their skills and crafts gained in this video game, players learn to run a small business, design

products digitally, and become entrepreneurs. Hung (2011) connected video games to myths: "videogames are the new mythmakers for many of us. They represent an emerging art form that continues to impress on multiple levels" (p. 203). Moving beyond hermeneutical questions concerning practical aspects of skill development and economic questions of production, Hung aligned himself with theories about popular culture that explain the mythical elements contained with these narratives. Video games are providing participants with skills, certainly, but they are also proving the mythological information necessary to construct abstract meaning. In other words, video games are a part of the lifeworld used by participants to construct epistemologies. The boundaries between the diegetic world of the video game and reality are thus blurred; skills, abilities, and expectations learned in one discourse cross over and affect the other. This blurriness has further opened the potential for a critical learning space.

Video Games and Culture

Pong is generally considered the landmark video game that introduced the medium to the world in 1972 and started the introduction of video games into popular culture. Yet, despite an initial cultural splash in the form of arcades and home systems, such as the Atari, video games were separate from the mainstream of popular cultural studies. With the video game market crash of 1984, the longevity of video games was called into question because arcades were closing down and the culture appeared to lose interest in playing these sorts of games until late in 1986, when Nintendo released its Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and put video games into homes, bypassing the expense of arcades and allowing players to interact with games in their own living rooms. Sometimes referred to as the golden age of video games, this marketing strategy resuscitated video games and moved them closer to being accepted by the mainstream.

More importantly, video games were placed into the hands of consumers and, eventually, into the hands of producers. Basically, they became accessible (Kent, 2001).

Violence

In the early 1990s, video games pierced the membrane of popular culture and introduced a theme that still plagues video game studies to this day: video games and violence. With the release of *Mortal Kombat* and its infamous fatalities (which are special moves that allow a player to execute their opponent in a gruesome fashion), members of the government began to question the affect these games had on the youth of America. National tragedies, such as the school shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, reinforced this stereotype and increased the tension and anxiety that video games were responsible for these incredibly violent acts. The tension and concern came to a gritting climax with the release of the immensely popular *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* video game that allows players to control the action of a mob assassin as he takes over a fiction replica of Miami. Its infamous acts of violence include the blatant shooting of police officers, driving over random pedestrians, creative assassinations using power tools, and using prostitutes for recreational sex to restore health (creative players can then assault the prostitutes, or run them over with their car to take back the spent money). This last entry in the franchise, *Grand Theft Auto 4*, earned over $500 million alone ("Take-Two's Grand Theft Auto 4", 2008).

Addiction

One cultural challenge within the discourse of video games has been the challenge of addiction. Recent news reports have indicated that players are succumbing to fatigue and dying after marathon stretches of video game playing ("Man Dies from Blood Clot*";* "S. Korean Man Dies*"*). The fear and anxiety over time spent playing video games has raised questions about

video game playing being a mental illness (American Association of Pediatrics, 2011; Kutner & Olson, 2008; McGonigal, 2011). Compounding the question of video game addiction and learning was the 2011 National Survey of Student Engagement, which reported that 33% of incoming male students and 25% of overall students reported spending over 16 hours per week engaged with video games, which reduced their chances to be successful during the first year of college (National Survey For Student Engagement, 2011). It has been significant, of course, that such a large percentage of males openly admits to playing video games this much. Kimmel (2008) takes up this point when he accuses video games of trapping males in "guyland", a luminal space where males are not considered boys, but not considered men either.

Gender-roles and Sexuality

More so, there have been challenges regarding gender-roles and sexuality. Video games have long been considered the realm of boys and men, despite an increase in girls and women playing video game (Jenkins, 2000; Kafai, Heeter, Denner, & Sun, 2011; Kimmel, 2008; McGonigal, 2011). The stereotype of male gamers dwelling in windowless basements has long been a part of popular culture, and it seems to be one that cannot be shaken. More so, while male gamers have been dwelling in basement caves, they also have been colonized by unrealistic, fantasy images of women and the female body. These hyper-sexualized depictions of women have been designed to encouraged scopophilia and male-dominance. Men are warriors; women are rewards. Thus, antiquated and anachronistic gender-roles and expectations have been replicated through video games, and this type of lifeworld colonization has been directly at odds with cultural expectations.

Criticality

Last, within this discourse of video games, there have been challenges directly related to issues of criticality. Wark (2007) notes the rise of the military entertainment complex, which—much like the military industrial complex—has idealized war and battle to encourage national ideology, demonize other cultures, and recruit boys into soldiers. Similar to the arguments expressed by Giroux (1994), Wark examines how players of these games, in particular the hugely successful *Call Of Duty* franchise, achieves a wish-fulfillment by engaging as hyperbolic warriors on the field of battle. With the emphasis on realism in video games, players are able to imitate soldiers successfully and can easily imagine themselves in these roles. In addition to enforcing the construction of man as warrior, these video games have also promoted national ideologies and jingoism against enemies.

In sum, the discourse of video games has clearly contained hegemony that, in alignment with that expressed by popular culture researchers, has colonized gamers through the act of play. Video games normalize those behaviors that are desirable and enforced by the dominant members of society. Much like the strategies used by Disney (Giroux, 2001), video games have presented an awesome ability to influence video gamers and their culture. Although the discourse of video games has been dominated by questions of violence, addiction, and corporate/military control, there has been a potential to emphasize critical consciousness in video games, just like other genres of popular culture. Members of video game communities are learning; thus, questions must turn to what it is that they are learning through playing these games and engaging the hegemony buried beneath their ludology. Although challenges associated with violence, addiction, sexism, and critical representations of culture dominate, one

gap concerns aspects of learning and development. As theorists, such as Gee and Hayes (2010), Jenkins (2006), and McGonigal (2011), indicated, questions regarding the learning and development within this discourse have extended far beyond these issues.

Video Games and Learning

In the popular press video games have been the latest scapegoat for the ills of society (Gee, 2010; Jenkins, 2007), but researchers have been studying the connection between gaming and learning. In fact, the position that video games negatively influence the players has been directly refuted in Ventura, Shute, and Kim's (2011) study that examines the correlation between video-game playing and grade point average (GPA). They found that people playing video games experience positive results; furthermore, although far from a conclusive study, it did exemplify that video games can have positive effects on learning. Importantly, it offeres a glimpse into the potential learning space created by these video games, and how they affect learning and development. More so, by articulating a connection between video games and GPA, this study also indicates a relationship between playing games and academic success.

Additionally, noting that games produce passion and motivation within gamers, researchers also have been exploring how this exuberance enhances the learning process (Abrams, 2009; Hromek & Roffey, 2009). In alignment with Gee (2004), these researchers found that gamers have learned about history and society, increased reading and comprehension skills, and developed social skills based on the larger community surrounding these video games. Other researchers (Partington, 2010; Smith, 2008; Steinkuelher, 2010) focused on the cognitive development associated with video games. They traced how video games increase the cognitive capacity of gamers, which, in turn, increases their learning. Partington (2010) makes an

important point that another experienced gamer (either a teacher or another player) is instrumental to facilitating this cognitive process. Gamers can develop increased cognition without assistance, but a mentor-figure drastically hastens the process. The author also illuminates a challenge with the cognitive-based learning; studies have not analyzed or researched the social context and potential social interactions available to gamers.

In part, this social context and these social interactions afforded from video games has connected to social justice. Some research has indicated elements of social prestige and capital generated from experiencing these games, and this prestige and capitol can lead to an understanding of social inequalities (Hung, 2011; Walsh & Apperley, 2009; Walton & Pallitt, 2012). More so, Toscano (2011) states, "The ability to read the video game environment requires the same amount of attention to details as reading other texts to locate the cultural work being done" (p. 24). Engaging in video-game play goes beyond cognitive development and merges with socio-cultural development as well. Further, the development of cognitive skills occurs in tangent with the sociopolitical skills; it is a symbiotic relationship.

Capping the research into both the cognitive and sociopolitical learning afforded by video games was the Quest Atlantis project and research performed by Barab and his associates (2009, 2010). This digital project used a scenario-driven video game experience to create a learning space in which students are faced with a cognitive challenge, are able to explore and learn with the assistance of others, and can receive aid from an expert (Barab, Goldstone, & Zulker, 2009). The underpinning theory behind using transformational play is to allow learners the space to learn, experiment, and apply their learning in a diegetic realm. Not drawing specifically from Mezirow's (2000) transformational learning theory, Barab et al. had video-game players develop

cognitive and socio-cultural skills through this play. More so, the project scaffolds this learning into other projects and arenas for deeper learning and experiences (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble, 2010). Importantly, though, this was a controlled environment where educations created a specific scenario to target surgically the learner's lifeworld.

Similar to the previous concerns noted about formal learning and popular culture, these video games, while successful, are formal learning environments that do not account for informal learning. Using Quest Atlantis as an example, these scenarios have been designed to elicit responses within a narrow parameter and typically focus more on the specific disciplinary learning (i.e., scenarios built around scientific principles, and not social learning). These situated, structured environments have offered a finite set of predetermined outcomes; players can operate only in a controlled situation. These studies failed to incorporate the learners' engagement and motivation into the study. Additionally, studies that have investigated the socio-cultural learning produced through video games, have lacked a specific focus on hegemony and issues of power and prestige. These video games instruct academic concepts (such as science, for example, in the Quest Atlantis) and, bluntly, have not addressed social issues or concerns.

An area in which these gaps overlap has been research concerning men—specifically college men. Video games have been socially defined as a male-dominated domain. Strikingly, due to the social connotation that associates video games with men behaving badly, research into video games has not interrogated this connection. The field of video games uses them to direct players to specific, but significant, content-based areas, and little has been examined and conducted regarding issues of social criticism or development. Despite being labeled a

repressive element for men (Kimmel, 2008), connections and explorations between men and video games have been sparse.

College Men and Masculinity

The dominant question in the research concerning college men and masculinity has concerned hegemony; to study one is to the study the other. Thus, research concerning this population has predominately focused on the perceived and actual socio-cultural forces working to colonize men with attitudes and behaviors that enforce the status quo and upholds gender inequalities. Therefore, research into college men and their masculinity has investigated both the individual construction of their gendered identity and the socio-cultural forces that provide men the language to articulate and define it. It has been rooted in hegemony due to the overwhelming pressure to conform to particular constructions of masculinity.

Because institutions of higher education exist within a complex web of social networks and organizations, they are not isolated from influence originating from these social networks and organizations. Students do not leave college with the same attitudes, beliefs, and skills that they had upon entering. In short, they are not resistant to hegemonic forces persuading students to behave in certain patterns or those forces limiting students' thoughts and choices. College men, in this context, labor under a false consciousness that they are allowed choices, when the social hegemony dictates which choices they are allowed. They do not have freedom to choose; they have a freedom to pick from pre-determined options.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The discourse of men and masculinity studies has examined this relationship between hegemony and masculinity to analyze the choices afforded to college men and to develop

strategies of resistance so that they may obtain the ability to make their own choices. Connell (2005) defines the intersection of hegemony and masculinity as "hegemonic masculinity." He states:

> To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* [his emphasis] between different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance, and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity. (p. 37)

Masculinity can no longer be viewed as a monolithic structure; it must be deconstructed to unmask the power and meaning-making structure contained within it. Connell, using Gramsci's concept of hegemony, convincingly argues that masculinity is a social construct that contains repressive elements, which must be challenged to ensure social equity and social justice. There are power dynamics and a social hierarchy that confine men to limited gender-roles and stereotypes, which ultimately damage and repress their social development. Furthermore, he equates this concept of hegemonic masculinity as being a part of social structures reproduced by the military and corporations to ensure reproduction of traits and virtues they find desirable (Connell, 2005).

Masculinity Goes to College

Concerning college men, specifically, the general claim has asserted that men are disadvantaged because of this hegemony. Not only does this hegemony limit the choices of men, but it creates the false impression that college men—as a gendered group—have already been studied and examined. Researchers have argued that men and masculinity have been overlooked in studies concerning college students (Davis, 2002; Harper & Harris, 2010). Although men are the predominant demographic in these studies, the idea of men having a gendered identity is a

relatively new field of study. The reasoning is that because all students were men, it does not mean the men were studied. This assumption has considered men's voices and the subject of masculinity to be marginalized in studies concern higher education. Some examples are Sax's (2008) *The Gender Gap in College*, which largely ignore the resources concerning men and masculinity development in her chapter on student development, and Dunn's (2011) chapter "Men and Women College Students," which glossed over male college students (unless talking about their male privilege) to analyze female college students. Of critical importance is that notion that college men have not been studied as college men—their gendered identity has remained unexplored.

The Masculinity Myth

One of the first definitions of masculine gender-roles was Pleck's (1982) *The Myth of Masculinity* (although, he used the term *sex roles*). Pleck's research began to define social norms influencing masculinity and shaping its construction that distinguishes it from femininity. Thus, a series of gender norms that affect masculinity development emerge, and they become an initial framework for men and masculinities. These frameworks concern issues of violence and aggression, vocation and being a family provider, and men's inability to express their feelings and be intimate. Most importantly, he states, "The concept of [gender] role identity prevents individuals who violate the traditional role for their sex from challenging it; instead they feel personally inadequate and insecure" (p. 160).

This analysis, then, led to the development of three perspectives on masculinity: a conservative perspective, mythopoetic perspective, and a feminist perspective (Capraro, 1994). The conservative perspective adheres strongly to traditional values and gender-roles, believing

there is a natural and biological imperative in men and masculinity. This biological imperative has informed a "boys will be boys" approach, hypothesizing that testosterone is culpable for inappropriate behavior (Pollack, 2002). In the Iron John movement, a Marxist perspective of worker alienation suggests that men are dislocated from their own natural masculinity and returning to the mythic archetypes would reconnect men with themselves (Bly, 1990; Caparo, 1994). Myths, legends, and fairy tales provide this primal meaning of masculinity, and re-visiting them provides a "blueprint of social morals" (Blazina, 1997, p. 286). Lastly, the feminist perspective espouses the important point that men have social power and privilege over women, but rigid gender-roles can harm men, too.

Men, it seems, have had their own gender-specific challenges and concerns. Masculinity cannot be viewed as a monolithic concept because there are challenges and tensions within. Hegemony affects masculinity, causing some constructions of masculinity to gain social power and privilege and some to be marginalized and ignored.

The Model Gender Majority Myth

To broaden the definition and views of how masculinity is constructed, the term *model gender majority myth* has evinced these differences. Harper and Harris (2010) defines the model gender majority myth to explain "flawed assumptions about college men" (p. 8). These are the five assumptions they challenge:

- Every male benefits equally from gender privilege.
- Gender initiatives need not include men.
- Undergraduate men do not receive harmful stereotypes.
- Male students do not require male-specific resources.

- Historical dominance and structural determinism ensure male success. (p. 8)

These myths, therefore, challenge social assumptions about masculinity. These social assumptions stunt men's development by forcing them to perform specific roles and tasks without a clear understanding of why they are performing them. College men become trapped in their hegemony, unwitting pawns whose actions reinforce the dominant ideology and ruling class. Importantly, this model majority gender myth asserts that there are stereotypes about college men, and these stereotypes damage them just as stereotypes damage others. College men are stereotyped, too.

Gender-Role Conflict

Early research regarding men and masculinity expanded the boundaries of the discourse to include Connell's (2005) concept and examination of the power of hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, researchers have desired to raise awareness about the gendered nature of masculinity. Cheng (1999) notes that men as gendered beings are frequently omitted from research studies and faults hegemony for this. Society contains many latent and unchallenged assumptions about masculinity as dominating, aggressive, competitive, athletic, stoic, and controlling (Clatterbaugh, 1998). Supporting this analysis, Philaretou and Allen (2001) focus on how socio-cultural perspectives construct a discourse of masculinity, and they argue that deviation from these social constructions produces anxiety and depression in men. Habit and routines are created when these social constructs are assumed and unchallenged, which, in turn, lead to their reproduction. Importantly, Philaretou and Allen posit an important idea that learning spaces are needed for men to develop counter narratives "to engage in a process of

becoming sexually emancipated and then resurrected from the deep-seated structurally determined and sexually limiting influences of patriarchy" (p. 315).

It is this idea of emancipation that leads researchers to determine ways about how men can avoid hegemony and its dangerous effects. Men seek liberation, not oppression. An important study in this regard was Davis's (2002) examination of gender-role conflict in college students. Working from O'Neil, et al. (1986) concept of gender-role conflict, which argued that people who deviate from traditional gender roles face anxiety and tension, Davis found that college students do possess fear and anxiety about gender-roles. His study notes that gender-role conflict forces some students either to act in a certain manner or to be shunned within college communities. There is an expected way to act among college men, and those students who do not are vilified, mocked, and shunned. They replicate the hegemony, or they are marginalized.

The challenge, then, is for men to move past this conflict and become active in the dialogue surrounding them. This analysis certainly connects to and supports the call for learning spaces that promote counter-narratives (Philaretou & Allen 2001; Wagner, 2011). Kahn, Brett, and Holmes (2011) offered two conceptions of masculinities emerging from their participants: one was a construction of masculinity dependent on hegemonic masculinity; the other was one formed in opposition to it. These conceptions not only underscore the gender-role conflict as men struggle with either being the oppressor by adopting hegemonic masculinity or being the oppressed by rejecting it, but more importantly, they attempt to understand the motivations for men choosing one form of masculinity over the other. As one might expect, peer pressure and group dynamics play a vital role in how and why men construct their masculinity.

Gender Masks

The notion of a gender mask emerged in the discourse of gender studies, with two studies depicting how some men pass in social groups. Rooted in Butler's (1993) concept of gender performance, men often perform expected masculine traits to assimilate into the culture due to the associated hegemony. Edwards and Jones (2009) call this "putting on a mask" to describe how men resist hegemonic masculinity (p. 216). In an effort to pass among certain groups, men adopt perceived roles to cover up weaknesses and/or to meet social expectations. These roles become gender scripts that encourage unhealthy stereotypes, such as the strong-but-silent tough guy, being independent, violent, acting as a playboy, being homophobic, and acting competitively (Mahalik, Good, & Englar-Carlson, 2003). These scripts become almost preordained actions that men adopt in order to belong to or pass among the dominant culture. Thus, men may admit to partying more than they should, objectifying women, making racist and bigoted remarks, competition, and downplay their studies in an attempt to resolve their gender-role conflict and achieve a sense of belonging (Edwards & Jones, 2009). The mask hides authentic aspects and shields them from ridicule and social oppression. Harris and Edwards (2010) supports the idea of gender performance and putting on masks to resolve gender conflict, but they also notes that men believe they need outside permission to establish their own individuality and identity. The expectations of hegemonic masculinity are broken when an authority or mentor-figure grants permission. Additionally, the authors note that men feel social pressure to perform hegemonic masculinity, specifically because of its privilege and social prestige afforded to men whom perform (or pass) these hegemonic masculine roles.

Supporting the concept of gender-role conflict, the studies about gender masks show that both tension and concern cause the performance of hegemonic masculinity. It is not a natural act, and performing a gendered identity produces anxiety in addition to the danger of adopting a false habitus and internalizing its behavior. As Harris and Edwards (2010) contend, there is social gain to adopting these undesirable traits, and without the express permission granted by an authority or mentor, these gains threaten to undercut any ethical or moral objection to them. As Edwards and Jones (2009) suggest, putting on these gender masks works for a short time as actions conducted when passing as a hegemonic man threaten to become habits and actions. Most importantly, the social construction of masculinity depends upon peer groups and members of the campus community.

Masculine Scripts

Importantly, gender-role conflict and gender masks have led to the adoption of masculine scripts. These scripts, because assumed and unchallenged, become automatic and "natural" ways in which men are supposed to act. Unchallenged and unanalyzed, these scripts support the status quo and the embedded power dynamics that support it. Thus, in order to challenge and change masculine scripts, it must first be known what scripts exists. Further, these known scripts influence men to act and behave in certain patterns. Central to these scripts is the tension between hegemonic and positive masculinity and ways to promote positive virtues and encourage social justice. Men believe certain ideologies and behave in certain ways as they seek their vocation; seek assistance to respond to physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges; and seek acceptance in social situations.

Vocation

Jobs and work have been a large part of masculine identities, and as such, a significant amount of gender-role conflict occurs when men consider non-masculine career paths that are not supported or validated by hegemonic masculinity (Mahalik, et al., 2006). What a man perceives to be masculine affects what vocations they consider and what their expectations are of that vocation (McDonald & Brown, 2003; Mahalik, et al., 2006). Thus, professions viewed as masculine support the conception of hegemonic masculinity and privilege those men exhibiting these behaviors. Further, it makes it hard for participants (either men or women) who do not display these behaviors to be successful in these careers (Evans & Frank, 2003; Page, Bailey, & Van Delinder, 2009; Sallee, 2011). Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields typically display the most hegemonic masculinity and require participants to adopt these behaviors (Page, et al. 2009; Sallee, 2011); but nursing is often viewed as feminine (and, thus, is feared because of gender-role conflict), and men who are nurses are faced with ostracism, social subordination, or harassment (Evans & Frank, 2003).

Many of these hegemonic masculine roles have been reinforced within higher education institutions and are thereby replicated in society. These expectations are contained within educational institutions because of the strong connection between them and the workplace (Sayman, 2007). Customs and expectations are contained with curricular and co-curricular programming, which enforce these gender-roles (Quaye & Harper, 2009; Sallee, 2011). The normalized rituals and habits support hegemonic masculine roles, which cause the exclusion and oppression of people not conforming to them. Frequently, this exclusion crosses class, gender, and racial boundaries, forcing certain demographics groups to assimilate to the majority and

abandon their own cultural heritages (Woodin & Burke, 2007). In this process, much like students struggling to conform to peer groups, social privilege afforded by hegemonic masculinity perpetuates itself because it becomes a route to success and prestige. More importantly, being cognizant of hegemonic gender-roles creates successful changes and appeals to a broad, diverse pool of students by implementing ways to address their specific needs (Quaye & Harper 2009; Sullivan, 2010).

Stoicism

Enabling men to share and discuss their emotions has unpacked the stoic ethos of hegemonic masculinity. Given that including men in dialogues about masculinity is a necessity, men must be able to share their thoughts and emotions in appropriate manners (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). This concern connects directly to gender-role conflict, because if men believe that they do not understand their roles or that their actions do not fit perceived norms, they remain silent and operate in isolation (Blazina, Settle, & Eddins, 2008; Cochran, 2005; Mahalik, et al., 2006). Contained in hegemonic masculinity is an idea of self-reliance and independence, and also that obtaining help is a sign of weakness, and men maintaining these myths makes men avoid seeking assistance or counsel in an effort to maintain their false conceptions of masculinity (Wimer & Levant, 2011). Both the conflict created by differing from the norm and the stubborn dependency on the myth of self-reliance, isolate men from resources that can promote positive masculinity. Further, these resources also can help men engage into difficult dialogues about socio-cultural issues and the construction of masculinity itself.

Importantly, developing the ability to express one's masculinity helps break cultural codes that depend on silence and antinomy. Pollack (2002) describes the boy code, which

contains the edict that boys will not inform authority figures about transgression, and Kimmel (2008) describes the guy code, which is an evolution of the boy code, and its tendency to encourage silence among men. Both of these codes of silence encourage disruptive actions because the penalty for breaking these codes is to lose one's masculinity and social standing. Men behave badly because the boy code or guy code protects them. The pressure of the peer group—typically emanating from hegemonic masculinity—results in men silently encouraging these acts by not taking the responsible action and informing authorities about them. Thus, socially deviant or harmful actions are reproduced and supported because men do not break these codes; this prevents corrective measures from altering and (in some cases) forcibly correcting them. Not only do men need to understand how to dialogue about the construction of masculinity, but they also need encouragement to speak out against transgressive behaviors (Capraro, 2004).

(Sexual) Violence

There has been an overlap between men's ability to expressive themselves and their ability to prevent rape and sexual assault—breaking the code of silence. Encouraging men to speak up and out against perpetrators of rape and sexual assault both breaks social codes and stops violence against women (Foubert, Godin, & Tatum, 2010; Foubert, Tatum, & Godin, 2010). Based on the research and opinions dedicated to this particular issue, preventing men from speaking out against and preventing rape and sexual assault is clearly one of the most detrimental effects of hegemonic masculinity and gender-role conflict (Berkowitz, 1994; Capraro, 2000, 2004; Foubert, Godin, & Tatum, 2010; Foubert, Tatum, & Godin, 2010; Kelly & Erickson, 2007; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Rich, Utley, Janke, & Moldoveanu, 2010). To address

this, men need to engage in difficult dialogues about these social justice issues, specifically to unpack the hegemonic masculinity and any fear of feminism. More so, there is a belief that claims of rape and sexual assault are exaggerated or that fail to understand the implicit and explicit connections to their individual realities (Rich, et al., 2010). In order to confront these issues, men must first understand the seriousness and relevance of this issue, and then they must be able to dialogue and work through complications and issues raised by it. For, while a study showed that men engage in more aggressive sexual behavior than do women, it did not show a correlation between traditional male gender-roles and sexual coercion (Kelly & Erickson, 2007). It appears that even the connection between masculinity and sexual behavior can and should be deconstructed, as there is not a clear correlation between the two. The notion that being a man must equal having sexual conquests is a notion that must be addressed through conversation and difficult dialogues.

Along with these studies that address the construction of ”man as perpetrator” in regards to rape and sexual assault, the construction of ”man as victim” appears as well. Along with affording men a chance to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity, men also need education on how to avoid sexual assault, and what they should do in the event of sexual coercion (Tweksbury & Mustaine, 2001). Habits that lead to men being abused are chronic partying, frequenting bars, or abusing drugs (Tweksbury & Mustaine, 2001), and these habits are congruent with negative aspects associated with the lifestyle and myth of “going out” (Capraro, 2000). Also important is that sexual violence against men tends to take the form of coercion and not direct violence; men, as a result of hegemonic masculinity, are vulnerable to guilt and shame, which causes them to engage in unsafe or unwanted sexual activity (Fiebert & Tucci, 1998). Therefore, along with

educating men to develop positive masculinities and stop rape and sexual assault, men must also learn how their masculinities can be used against them. In either case, a part of positive masculinities must be breaking the code of silence and seeking help and assistance when situations arise—especially regarding rape and sexual assault.

Clearly, gender scripts connect with constructions of masculinity; these scripts afford men patterns of behavior. From these patterns of behaviors, men develop habits and perform actions that define their masculinity. Yet these scripts are developed in isolation; men perform these actions to either conform or resist to social norms (Pleck, 1982). Research has shown that social norms and peer pressure carry an enormous weight that can lead men to perform actions that "mask" their own conceptions of masculinity in order to achieve power and prestige within the dominant group. The hegemony of the group overpowers the individual and forces them to conform in order to meet these expectations.

Although the research outlining gender-role conflict, gender masks, and gender scripts is vast and articulates boundaries of the discourse, it is a problem-based model. It assumes problems (which there are) with college men and masculinity, and does not isolate particular virtues associated. Certainly, there are challenges with men and masculinity; however, there is a void about what should replace hegemonic masculinity and these gender scripts. If this habitus is negative, what positives exist that can replace it? Of importance is the ability to establish learning spaces within this discourse to challenge and change the present hegemony. If men have not been researched and studied as men, then the question remains about how to open this space for men to express and learn about themselves as men.

Sites of Masculinity

Interestingly two groups have dominated the discourse regarding college men and masculinity. First, the influence of alcohol and drinking sub-cultures has been well-documented regarding how they produce their own scripts that encourage men to change their behavior to meet norms perpetrated by these groups (Capraro, 2000; Peralta & Cruz, 2006; West, 2001). The other group is athletics as a collection of men. This group contains power to influence decision making and the construction of gender. More so, athletics are often viewed as a site guilty of reproducing hegemonic masculinity scripts and its power dynamics (Katz, 1995; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Messner 2000). As college men encounter these groups, they also encounter the gender scripts that give passage to obtaining power and prestige. In order to be socially accepted, men must perform actions dictated by these scripts.

Again, regarding sites of masculinity, there are more problems posed than solutions offered. Research has not examined any potential learning opportunities originating from these alcohol or athletic sub-cultures. The assumption is that these sites of masculinity perpetuate hegemonic masculinity and do not promote other constructions of masculinity. Further, the sites of masculinity are limited to these two classifications. Research must extend past these sites of masculinity to capture the complex network and cultures that students reside in and learn from during their college experience.

Harris's Model of Masculinity Development

Harris (2010) examines which sites of masculinity are used to provide a model of how college men make meaning of their masculinities. His model traces the network, culture, and sites from which men draw their conceptions of masculinity, and, thus, their definitions of

gender scripts. These sites include pre-college gender socializations, academic interests, campus involvements, male peer-group interactions, and male-gendered norms, and from these sites, men construct and define "multiple masculinities that are situated within socio-cultural contexts" (Harris, 2010, p. 299). Inherent within this process is the transaction between the individual and the groups. What individuals brings with them to campus inevitably mixes with the campus culture and other members of that culture. Masculine scripts, in effect, continually possess the potential to be written and re-written; hegemonic masculinity, therefore, can also be challenged and changed. Harris's model outlined the reciprocal process involving how men affect a group and, in turn, are affected by it. Through this process, men (re)construct their concept of what it means to be masculine.

Although the model describes the linkages between the individual and the group, there was a noticeable gap in it. One aspect of college culture and masculinity that is marginalized to the point of obscurity is popular culture, specifically video games. Whereas Harris includes references to video games as "male bonding" and considers video games part of the "male peer group interactions" phenomenon (p. 303), this aspect of culture is vast and deep—worthy of further research and analytical study (Harris, 2010). This interaction between the construction of masculinity and video games has needed to be researched and studied to determine how hegemonic masculinity can be challenged and changed within this discourse. Whereas drinking sub-cultures and athletics are sites of hegemonic reproduction, so, too, are video games and gaming sub-cultures. As Storey (2009) articulates, popular culture is a pervasive component of culture, and as a cultural reservoir and part of the lifeworld, the connection between student development and masculinity development must be examined further.

The connection between masculinity development and video games has been powerfully noted and accused directly of stunting men's development. Kimmel (2008) indicates as such with his accusation that video games are trapping students in *Guyland*, and preventing them from reaching their full potential. He defines "guyland" as a space where men are not considered boys, but lack the responsibility and direction of men. They are trapped in a space of apathy and mis-direction, which hinders their growth and development. Video games, he argues, are a part of society that encourages boys/men to maintain a state of low potential, discouraging active, healthy, and productive relationships. Despite the over-simplification and maligning of gaming and its effects on men and masculinity development, Kimmel did accurately note that men construct definitions of masculinity from these texts.

Yet, according to Kimmel (2008), video games are a significant distraction from academic and co-curricular pursuits. Time spent playing video games is time spent not performing academic rigors. Rather than indicting video games as the cause for masculine purgatory, his pontificating failed to include the research connecting learning and development regarding video games. This has opened a critical space from which to examine video games as a site of masculine development and a site of learning. Certainly, college men play video games, yet the potential for learning and critical issues remains unknown. Further, the notion that college men are able to discuss how they feel about being men and how they develop as men must also be incorporated into research. Men must be afforded the opportunity to explain how their social positionality impacts this learning and development. Of course, video games must be included in this explanation.

College Men and Two-Year Institutions

A second gap has occurred within the context of this model being applied to four-year institutions; it assume a particular model of students. Limited research has been applied to students attending two-year institutions. In two-year institutions, for example, there is more interaction with groups beyond the college community (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). These types of students interact with much more than the college environment and, thus, incorporate more than college into their decision- and meaning making process. The current research concerning male students in higher education has predominately focused on men situated in four-year institutions of higher education. Harper and Harris (2008) states, "Exclusive reliance on published literature pertaining to male students at four-year institutions is attributed to the dearth of research exploring men at community colleges" (p. 67).

This gap, perhaps, is one of the most noticeable and the most critical in the research. Little research attention has explored the differences between men at two-year institutions and men at four-year students. Further, the little research that does focus on men and two-year institutions has focused on issues concerning enrollment numbers, degree attainment, and student engagement (Harris, 2010). It has not examined issues involving gendered identity or how gender impacts male education, work, or social life. Issues related to hegemony, hegemonic masculinity, critical consciousness, and the development of masculinity are noticeably absent from this discourse community.

Students at two-year institutions are different from students at four-year institutions and deserve studies designed for and accounting their socio-cultural positioning. First and foremost, most two-year students are commuters, maintain substantial work hours at jobs off campus, and

possess significant life challenges uncommon to four-year students: they are, by definition, nontraditional students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). More so, two-year institutions are frequently open enrollment campuses, which means that all students may apply, register, and attended classes, but they also bring challenges concerning academic readiness, motivation, and engagement. Although the authors mention that for many students the choice is between "the college and nothing" (p. 58), that does not mean all students enter with the same goals, direction, and vision. The aforementioned life challenges and work demands also possess challenges related to students stopping out, dropping out, or taking longer to complete their degree requirements (Center for Community College Student Engagement. 2012).

Along with these practical considerations about student engagement, completion rates, and other similar concerns, there are abstract considerations as well. Two-year students resist easy classification because of their frequently diverse backgrounds and special needs related to access and disabilities. Additionally, students at two-year institutions possess differences in epistemology. They bring with them a workforce related concern about making money and financial wellness; the traditionally academic pursuits of students at four-year institutions take a lower priority (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This epistemological difference contains ramifications that reverberate throughout the entire institution. As Harper and Harris (2008) state, "Disparities in enrollment, attainment, and engagement constitute most of what is known about men at community colleges and, therefore, make the exploration of gendered questions necessary" (p. 67). Their broad recommendations are that two-year institutions challenge male students to seek help when needed and provide opportunities to reflect critically about their masculinity, understand perceptions of men and masculinity, bond with other men, and address male students

and masculinity through assessments and committee designed to meet their needs. Classes, programs, and initiatives at two-year institutions cannot be conducted as simulacrums of four-year institutions. The focus on jobs, money, and the workforce alone make that a difficult, if not impossible, proposition. Rather, students' diverse backgrounds are present in class discussion and activities. Due to these life experiences and non-traditional backgrounds, students resist uniform definition or teaching strategies.

To this end, there have been research studies focusing on male students at two-year institutions; however, the studies have focused predominately on students of color and/or situates students within the discourse of academic success and achievement (Gardenshire-Crooks, Collado, Martin, & Castro, 2010; Sanchez, Huerta, & Venesgas, 2012; Sontam & Gabiel, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013; Winter, 2009). An implicit assumption is that students at two-year institutions will transfer to four-year institutions, despite the fact that many students express desire to enter the workforce (Cohen & Brawer, 2010).

Thus, considerations associated with four-year institutions have been a part of these studies. Much like college men have not been studied as college men, two-year students have not been studied as two-year students. Research has not examined the needs and desires specific to students at two-year institutions. For example, students of color have been analyzed frequently in the context of being student-athletes; the assumption of transferring to a four-year institution, then, is implicit in the study. More so, although the studies' conclusions align with those recommendations of Harper and Harris (2010), the approach taken by the studies situated the men of color in terms of acclimating them to college life and college success. Importantly, emphasis has been placed more on their experiences within the institutions and less on their

socio-cultural situation; more so, the studies have not accounted for hegemonic influences or cultural repositories, which affect their construction of masculinity.

As research moves forward, there must be exploration into two-year college male students' socio-cultural positions, how these positions are constructed, and what effect they have on other aspects of the students' lives. Students at two-year institutions possess lifestyles and social groups extending far beyond the wall of higher education—if their institutions even possess walls at all. More so, because of the close connection to the community, two-year students possess critical opportunities to challenge and change their communities. It cannot be stated enough: college life is not separate from their regular life; it is a blended, an entwined part of it. The critical sociopolitical concerns regarding student development at two-year institutions must also be incorporated into the research literature.

Conclusion

This study situated itself at the intersection of college men and masculinity and video games to research and uncover the critical gender constructions embedded in this overlooked aspect of popular culture and their impact on learning and development. First, as part of Habermas' (1985) lifeworld and popular culture, people playing video games have done more than just play: they have encountered a rich tapestry of ludology and narratology within the discourse of the video game. More so, they have encountered both hegemony and resistance to hegemony as well. As such, elements of critical consciousness and counter-narratives have become an integral part of video games because players are faced with many aspects in the games. Through the acts of mimesis and habitus, they have internalized these aspects to construct their epistemology and meaning-making structures.

Second, there have been concerns with learning and development. Although higher education has often used video games within tightly control environments to produce a specific effect, video games extend far beyond formal environments. Issues concerning video games encompass violence, addiction, sexism, and critical cultural studies. They also touch upon the informal learning environment, similar to TV and film. Because of this, video games, too, have needed to be considered a part of popular culture and studied in similar manners.

Third, men and masculinities have been studied at the college level, but video games have not been a central issue in critical conversations. Although hegemonic masculinity, gender masks, and gender scripts are frameworks through which to analyze the development of men and masculinities, the relationship of men, masculinities, and video games has been absent. Moreso, video games are accused of promoting violence, addiction, and sexism, those same charges are made against challenges with men. Video games, unfortunately, have not been considered sites of masculine representation.

Finally, students at two-year institutions possess significant differences from other student populations. They have needed to be researched and understood as a unique demographic with their own challenges and concerns. Students frequently possess various needs, goals, and challenges, which impacts their learning and development differently. The current research, though, has focused only on issues of academic success and achievement, not any sort of social or cultural development.

As such, this study examines three critical gaps within the research. The first gap is the connection between popular culture and video games. The negative stereotypes and connotations of video games have been well established and have been pervasive, the body of

work from researchers such as Gee (2004), Gee and Hays (2010), Jenkins (2008), Johnson (2006), and McDonigal (2011) pushes beyond this negativity to examine what is learned and developed from playing games; however, these researchers did not specifically examine issues of masculinity (and gender). Moreso, video games have needed to be examined as a part of the lifeworld and, therefore, something complicit in the production of and resistance to hegemony. Further, much research has considered video games within the context of formal education associated with educational institutions, thus, the study of video games is required to extend past formal learning environments currently found in higher education to examine these games as a part of popular culture and a site for informal education.

The second gap was that the body of research concerning men and masculinity studies has not examined the relationship of video games to men's development. The gap exists that, despite condemnation regarding video game's effects upon college men, little research has targeted this relationship. For example, Harris's (2010) model of masculinity development did not include video games as a separate peer interaction group as a site of masculine representation, and Kimmel (2008) argues that video games are a negative force in students' lives. Parallel to the aforementioned gap in the previous paragraph regarding hegemony, overlap has existed between hegemony and hegemonic masculinity. Thus, more research is needed to determine the impact of video games on men's construction of masculinity. Because such negative stereotypes and connotations exist regarding video games and men, these stereotypes and connotations needed to be researched and challenged to determine how men use video games to construct concepts about being a man and masculinity. Given the explicit attention in the field of college men and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Davis & Laker, 2011), the

exploration of hegemony within video games and how it affects the construction of masculinity must be given due consideration.

The third and final gap to which this study brings attention to is the various epistemologies and needs of students at two-year institutions of higher education, and the relationship between students and the institutions. The gap has existed because studies concerning college men and these issues have examined only men at four-year institutions and not two-year institutions. As Harper and Jackson (2011) urged, more research must be conducted to establish and delineate differences between student populations, especially the differences between four-year and two-year institutions. Students attending two-year institutions possess different desires, in particular the desire to align their courses with professional success. Additionally of note, one area of particular importance has been the relationship of two-year institutions, men, and vocation (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methodology and procedures used in this study are outlined below. In particular, this chapter focuses on the design of the study, the methodology used, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness and consistency, and, finally, my researcher's position statement.

The purpose of this study was to research how community college men use video games to construct their masculinity. Further, it also explored how this construction has affected their learning and personal growth. To this end, it is important to determine which cultural myths and assumptions about masculinity are perpetuated by these video games, too, just as it is equally important to determine which strategies can be employed to ensure learners are liberated from negative stereotypes and preconceptions. In particular, this study illuminated a gap in literature concerning men and two-year institutions. Last, given the paucity of research positioning video games, masculinity, and two-year institutions, it was important to explore and understand the habits and rituals that are developed through these games and associated affinity groups.

The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do men experience when they play video games?
2. What cultural myths and archetypes about men and masculinity are produced or reproduced by video games?
3. How is masculinity constructed through experiencing video games?

4. What impact on learning is produced by video games and occurs through this construction and development of masculinity?
5. What role, if any, do two-year institutions of higher education serve within this construction of masculinity with video games?

Design of Study

The design of this study was qualitative methodology, specifically critical discourse analysis, to capture data provided by the participants. This qualitative methodology was employed to gather thick data and rich descriptions to fully understand and conceptualize how social values, masculinity in particular, are constructed and developed in these communities. Through immersion via semi-structured interviews about the participants' lived experiences, a composite picture of their social positionality and viewpoint emerged through this methodology. Qualitative research has been used to provide insight into issues and communities, and it provides description about the lived experiences of participants (Merriam, 2002). Germane to this study was the lived experiences about how men use video games to assemble definitions and applications of masculinity. Qualitative research was best suited for this study because, through these descriptions, the unique viewpoint of participants could be explored to determine how they construct meaning at a particular point in time and at a particular place in culture. Therefore, open-ended questions in a semi-structured format were employed to elicit responses for analysis. Through these semi-structured interviews, participants provided data necessary to examine their social positionality with the discourses of video games and masculinity. Although not establishing a specific discourse per se, these interviews evidenced broader socio-cultural elements of the discourse in operation within the lived experiences of the participants. Though the participants may not have been cognitively aware exactly how these elements work, based

upon semiotic and critical discourse analysis theory, there is the belief that these men are in the process of constructing their own definition of masculinity that is either congruent or perpendicular with current social perceptions. Just because players are not aware of the effects of culture, it does not mean they are not unwittingly affected by culture (Fairclough, 2001; Habermas, 1985). Thus, video games have produced an effect whether or not men playing them are aware at it. There are hegemonic and other social elements involved within this discourse that men experience when playing video games.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The foundation for this study was a critical discourse analysis. Gee (2011) states that Discourse is "the ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity" (p. 29). Generally speaking, Discourse is a way in which meaning is created and ascribed to cultural artifacts. The referents used in this act of combining and integration produce signifiers that relate to cultural values. Further, Gee explains that these cultural values are rooted in political acts—language cannot remain neutral—and it is always advocating for a specific good. The use of specific speech acts and descriptions are rooted in an ideological foundation that represents cultural power dynamics. Within this discourse, men have been using video games to assist in their constructing representations of masculinity to either conform to or resist hegemonic masculinity. In essence, the process of how language and discourse depict representations of a particular concept perpetuates that particular concept because it is the only representation perceived available. Thus, if men see only the hyper erotic, violent, sexist, and homophobic representations of masculinity, they will perpetuate these

representations because they lack the ability to be liberated from this hegemonic hold. Their language and actions will reflect this process.

Rooted in the theories popularized by Foucault (1973), discourses are specialized ways in which information is communicated by various members in the group. Through this process, "the art of language [is] a way of making a sign—of simultaneously signifying something and arranging signs around that thing" (p. 45). Within these discourses, languages and images become coded with cultural meaning that foster interpretation, and, by coding cultural artifacts in a particular way, a discourse can privilege one meaning over another. Discourse is not a neutral concept; it contains political elements that perpetuate and privileges specific cultural values and marginalizes others. Moreso, habitus of certain acts becomes replicated within the discourse that encourages its reproduction. Habitus that is meant to be imitated is replicated across a broad spectrum of media to dominate the discourse, yet hides other marginalized meaning within this onslaught.

Discourse and Power

What is replicated in the discourse represents the hegemonic power dynamics of the discourse. The act of privileging certain aspects of masculinity in the discourse, and marginalizing others, reveals the boundaries of the discourse's regime of truth. Foucault (1980) defines regimes of truth as "the types of discourse, which it accepts and makes function as true" (p. 133). This act of privileging and marginalization defines the discursive boundaries that project an image of masculinity that is conceived of as true or unchallengeable within society. Regimes of truth establish the parameters through which concepts appear normal thus, are internalized and natural. So, by dominating the discourse with descriptions of men behaving badly, these negative representations of men are the only cultural referent that men are able to

use to construct their personal definition of masculinity. Excluding positive representations from the discourse drastically limits men's growth and development. The negative representations become the template for which norms and cultural assumptions are available to men. Because these are the only signs of masculinity they encounter in video games, the possibility of the signs signifying anything other than hegemonic masculinity is not possible. Growth and development is limited because the regimes of truth within the Discourse reduce the possible conceptions of masculinity to a narrow definition.

These representations have been important because they help construct a discursive framework about how men are supposed to act; they become a form of naturalized and internalized habitus, which prevents critical challenges to their authority (Fairclough, 2001). As the established discourse of college men and masculinity indicates, men follow a system of norms, beliefs, and scripts as they perform expected gender-roles. They become placed in, what Fairclough described as a "subject position," (p. 85) which is a form of naturalized socialization. These subject positions then frame their actions, expectations, and decision-making processes based upon what they conceive to be natural, which prevents critical examination of hegemony. Men perform hegemonic masculine acts because they believe that is how men are supposed to perform. Men in this position cannot and do not challenge the preconceived definitions of masculinity because they lack signifiers that suggest other definitions of masculinity are possible. Rather, men witness the power and privileges bestowed upon hegemonic masculinity and reproduce actions to obtain social standing. This subject position accounts for a large part of gender-role conflict because of the tension created between how men want to perform masculinity versus how men believe they must perform masculinity (Davis, 2002; O'Neil et al., 1986). Through these subject positions, hegemonic masculinity exerts its influence over men by

creating a system of hidden meanings masquerading as accepted, common-sense values (Connell, 2005). The power comes through the expression of both semantics and semiotics that enforce this particular belief structure; importantly, the constructed system of significance appears natural and common, which prevents it from being challenged (Fairclough, 2001). Within this discourse, only certain perceptions of masculinity allowed because the signs of masculinity signify only one definition of masculinity.

Discourse and Culture

An important notion has been that discourse does not comprise an isolated field or construction, but rather a group of social categories that touch upon and influence other discourses. Shi-Xu (2005) states, "Discourse, as an object of enquiry, poses a central question of meaning and, hence, of interpretation for the interpreter. Discourse is essentially a meaning-making activity" (p. 33). Wrapped within this question of meaning and interpretation are the cultural power dynamics of politics and how discourse privileges certain interpretations or representations over others. Discourse does not occur in isolation. Aligning with Fairclough (2001) and Gee (2011), this cultural component of discourse depicts the process of how political aspects of representations of masculinity perpetuate themselves over representations of other forms of masculinity. Because discourse is situated in a cultural context, it also reflects the power dynamics of that culture; like language, discourse is never neutral. There is a cultural blending within the discursive micro- and macro-cosms that organize concepts in relationship to other discourses (Chilton, 2009). Cultural concepts do not exist or act in isolation: there is an interrelationship between them that affects their meaning and function (Musof & Zinken, 2009; Shi-Xu, 200;). Ergo, one discourse affects and impacts other discourses, similar in the way

which a social construction of masculinity affects and impacts social constructions of worker and spouse.

Language, then, has acted as a semiotic referent that helps describe the power dynamics in discourse and how that power dynamic should be applied. The images and words used to connote the idea of men as warriors are reflected in the culture, which then acts as the referents men use to construct their idea of masculinity. Thus, there is a warrant for a large cultural shift in this discourse to promote notions of positive masculinity over hegemonic masculinity. No matter how tight or rigid the boundaries of the discourse, it is but one part of the larger culture, and other aspects of that culture have to be considered. Because of this larger cultural function, it is important to note through this study what other cultural discourses men have used when constructing their definition of masculinity.

Gee (2011) urges researchers to "ask what *situated meanings* these words and phrases have in your data" (p. 125, his emphasis). These situated meanings convey methods that participants use to construct information and knowledge. For example, because discourses and language do not and cannot operate in isolation, it is important to know how men construct cultural information that they then use to define their masculinity. The specific languages and tropes used to describe sociocultural concepts evince the deeper cultural structure present within the discourse. These social constructs depend upon, depict, and link various discourses to make meaning; furthermore, within this linguistic process are power dynamics privileging some representations and marginalizing others. Using particular words and phrases indicates embedded cultural values and power-dynamics within the discourse.

Language, then, indicates deeper, paradigmatic thinking. Following Saussure's (2007) semiotic theory, language works on a syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis. Syntagms are the

linear relationships among signifiers; paradigms are the categorical relationships among signifiers. As noted, comparing two concepts through this syntactical construction juxtaposes them to generate meaning. Along these theoretical lines, when words are used to describe something within culture, it connects two discourses together. Juxtaposition of words indicates a juxtaposition of meaning. The discursive regimes of truth in these domains facilitate an exchange of knowledge and meaning. Men using cultural artifacts such as video games learn from other discourses because of this function of language. Habitus associated with either hegemonic or positive masculinity replicates itself when men repeat actions and exhibits values constructed in these games. Thus, the act of playing a game within a specific discourse community comprises a process in which the act of languages used by participants indicates understanding of the video game, which allows for both the creation and exchange of habitus. How participants describe video games and their experiences highlights connections made by the participant.

It is important to note that this study focus on the discourse analysis argued and defined by Gee (2011) and Fairclough (2001) because of the specific focus regarding the relationship among language, power, and discourse. As opposed to the critical discourse analysis espoused by Van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive approach and Wodak and Meyer's (2001) historical method, Gee's and Fairclough's definition and application, I believe, was best suited for this study because of the tension between privileging and marginalizing constructions of masculinity and the semiotics of these cultural artifacts. An overlap between Gee's emphasis on social goods represented in language and the social power asserted by Fairclough exists; however, Gee places an additional emphasis on the discursive communities and interaction of others within it. Additionally, Gee also draws upon the development of literacy more than Fairclough (this is not

discounting his approach to language and power relationships, though), and his seven building tasks provided a directed framework for processing and ordering information; these tasks correlate with his semiotic domains (Gee, 2004). Finally, I believe that the division between Fairclough's and Gee's approaches to critical discourse analysis is permeable, given that Gee notes how discourse communities relate to other discourse communities, and Fairclough describes the intertextuality of texts (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2004). I also believe Gee focuses more on the syntax and semantics used, while Fairclough adopted a social semiotics approach. Both the focus on syntax and semantics and social semiotics are necessary to uncover how participants construct meaning.

Population

For this study, I used a targeted population method to gather an initial list of participants. From this initial list, a snowball sampling method was employed to gather additional participants for the study. The targeted population was college men currently enrolled within a two-year institution who self-identify as playing video games. A targeted population is necessary to appropriately identify those students who identify as gamers to learn the most about this particular affinity group (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Although self-identification has presented limitations and challenges to the validity of the study, it was necessary to obtain a population that was specific to this study. Further, selecting a target population ensured deep knowledge about gaming, which provided the thick description necessary to decode the referents used to make meaning in this discourse (Patton, 2001). In addition to a targeted population, I asked for names of individuals who might also express a desire to contribute to the study.

To gather my initial list, I researched local businesses in a northwest region of a Mid-western state. These businesses were identified by either the word "game" (or a derivation of the

word) in their title or by local reputation. Further, brief visits to the stores were made to confirm their affiliation with video games. From this list, three businesses were selected as places where participants could be identified. Personal visits were made to these establishments. These visits included contact with the owner or manager to explain my study and acquire relevant approval. During these visits, details relevant to Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies were conveyed, and I explained the confidential nature of the study. Flyers were posted on community message boards, and I attended relevant events to ask for participants. These flyers introduced myself, the research study, and the interview process. Further, my contact information was also provided on these flyers. At the events, I provided a sign-up sheet, and I made myself available for short questions. Due to proximity, I also obtained approval to advertise at Chippewa Valley Technical College, a two-year institution located within the region. Additionally, it should be noted that these sites were selected for geographical convenience for this study. Given the inherent lack of generalizability of qualitative research, this geographical convenience did not detrimentally affect the results of the study.

Higher Educational Institutions

- Chippewa Valley Technical College

Community Business

- Fountain of Youth
- Games by James
- Nomad Game Center

Participants were invited to an interview session using a semi-structured question format. These interviews were conducted locally, either on campus or at a nearby public space (coffee shop, restaurant, or similar environments). Of note, interviews continued until saturation was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As long as new data appeared in the interview, I continued to

interview new participants. Lastly, interviews were confidential, and all records were kept for the required amount of time in a secure location within my home office.

Data Collection

The timeline for data collection was to interview participants and transcribe all the data by February 1, 2014. Oral interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length and tape recorded to ensure validity. Oral interviews were necessary in order to ask probing questions that elicited deeper information from participants. The interview protocol used was semi-structured so that the study was framed by a list of questions designed to elicit specific knowledge from the participant yet also flexible enough to allow for probes to ask for more information and description (Bogdan & Biklen, 2005). This flexibility was important due to the myriad nature of video games present in society and because of the myriad ways in which masculinity can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Where participants used emphasized words, and which words they emphasized, indicated semiotic referents that denoted the presence of the deep structure of the interview. These emphasized words were determined through repetition of words, stressed infliction of one or more syllables, or words used in conjunction with expressive hand motions (which were noted separately). As an interviewer, I needed the flexibility to allow participants to choose and explain their own cultural artifacts and referents that they used to construct their masculinity, and to describe how it developed in this community.

Tape recordings of the interviews helped navigate any complex or emotional points that arose in the process (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). These tape recordings helped note which words were emphasized for meaning. This emphasis, according to Gee (2011), was important because these were the words that the participants chose to express and that, therefore, may have contained some of the sociopolitical themes and may have indicated which social goods were

present in the interview. Additionally, I noted any hand gestures or significant body language used by the participants that indicated nonverbal emphasis or meaning.

Interview Protocols

Interviews were conducted in public or in semipublic spaces, such as restaurants, coffee shops, and parks. Introductions were made, and the research study and exigency were conveyed to the participants. The consent form was provided, explained, and signed by participants. After the introductions and overviews were conducted, questions were then asked in a semi-structured format that allowed follow-up probes to elicit more data when necessary. Each interview occurred over an approximately 60-minute time period. No follow-up interviews were necessary. During each interview, I summarized and clarified the dialog and asked for any additional statements and comments to capture the intent of the participant. Each interview was then transcribed and analyzed according to the expressed methodology. A transcriber was hired to assist for an efficient transcription process. The transcripts of the interviews were checked against the recorded interviews for accuracy.

Question Design

Critical discourse analysis has sought to uncover and challenge the social goods and power dynamics hidden within the language used in a specific discourse. Gee (2011) defines an important distinction about Discourses: first, larger frameworks influence how communication occurs in society, which Gee defined as Discourse; however, within each Discourse is the act of communication, which he also described as discourse (Gee, 2011). Hence, Discourses with D signifies the rules for communication, and discourse with a d is for the process of communication. For example, the act of typing these words into this word processor is an example of a discourse, whereas, the words used are examples of Discourse. To target and

address specific aspects in the Discourse, questions were designed according to specific tools outline by Gee. Importantly, these tools and the "toolbox" they provide, delineated a structured process that outlined the creation of knowledge and discourse. The tools also provided guidance for establishing a procedure that established the relationship of the participant in the Discourse and then how relationships within that Discourse connected to other Discourses.

These specific tools were designed to uncover how meaning is constructed within the Discourse and the language within it. Several questions were organized under the subject tool to understand why the participants entered into this discourse community, and what effect they thought it had on their masculinity. The questions used were as follows:

- How did you start gaming?
- What is your favorite video game and why?
- What are some of the more popular male characters in video games?

Gee's (2011) significance building tool was then used to construct questions designed to elicit opinions and descriptions about their construction of masculinity. When these questions were asked, specific attention was given to language and poetic tropes used in the answers. The assumption was that these were referents to other social goods, and probing questions were then asked to interrogate these connections. Questions used for this tool were as follows:

- What do you think being "being a man' in our society means?
- What specific habits and actions do you associate with being a man?

In order to understand the relationship between video games and masculinity, Gee's relationship-building tool and connection-building tool guided the next set of questions. These are tools that constructed a method to establish and document contacts among discourses. Using this tool, the questions asked were designed to first establish information about the participant and his

perception as a man. Then, these tools were used to connect this information to their idea of masculinity. Last, the questions elicited information about habits and actions associated with being a man, a gamer, and a student.

After receiving descriptions about both gaming and masculinity, the next set of questions asked participants how they were related and attempted to reveal importance connections between the two. They were as follows:

- What do you notice about men represented in video games? What do you think this means?
- How would you define what it means to be a man?
- Describe what you think being a gamer is like.
- What do you think you have learned from playing video games?

Finally, participants were asked how their experiences in the communities related to their being a student, and what effect they thought one may have on the other. These questions were designed using the intertexuality tool to understand how development in one community affects development in the other. The questions were as follows:

- How do you think habits and actions associated with video games affect you as a man?
- How do you think habits and actions associated with video games affect you as a student?
- What stereotypes about being a gamer do you think exist? Have they changed over time?
- What stereotypes about being a man do you think exist? Have they changed over time?
- What stereotypes about being a community college student do you think exist? How have they changed over time?

Additionally, as part of a metaphor analysis, I used an open-ended simile to encourage critical thinking and probe for deeper connections among the bodies of knowledge being examined in

the study. These open-ended questions also represented further use of the intertextuality tool, because participants had to connect information from a source domain to a target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Intertextual relationships were inherent to these questions. They pointedly asked the participants to draw connections between two discourses: one known and one unknown.

As summative questions, they signaled the approaching conclusion of the interview and allowed the capturing of data via a different set of questions. While similar, these open-ended similes encouraged a type of abstract thinking about the concepts (man, gamer, and two-year college student) than did the semi-structured question format. These questions acted as capstone questions in which, once the participant established himself in the Discourse and what affect this discourse had, he was asked to make explicit connections among Discourses. When there was incongruity between the direct questions and these open-ended similes, I used that opportunity to probe the difference. Thus, additional questions were as follows:

- Being a man is like _____
- Being a gamer is like _____
- Being a two-year college student is like _____

Data Analysis

Discourses are fluid; their boundaries permeable. Because of this dynamic, "discourse analysis is a reciprocal and cyclical process" in which information must be analyzed and re-analyzed to generate meaning (Gee, 2011, p. 128). The core of a critical discourse analysis was to understand how discourse is a relationship between "a piece of language and the situated meanings it is attempting to build about the world, identities, and relationships in a specific context" (p. 128). To assist in this constant navigation, I used Glaser and Strauss's (1999)

constant-comparative method to provide the initial overview that allowed for inductive reasoning to tease out important themes appearing in the interviews. Important to the critical discourse analysis, I also gave additional attention to the specific syntactical and paradigmatic structures used by the participants, particularly any linguistic tropes used to describe men, masculinity, and education.

Analysis of these transcriptions followed a modified version of the process outlined by Gee. Information was grouped into "tone units": "a set of words said with one uniform intonational contour" (p. 118). Clumps of tone units were arranged into larger paragraphs to denote similarity in thought. An ellipsis (…) indicated the trailing off or non-completion of a tonal unit (Gee, 2011). A period indicated the end of complete tonal unit. Tonal shifts in syllables, words, or phrases were marked in italics for a shift upward or in bold for a shift downward. Elongated syllables or words with extra emphasis were noted in the margins. Extraneous information—such as gestures, motions, or significant body language—were indicated in the margins, too.

The following excerpt from a transcript is an example of this process in action. In this excerpt, the participant described a connection between video games and work:

> Mainly because most people at [name of business] **don't play video games**, so I guess… Between video games and work it's just another example of the better your *analysis* at work, the better you can *plan* for upcoming events.

He deemphasized the connection to his work environment by speaking more soft and quick in the first sentence, but he emphasized the word "analysis" in the second sentence; furthermore, he juxtaposes the emphasized word with "plan" and "upcoming events." This juxtaposition suggested a possible causality between the act of analysis and the effect of planning. More so, in

the margin of this text, I wrote "spoke quickly" to indicate the rapid delivery of the de-emphasized words.

Using a constant comparative method, I implemented an open and axial coding process to distill meaning from the transcripts. After transcription, I reviewed and reflected upon initial themes that emerged from the data. During the open coding process, I identified key words and phrases within each transcript and used this information to construct larger categories (Charmaz, 2006). Afterwards, attention was paid to data concerning video games as cultural artifacts, how participants constructed a definition of masculinity from their experiences of encountering the video game, and how this definition affected their student development. This type of coding formed the "macrostructures" present within the data (Gee, 2011). Additionally, any other data related to the research questions are noted and documented during this analysis.

It is important to note that although these questions guided the analysis, I was cognizant of Foucault's (1970) assertion that there "is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them" (p. 27). When a discourse has been defined and acknowledged, there are always other elements relegated and marginalized to the outside of this discourse. When conducting this initial analysis, I understood that the questions asked and applied directed my attention in a specific way, and, therefore, I was extra-cautious to avoid overlooking marginalized elements in these transcripts.

After the initial phase, focused coding refined and further organized the codes. This focused coding highlighted the reoccurring themes and constructed categories of knowledge (Charmaz, 2006). Gee's (2011) tools were also applied to understand hermeneutical concerns that arose in the transcripts by providing instruments of analysis that connect the language used

to the social goods they describe. The focused coding filtered the data into codes that provided building blocks to determine how masculinity was constructed in this discourse. These categories were defined by habits displayed in the transcripts; the habits were associated with how social goods were constructed and developed.

These focused codes aligned with the seven building tasks that Gee (2011) outlines to show how reality is constructed. They are as follows:

1) Significance: what does this piece of language make significant?
2) Practices: what "socially recognized and institutionally or culturally support endeavors" are used to sequence information to provide meaning (Gee, 2011, p. 17)?
3) Identities: what identities are being recognized or constructed?
4) Relationships: what other areas does this language draw upon to create or provide meaning?
5) Politics: what social good is being commented on, and for what purpose?
6) Connections: what do these pieces of language connect to or distance themselves from in the discourse?
7) Sign systems and knowledge: what is being privileged or marginalized?

During axial coding, I determined connections between these categories and participants. These building blocks became meta-codes that organized and grouped additional data. Observing and noting power dynamics was also a part of this coding process. Not only were social goods described, but I also noted which themes appeared to dominate others. Through analysis of these commonalities, I constructed insights into these overlapping themes present in how these men constructed their masculinity (Charmaz, 2006). These themes were then analyzed to determine

how this construction of masculinity affected the development of being a student at a two-year institution.

Trustworthiness and Consistency

Coding continued until the criteria for data saturation established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were met. Coding stopped when data saturation was achieved due to a sense of regularities appearing in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At this point, categories were reviewed to ensure none had any "overextensions," and they remained relevant to the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This final review was important to determine any hermeneutic drift that may have occurred from this interpretation strategy (Eco, 1990). During this process, each category had to relate back to either the topic of masculinity or the research questions, and, although a natural hermeneutical process, categories that drifted too far from the source material were re-examined.

To help verify and triangulate this data, member checks were used to validate the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These member checks first occurred at the conclusion of the interview, and participants had a chance to provide corrections or clarifications. Participants also had an opportunity to openly comment on the subjects, including video games, masculinity, and being a student. Then, a post-interview summary was conducted orally, and I discussed the summary and impression of the interview with the participants. After coding was completed, summaries of findings were discussed with participants for further opportunities to comment on and/or clarify their remarks. At this junction, participants were also able to comment upon the analysis, which, in their opinion, drifted or extended too far from the original research questions. A record was kept of encounters and interactions between the researcher and the participants, and it, too, was coded so as to protect confidentiality.

Researcher's Position Statement

First, I am a gamer. Second, I am a man.

I remember playing my first video games in 1986 when the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) started the home video game revolution. Since then, my experience and knowledge has expanded to include table-top role-playing games, card games, and board games. Although I still play games socially, my experience with video games has declined. Whereas games used to consume a large portion of my life and occupied a central position in how I constructed reality, it is no longer the situation. Since the invention of on-line gaming and downloadable content, I believe the Discourse, discourse, and community has changed. Whereas games were once, in my opinion, rich with stories and innovative mechanics, I do not see much new in modern games. It is a sort of post-modern emptiness where popular games are replicated because they are popular. As such, I consider myself to have some objective distance with modern video game communities. I understand them—and even enjoy playing them occasionally—but, I would not consider myself immersed in these on-line communities or an expert in "modern" gaming and gaming cultures.

Yet, gaming popularity and impact on society cannot be denied. Clearly, there is something occurring within these communities, and it should be studied and articulated to help men develop positive masculinity to effect social change. The impact of higher education institutions, specifically two-year institutions, has needed to be included with this examination. Thus, I wanted to examine what and how men develop in both formal and informal learning communities. Of course, I have—and I am aware of—my own theories about this construction and development. It is something that I have conversed about extensively over the years, which

could have brought potential bias into this study. However, to this end, I depended upon the literature to frame the discourse and reveal how masculinity is developed and applied.

Summary

This chapter outlined the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this qualitative research study. Rooted in critical discourse theory, this study sought to examine the intersection of men and masculinity, video games, and educational institutions. Moreso, it sought to examine the implicit and explicit power dynamics and hegemony occurring within this intersection. It was important to determine what social constructs are privileged and what social constructs are marginalized by constructing knowledge through encounters with these cultural texts.

Using a targeted sampling, participants were selected from two-year higher educational institutions and local businesses that emphasized video games. These participants were then invited to an interview, and using a semi structured question design, these experiences were tape recorded. Following these interviews, the transcripts were open, axial, and focused coded using a constant-comparative method. Then, a critical discourse analysis was preformed to examine what social power dynamics were present within these lived experiences.

Chapter Four: FINDINGS

Summary of Methodology

Over the course of an hour, participants responded to questions constructed from a critical discourse analysis methodology. This methodology was used to determine the relationships among language, context, and power within each participant's responses. These questions provided the framework necessary to establish and analyze meaning emerging from data provided by the participants. The research questions that formed the foundation of the study are as follows:

1. What do men experience when they play video games?
2. What cultural myths and archetypes about men and masculinity are produced or reproduced by video games?
3. How is masculinity constructed through experiencing video games?
4. What impact on learning is produced by video games and occurs through this construction and development of masculinity?
5. What role, if any, do two-year institutions of higher education serve within this construction of masculinity with video games?

Data from the semi structured interview were then analyzed using the following methodology. First, open coding was used to establish broad themes and patterns emerging from the data. Second, focused coding was used to establish themes specific to the research questions. Third, axial coding was then used to establish patterns and categories specific to these participants' lived experiences (Charmaz, 2006). Throughout this process, a constant-comparative method

was used to establish both micro- and macro-structures in the data. Last, specific attention to how words were emphasized and any extraneous physical gestures made during the interview were noted throughout the process.

Participants

The following data were collected via interviews with 13 participants between August and November of 2013. These participants were self-selected and self-identified as (a) men, (b) two-year college students and (c) someone who plays video games. Specifically, all 13 participants were White men currently enrolled at a two-year institution in a Midwestern state located near a city of approximately 60,000 people. Further, 11 of the 13 participants were between the ages of 21 and 26. One participant was age 34 and another was over 40. This last participant was also the only participant to disclose having children. Although not specifically asked, sexual orientation was not revealed or discussed by any of the participants. Last, 5 of the 13 participants shared that they were returning students, having attended at least one other institution before their current two-year institutions. It must further be noted that two participants, George and Jake, admitted to not playing video games on a regular basis. Data from their interviews was included to demonstrate how learning still occurs from video games, whether they are active players or not.

Data Analysis and Chapter Outline

After the data were coded, Gee's (2011) tools were applied to arrange the data into specific themes. Table 1 was developed to understand graphically alignment with the building tasks. It also underscored how the specific tools used align with the building tasks articulated by Gee.

Table 1

Alignment of Tools and Building Tasks

Subject Tool	Identities
	Significance
Activities Building Tool	Practices
Connection Tool	Connections
	Relationships
Intertextuality Tool	Politics
	Sign Systems and Knowledge

First, after documenting frequently appearing semantics and semiotics structures fom the data, the subject tool was then applied to determine how participants viewed themselves and others in this discourse. The application of this tool provided data about what the participants considered significant and what social identities were established. Themes that emerged from the application of this tool are as follows:

- The Role of the Family,
- The Role of Friends,
- Being a Video Game Player,
- Being a Student,
- Being Masculine,

- Popular Male Characters In Video Games.

Next, the activities-building tool was used to determine notable habits, actions, and routines that participants considered significant. Then, the connection tool was applied to analyze how participants made connections and established relationships among video games, masculinity, and students. The application of this tool offered insight into how social concepts were constructed and performed. Data revealed the following themes:

- Actions Associated with Masculinity,
- Actions Separating Men from Boys,
- Video Games and Learning,
- Academic Learning,
- Metacognitive Learning,
- Learning Social Skills,
- Other Learning.

Additionally, the intertextuality tool provided insight into how participants provided meaning about the political dynamics and social significance occurring within this discourse. Through the use of this tool, patterns and themes were connected to understand how this specific discourse was defined and how it affected the definitions of others. The following categories reveal the connections:

- Video Games and Work,
- Video Games and Schools,
- Video Games and Men.

Next, Gee's (2011) intertextuality tools placed these themes, discourses, and connections into abstract discourses related to political goods present with them and to the ways in which epistemology was created and applied. As such, themes displayed acts of privileging and marginalization occurring within this discourse:

- Stereotypes of People who Play Video Games,
- Stereotypes of Men,
- Stereotypes of Two-Year Students,
- The Role of Parents,
- Video Games as Social Scapegoat,
- Reality and Fantasy,
- Escapism,
- The Enjoyment of Video Games.

Finally, to provide additional insight into the data, three metaphors were used to illuminate connections. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theories about metaphors, participants were asked to describe what being a man, being a gamer, and being a student was like, in their opinion. The results of these questions supported previous analysis of the data. The data provided by these metaphors paralleled data gathered during answers to the other questions.

Semantics and Semiotics

The following categories analyze the document's specific words and games-as-cultural-artifacts used throughout the interviews. This data provided themes and connections based upon the embedded semantics and semiotics devoid of any context specific to participants. These data

were collected and analyzed to determine repetition in words, phrases, and cultural artifacts and to determine any significance in that repetition.

Semantics: Words

After coding, the transcripts were sifted to find stressed words that were repeated. The following descriptions are words uttered with additional stress or emphasis to provide additional meaning. Although many words were stressed, these descriptions focus on two criteria: first, the word was emphasized by at least two of the participants; second, the words were subjects, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs in the sentence. Many transitory words and prepositions were excluded from these descriptions. These words are often words that do not connect to the specific content or meaning of the sentence but rather are used to link key concepts together in the sentence. Unless repeated or otherwise significant, these words were not included in the analysis (Gee, 2011).

The word "big" appeared within six of the transcripts; two participants emphasized the phrase "big sword" and three participants emphasized the phrase "big gun." For example, when asked to describe noticeable features of male characters, data frequently appeared as, "yeah, carrying a *big* sword or *big* gun." The adjective "big" modified the noun, weapon. Additionally, four participants emphasized the word "job" during their interview. Three participants emphasized the following words: "chivalry," "learned," "responsible," "action," "critical thinking," "masculine," "literally," "dominant," and "good." Two participants emphasized the following words: "escape," "strong," "violent," "story," and "positive."

Although many participants engaged in physical behavior and mannerisms during the course of the behavior per conventions of normal conversation, four of the six participants used a

noticeable gesture when mentioning the word "big." While the gestures varied, the important point is the emphasis placed on this specific word: "big" *is* a big deal. The combination of the repeated semantic emphasis on "big" in conjunction with the exaggerated semantics performed, suggested an important connection about this particular modifier in the sentence. Additionally, it was significant that one participant emphasized the phrase "extreme critical thinking" during the interview, including jumping from his seat and making an emphatic pointing-motion towards the tape recorder. Further, he insisted that the phrase "extreme critical thinking" be copyrighted with his name. This was expressed with wild hand motions and clear passion in his voice.

Semiotics: Cultural Artifacts

Due to the emphasis on video games, the following is a list of specific video games mentioned during the course of the interviews. Because these cultural artifacts comprise a section of the participant's lifeworld, it was necessary to document the cultural artifacts used to construct meaning and act as a referent used to decode further signs and sign systems. Only games that were mentioned more than once are listed. Four of the participants mentioned Super Mario World, or an iteration of the character Mario. It must be noted that Mario is a popular, well-marked character who often transcends any one particular game. Also, four participants mentioned the video game *Call of Duty*, which is a first-person shooter/war simulator, and three participants mentioned *The Legend of Zelda*, which is an adventure game emphasizing mazes and problem-solving alongside combat. Additionally, two participants mentioned the series *Final Fantasy*, a popular role playing game series (RPG) series; two participants mentioned *League of Legends*; two participants mentioned *World of Warcraft*; two participants mentioned *Defense of the Ancients 2*, an expansion of *Warcraft III*; two participants mentioned *Tetris*; two

participants mentioned *Resident Evil*; two participants mentioned *Pong;* two participants mentioned *Grand Theft Auto*; and two participants mentioned *Madden*, the popular football-simulator franchise. Finally, two participants referred to *Atari*, which is a reference to the old Atari video game systems whose vast collection of games are frequently released in a single collection.

The following is a list of video game genres mentioned during the interviews. RPGs were mentioned by 6 of the 13 participants. RPGs are massive character- and plot-driven video games with an emphasis on strategies, tactics, and puzzle-solving. One of this genre's criteria is that the player controls a group of characters, as opposed to just one main character. Conversely, 9 of the 13 participants mentioned action-adventure games. These games, like RPGs, are character and story-driven narratives, but the focus is controlling one main character through narratives with more action and reflexed-based elements.

Additionally, six participants mentioned first-person shooters (FPS). FPS games provide players with a first-person immersion into the digesis, where the player sees what the character sees. Modern warfare games were referenced by four of the six participants; the fifth made reference to *Goldeneye*, a game based on the James Bond 007 film of the same name, who is fictional soldier for the British Empire; and the last made reference to *Dues Ex*, a RPG/FPS hybrid about a futuristic cyborg-soldier navigating through a dystopian world.

Three participants mentioned Real-Time Strategy games (RTS). This genre involves players engaged in a head-to-head match-up where they must balance multiple resources and units to achieve strategic goals. When selecting units or managing resources, time does not stop, as the opponent still continues play. Hence, decisions must be made in "real time." Three

participants noted games based on reflexes or puzzles. These games lack a cohesive narrative and involve obtaining a high score. Additionally, three participants mentioned sport simulators. It is worth noting that one participant's response contained considerable disdain and contempt when mentioning sport simulators.

Lastly, two participants mentioned point-and-click games. This genre, while related to the RPG and Action-Adventure genres, places considerable emphasis on riddles, puzzles, and problem-solving. The main method of experiencing these games is to point and click around a static screen to interact with characters and the environment to gather clues and resources needed to pass the current obstacle and continue the narrative. Two participants mentioned Rhythm Games. These are games based upon pressing buttons in time with flashing indicators for points (the popular Dance Dance Revolution series is an example of this genre).

In closing, these descriptions of semantic and semiotics provide insight into the components and broader cultural artifacts that participants used to construct their knowledge. Void of specific context, they showcased patterns and similarities across all 13 participants. Despite the plethora of words and video games, some significant patterns emerged. From this point, Gee's (2011) tools analyzed what occur in the specific discourse; these semantics and semiotics help irradiate boundaries of that discourse.

Subject, Significance, and Identity

The subject tool was first used to analyze how participants ascribe significance and establish how they construct themselves and others in this discourse. For example, given the emphasis on the word "big" and the emphasis on RPGs, the subject tool offered an indication of how participants view themselves in this discourse. It started to define their role and position

within this larger context. First, specific subjects used by participants displayed emergent themes concerning how they understood the discourse. To this end, the application of this tool positioned the participant within the larger context of the discourse. They were the subjects from whom meaning was derived; thus, how they entered the discourses and what patterns can be drawn from that entrance was an important first step. Data were coded into themes that displayed how participants started playing video games and what helped them get started; any significance about their favorite games; and how they defined the actions of being masculine, being a video game player, and being a student.

The Role of Family

Most significant was how 11 of the 13 participants noted that family members were involved with their start of video games. Family played a distinct role in how these participants entered this discourse.

Parents. Without making a distinction between a mother and a father, 5 of 13 participants noted the role of parents in the process. For these participants, "parents" were a single unit without specific emphasis placed on either the mother or the father. Dan described that "my parents brought home an Atari. That started my gaming when I was young." He also said, "My parents used to own a video store, so I had all the games." Matt stated the role of video games and his parents as, "just a kind of fad thing [for my parents], but it grew in to something more for myself." Mark, finally, said, "[When I was] six, my parents decided that we should get our first home computer."

Data provided by Nate and Spencer indicated a different perspective. Nick described a situation in which the family culture dominated video games. As he explained it, the role of the family obfuscates the influence of video games:

> I grew up, like I said, in a house where gender wasn't really like a thing that was stressed. I saw it in other families and stuff, where they had stay-at-home moms. That was more stereotypical but, like, what I kind of grew up to be normal is just that gender doesn't matter, and I'd just, kind of, learned that it didn't take anything else along those lines from video games.

Spencer also indicated the role that family can play when describing how his parents took notice of his playing after noticing a depletion in batteries; his parents caught on, "by how fast we were going through the double-A batteries; they were a little more strict on watching me and how long I played," they began to take an more active role in his video game playing.

Father. The role of the father was noted by 3 of the 13 participants. Nate noted that his father was present during his experience at Shop KO. Additionally, Nate's father was mentioned in conjunction with other elements of popular culture: "It's like my dad. He used to watch old 50's westerns and sci-fi movies, and he's got a thing for those." Josh also noted the role of his father and a connection to shopping/purchasing: "My dad, but we, uh, would go out and get different [computer] towers every, every couple of years." Jake described the role of competition between father and son: "My dad used to play when he was little. Because he would talk to me about how you play it, and then I would just try too, like, beat his high scorers or something like that."

Mother. The role of the mother was mentioned by 3 of the 13 participants. Jake connected his mother to the gift-giving process. Adam B. said, "I was raised by a single mother, and my video games were never on, that was back when she was smarter at computers than I

was, so she could put a password on it." He mentioned additionally how his mother would use video games as a reward system for good behavior: "She did a great job, you know, I got rewarded with video game time if I did well in school which drove me to do better in school." George mentioned that his mother encouraged a sense of freedom: "My mom raised me to do what I like."

Other family members. Although mothers and fathers were the most mentioned single-family member, other family members were mentioned, too. John described the role of his sister: "my sister and them sort of got me into, like, RPGs." Additionally, along with describing the role of the mother, Adam B. acknowledged how cousins influenced the process: "my cousins got a Sega Genesis, I never got one, I mean, as far as my knowledge goes back.… They were just always around." Adam S. described an interesting dynamic with a close friend of the family acted as a surrogate uncle and participated in the process to suggest that family can extend beyond hereditary ties and still provide influence:

> And I had an uncle who consequently was not actually my uncle. It was a close friend of my mom's high school friend. I don't know, anyway it was very complicated. But, basically I saw him as my uncle. I would go to his house often and just be there and hang out.

The Role of Friends

Friends were mentioned as important to video games by 6 of the 13 participants. Whereas family members introduced the participants to video games, friends helped maintain video games' active role in their lives. Brent provided an observation about how the line between family and friends: "I don't consider most of my blood relatives my family because I don't see them and I don't talk to them, and it doesn't really bother me. In any way, [friend] is my family." This assertion paralleled that made by Adam S. and his surrogate uncle.

Further, Brent summarized the sentiments of the participants through his descriptions of video games occupying a social space: “through friends’ [video games] kind of grew and the only time I play current games are with friends.” This supported the notion expressed by Matt that his video games were “just a kind of fad thing [for my parents], but it grew in to something more for myself.” Adam B. mentioned that video games maintained relationships over long distances: “I much prefer to sit around with my real life friends with one stationed in Kuwait right now, the other, you know, they’re all over Louisiana, you know. My friends that I grew up with I can't play with so, it's just easier to sit down.”

Being a Video Game Player

Participants provided the following responses about what being a video game player meant to them. Appearing through this analysis are details and criteria about what defines someone as a video game player. This affects how they view themselves in the discourse and establish traits unique to it.

Enjoyment. One significant aspect appearing through this analysis was the act of enjoyment experienced when playing their video games**.** Key words used by participants to suggest continual enjoyment were “favorite” and “continue,” and the phrases “more than once” and “go back to them” are also critical components of defining a favorite game. Embedded in these words in phrases was the act of frequent enjoyment and repetition. Favorite games do not lose their charm or appeal.

Time. Josh provided this quantitative piece of information by stating, “If I were to, like, label somebody as a gamer, then I would say that they have to spend at least the majority of their spare time playing video games or talking about video games.” Although not providing a

specific requisite amount of time, Nate and Brent also indicated that a commitment to video games defines a person as a gamer. Significant time must be spent appreciating the game and all that it has to offer. Nate compared playing classic games to understanding classic pieces of art: "If they are like, I like Final Fantasy and I have all the Final Fantasy games, that's a gamer. It's like art. You have to know Rembrandt or Picasso." Brent emphatically indicated that a gamer enjoys the game to completion; a person rushing through a game is not a gamer:

> I go through the game to do everything the game has to offer. People I know, literally, rushed through the game as quickly as possible to just say they beat the game and go "ha, I beat the game." I literally go through and explore every portion of the map trying to find everything. Trying to defeat every monster, collect every item."

Conversely, one participant offered dissenting points of view. George identified a social stereotype as defining gamers: "Society has always said that people who play video games got no future are people who are going nowhere, and society would classify people who play video games as losers." Yet, he countered this assertion with an example of his sister's boyfriend: "My sister's boyfriend owns his own electrical company. He smokes and plays video games. Society would not assume people do that because some people are management."

Being a Student

Akin to being a video-game player, data suggested ways that participants constructed being a student and offered some insight into traits and habits associated with this discourse.

Class attendance. A prevalent theme in the data connected being a student with going to class, as 6 of 13 students indicated this action defined being a student. To Jake, a student was someone who was "trying to stay dedicated to studies. Focus[ed] on what you need to do to pass your classes. And get a good grade. Focus[ed] on your degree." Josh put it simply: "students are going to classes, doing homework, taking a test, and eventually graduating." Adam B. also

stated bluntly: “being present for class.” Brent, although not mentioning class directly, offered this piece of data indicating a function of attending class: “being a student is all about learning.” The emphasis on learning, including the emphasis on the phrase “all about,” indicated his belief about the reason for going to class. George noted, too, a penalty for missing class, “it doesn’t take much to screw up school. You miss a week of class and you are fucked.” Adam B. also noted a penalty for missing class in the context of leaving one institution: “I was partying with [a group of friends], having a lot of fun, and just kind of stopped going to class.” Lastly, Nick mentioned that he saw “a lot of kids straight out of high school would skip class quite a bit because they're free to do that” and asserted a definition of being a student in opposition to these behaviors.

Institutional differences. Along with going to class, there was a distinction made between two-year institutions and four-year institutions. Four participants directly indicated this distinction. For John, this difference concerned the price: “get your associate’s degree at a two-year institution first is just, dollar and sense-wise, it just makes more sense than paying thousands more per semester to go to a four-year first.” Spencer noted that students receive “more diversity in the school, and this school is a lot more hands-on and geared for real-life application.” Matt defined the difference as a question of direction: “your two-year university is usually, like, a transfer or your automotive technician programs. Four-year university is your undergrad kind of stuff” and contextualized this opinion by stating, “I think that our nursing program would hold its own against just as many four-year universities. We just don't offer them a bachelor's degree.” Nick, in his reflection, stated, “I went to [four-year regional institution] for

a year, and I saw a lot of kids straight out of high school would skip class quite a bit because they're free to do that."

Interestingly, Matt continued to qualify this behavior and connected it to other data about the role of parents: "Their parents were paying for classes and they'd be barely passing, or some.… I saw a lot of people fail out right away, first semester." This qualification suggested parents have a role to play in college much as they do with video games. Matt also stated a connection between school and work: "treat school like a job." Dan continued this theme with his emphatic statement, "I'm not living with mommy and daddy, and they tell me I have to go to school or pay rent, so ... it's just come to a point in my life that I have to make a career choice." Not only does his pejorative terminology of "mommy" and "daddy" conjure connotations of infantilism, it also indicates to whom he is held responsible and the goal of students wanting careers.

Being Masculine

Much like the insight into being a video game player and being a student, data provided the same insight into how these participants viewed being masculine. Certain traits and beliefs appeared that classified how masculinity are constructed.

Responsibility. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated responsibility as a part of masculinity. The word "responsible," or a derivation, was used in the responses of 5 of the 13 participants. Adam B., the most emphatic of the participants, provided data that exemplified this point: "it's, like, being responsible for yourself to a point where you can also be responsible for other people." Participants Adam S., Brent, and Jake emphasized the word "responsible" in their

definitions as well. George used the phrase "taking charge," which suggested a connotation of responsibility.

Family. Another theme about masculinity concerned its connection to family. Two participants mentioned family in their definition of masculinity. Adam B. emphasized that "being a man comes when you decide you're going to start a family, provide for them." Brent echoed this expression with, "a man should be responsible, and able to provide and be there for family." It must be observed that both explicitly use the words "provide" in their definition as well. Jake also stated directly, "take care of your family," when asked about his definition of masculinity. Adam S., in passing, mentioned the connection to being responsible for "other people."

Floppy bits. With this definition of masculinity, three participants reached consensus about one aspect of masculinity. Masculinity remains tied to "the floppy bits," as Mark expressed. Spencer correlated this opinion with his direct utterance: "what you've got between your legs. That's really all, and the only difference is what you are born with." Through the use of the word "gene," this theme also appeared in Josh's statement: "the only real definition that I've come across is just that you have an X and a Y genes." Mark also used the term "genetics," too, in his statement.

Multiple definitions. Within the data, four participants noted explicit ways in which masculinity may contain multiple definitions. Nate described it as "convoluted" and "branched off." He stated, "It's become like, masculinity has started to encompass things like interactions with your wife, like feelings, being sensitive." Josh used the term "expanded" in his definition of how masculinity included "so many different types of people." Nick replied, "In today's

society, well, I think we're moving toward that there is much less for gender lines and stuff like that [for being a man]." On this point, however, Mark provided an interesting analysis about masculinity with the comment that "the role of masculinity is changing." While he believed masculinity does not change, its function in society does:

> It's slowly getting to the point where masculinity is, uh, applying less about aggressiveness, less about dominance and more about steadfastness. That's not the right word, it's about uh, it's more about integrity. Sticking to your guns … not being defeated, as opposed to becoming dominant.

Popular Male Characters in Video Games

From this data, patterns emerged about how masculinity was represented through the characters encountered by playing video games. Many of these characters are archetypes that provide indication towards aspects of masculinity that are valued and appreciated.

Specific characters. The following specific characters appeared significantly in the data. Nate, George, John, Josh, and Nick made reference to Mario, the popular male character from the Super Mario series of video games (which include a variety of genres ranging from RPGs to puzzle games) and the mascot for the Nintendo Entertainment Company. Spencer, John, and Matt mentioned Master Chief from the *HALO* franchise, which is one of the premier franchises for Microsoft's X-Box.

Specific archetypes. In addition to specific male character mentioned, participants also specified two archetypes of characters popular in video games. Although not a specific character, per say, popular characters are classified as warrior-characters, assassin-characters, or athletes.

Warrior. Eight participants provided data that invoked the archetype of the warrior. A key criterion of the warrior archetype is a preference for combat and battle, as opposed to stealth or diplomacy. Spencer mentioned *Grand Theft Auto* and *Modern Combat: Battlefield*, both games depend on the warrior as soldier archetype to conduct wars in either an actual military or criminal war environment. Adam S. mentioned *Gears of War*, which has soldiers as protagonists protecting the galaxy from invasion. Dan used the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, made popular for a series of movies during the 1980s starring him as a warrior, and the words "muscles," "violent," and "killing." John mentioned Link, the protagonist from the *Legend of Zelda* series of adventure games that often feature Link defeating his opponents with his sword and a variety of tools. J.P. mentioned the word "soldier." Matt mentioned Kratos, a character who becomes the god of war after violently killing Ares and other Greek gods in the franchise *God of War*. Data from Nick mentioned the character Barrett as a "badass," who uses a "gun for an arm." Mark mentioned John McClain from the *Die Hard* films, which is a character known for shooting first and talking later. Lastly, Adam B. described a barbarian and used the term "hack-and-slash."

Assassin. Soldiers prefer direct combat, but the assassin archetype depends on stealth appeared predominately in the data. A vital characteristic of this archetype is the dependency on hidden movement and silently dispatching enemies, as opposed to open combat. Nate mentioned Sam Fisher from the *Splinter Cell* franchise, who is a government spy tasked with silently completing his mission. Nick mentioned Nathan Drake, a charismatic, globe-trotting allusion to Indiana Jones. Mark referenced Etso, a character from the popular *Assassin's Creed* franchise

that depicts characters soundlessly eliminating enemies. And Adam B. used the term "rogue" to describe characters using stealth and remaining hidden to complete their objectives.

Although participants indicated either a warrior or assassin archetype, Mark offered this piece of data that suggests commonalities between the two. When describing both Etso and John McClain, he says:

> In a lot of ways, both of these characters are a man's man. They are very strong, forward, driven. They don't suffer from a great deal of, ah, frailty. Even as they age, they are peerless and invincible. They project a certain amount of dominance and confidence. A certain ability to deal with any problem. It feeds into a good deal into, um, sort of, like the common male fantasy of being strong. It's alluring that way. It engages, uh, one's own desire … the tendency to be strong. So, when you take control of these characters, even more so.

Importantly, this piece of data crystalized both archetypes into an idea of desire and male fantasy represented within the representations of men and masculinity in video games. Whether the character is a warrior or an assassin, there are aspects of control and determination that is appealing to players.

Athletes. Importantly, the following themes also appeared in the data. Adam S., Dan, and Nick mentioned characters as athletes when describing popular male figures in video games. Adam S. mentioned "football" directly, and Dan mentioned that "football is football," with the repetition and emphasis indicating a seemingly obvious definition and its importance in the video game discourse. Further, Dan also mentioned baseball and basketball, and Nick referred to *SportsCenter*, a popular program reporting on sports.

Physical Descriptors

Data also indicated that physical attributes are important. Adam B. described a connection between personal appearance on digital personas: "I kind of try to tailor my

characters to how I look as close as possible, like, it's not super, just like, my character's abs have abs, but you know, longer hair, bearded." Adam S. stated empathically the importance of "wearing armor" and being "biologically stronger and bigger." Dan provided data reiterating the importance of "muscles" and "strength" by emphasizing these words. An emphasis on hair also appeared in the data. Adam B. specifically mentioned "hair" and "beard" in his descriptions, and Adam S. provided the following explanation about the importance of hair to indicate wisdom and being prepared: "[not being] hairy indicates youth a lot of the time, and yeah, short hair, that's probably just indicating, like, low maintenance … a character with shorter hair, for example. Without having that characteristic, these male characters are, perhaps, seen as a less susceptible to those sorts of maneuvers."

Activities and Actions

After applying the subject tool to orientate participants and their offered data, the activities-building tool was applied to determine what specific practices and actions are connected to men and masculinity in order to build their social construction about how men do and should behave. This tool highlighted how things are performed in the discourse. In this case, data displayed what participants learn, or at least think they learn, from participating in video games.

The themes below classified significant activities and actions emerging from the data. These data display how participants learn specific activities and actions from video games and how that learning affects being a man and being a student. Additionally, certain actions are attributed to separating "men" from "boys" and privileging "insiders" from "outsiders" within video game affinity groups.

Actions Associated with Masculinity

The following themes outline specific actions associated with constructing and performing masculinity. They also comprise critical values that affect masculinity.

Responsibility to family and work. Most prevalently, 6 of 13 participants articulated "responsibility" as an action associated with masculinity. Adam B. clearly provided a connection among "responsibility," "work," and "civic duties" by emphasizing these words in subsequent sentences: "I mean, able to play as many video games as they would want after, you know, their civil duties are done. Go to work, don't skip work because you are playing video games. Be responsible." Additionally, Adam B. provided this connection between responsibility and family: "a lot of responsibilities, but when you decide to have a family it comes with a ton more, obviously." Additionally, he noted that responsibility is putting others before his needs:

> I mean, there are days that all I want to do is get out of class at noon and go play video games, but I realize I have to get my laundry done, get groceries, pay bills. I was just doing a side job for a friend of mine, putting a ceiling in, you know, I was there 12 hours a day after, you know six-to-eight hours of classes or being in a library and then after I get done there, I go to work and then it's four o'clock in the morning by the time I get home, and it's, you know, you can't play video games, got to go to class.

The following piece of data from Brent provided an uncanny parallel to Adam B.: "It all kind of goes back to being responsible. But I mean, having a source of income, a stable source of income. Being able to take care of family and help people when they need help." Further, Brent summarized these actions with the emphasized cliché "bring home the bacon" that is used to indicate men as the primary income. George explained that, "we do the hard work. We have to have the idea to fix stuff" to emphasize the connection between (hard) work and masculinity. More so, he contributed the following data: "Take charge of everything. You do what you have to do and get it done. State your priorities. Be the smartest one in the room. Be ahead of the

game. Pay your bills." Jake summarized actions associated with masculinity that connects to work and family: "[Responsibility is]… I don't know, don't do anything dumb. Don't hurt your family, don't do stuff that will break your family apart." Data from Nick indicated masculinity comprises taking the lead:

> So just, I don't know, just that's more of being a gentleman than what I think you're asking. It's more of a responsibility of a man and to do things like that. When you're with your grandparents, or girlfriend, or something like that, you do the heavy lifting so to speak.

Last, Mark provided this data with reflection (as indicated by the long pauses): "Following through, uh, <long pause> accepting responsibility, uh, <long pause> … And, uh, <long pause> providing for those you care for."

Chivalry. Also, the theme of chivalry appeared in the data, as three participants used the word in the context of actions associated with masculinity. Nate directly defined chivalry as "like the sense of chivalry, being respectful to others"; furthermore, he offered a definition of chivalry by denouncing other actions: "like generally not being a douche." In this context, "douche" is a modern stereotype for people (men) who think of themselves first and act with general disregard for others. Nick used "chivalry" in his response and connected representations of chivalry to video games: "chivalry, honor, integrity, honesty. You always see that portrayed in, especially, like, Zelda and Mario." Likewise, George used the word "chivalry," but his use of the words "but" and "um" in the data was significant because it marked a change in thought: "they say chivalry is dead. But, um, really what is that?" To George, connections between chivalry and masculinity were not dead, despite rumors of their demise.

Bullying as male bonding. Seven participants described actions that indicated physical or mental dominance over another, usually for being different, as part of masculinity. Three

offered explanations for this behavior. Nate qualified this act as a social part of playing games with men, which is frequently done in the spirit of friendship, but admitted it can cause hurt feelings. He described that, "[he knows] people who are perfectly decent in person, but when you meet them online they brutally ridicule you," and he offered this piece of data:

> As an example, most guys, when they are playing with another male person, and that person does something wrong, they will deride them. If they know them, they will do it in fun, and if they don't know them, they will do it out of spite because they are mad.

Jake suggested appearances comprise a reason for being bullied, but also admitted this is inappropriate behavior: "I have friends that are nerds and you know that, I don't know, sometimes you can tell by looking at them just, it sounds bad." However, Matt directly stated, "If you don't fit it, this could be said for maybe more of a high school setting, but if you don't fit it you are picked on."

Two participants rationalized it as something beneficial. Adam B. credited this act as a part of a release for some, and he described how this bullying behavior can be a result of being bullied in the non-virtual world:

> You have your fourteen-year-old kid that gets picked on in school, but here he can create this big barbarian that he's top five in the world for something, you know, he's recognized for that, which I don't think is a bad thing by any means.

Nick provided this explanation and rationalization for bullying, and offered advice for corrective behavior. For him, the process takes away from playing the game and distracts him from it: "Someone would make a mistake, and I would just be, like, shut up. I would be getting really mad at them for being mad at me for making a mistake. I just, kind of, realize, well why

am I doing that? I'm putting my energy towards typing. I'm putting my energy towards thinking of a comeback."

Yet, two participants provided data that indicated how disrespectful and intolerable these actions are amongst gaming men. Particularly in online gaming, John explained the effect:

> It's a very disrespectful thing, and it's part of what I think is wrong with the society. Because it's the whole being able to talk online and wondering if kids are hearing stuff they really shouldn't because you have eight-year-olds, because parents don't pay attention to ratings, all the way up to, you know, 50 year-olds who, you know, don't have the greatest language, that are all communicating on the same basis.

More succinctly, Mark offered this hyperbole, which best captured sentiments of racist and homophobic implications for this bullying: "Mostly it's just 14-year-olds hurling racial epithets and bad names for homosexuals. That makes me want to light myself on fire and run screaming into the night."

Work. Five participants mentioned the workforce and related actions to the workforce as part of being masculine. Spencer indicated the presence of role-based stereotypes and how they are blending within the workplace: "I'm going into nursing. Back then, that was considered a female dominant profession and now, well it's still not equal, but you see more guys going into like, nursing and ... nowadays everything is ... everyone is kind of mixing the pot a little. It's more socially acceptable for a girl to be the head of a corporation or a guy to be a nurse per se." This data was in alignment with the aforementioned data from Brent: "More women are getting the higher jobs. More women are in managing positions, or positions of power. I would say they are balancing out over all, while present roles are changing in the workforce." The benefit of history provided context for Adam S. and his belief about roles in the workplace.

Significantly, Adam S. connected the economy, technology, and women's rights together as a reason for these changing roles in the workplace:

> Back [in the 1950s], a lot of jobs were, like, manufacturing and like that. There was enough money coming from one job to support a family. So, the man could, just, literally bring in all the money that was necessary. But it's not really, economically, it's not like that anymore. Everybody has to really fight for themselves … and they're working a lot, and so roles just change—basically because they have to. The situation changes; if it stayed the same, all the families would die off, basically: They would lose children. They would lose their house, like that. So everybody works more often. Also, it's more of a social initiative to, with women's rights and things like that.

Both George and Josh suggested that a competition occurs in the workplace, and that competing at work is an action associated with masculinity. Josh reported a desire to be the best for an intrinsic reason; George suggested that being the best is a way to avoid criticism. Josh describes it as: "If you're a like uh, carpenter, you have to be the best carpenter. You know, a baker, you know, just whatever thing you do, you have to be a better than everyone else"; but, George adopted a different tone, "Out in the workforce, people put a lot of shit on you to make you look bad. It happens all the time. So, you need to get stuff done. You need to worry about number one."

Violence. Data from five of the participants provided a connection between men and acts of violence. Interestingly, Dan offered a connection between men and violence, but then offered distance from that connection:

> Guys are always portrayed as men. Killers, like you know, masculine men. They're not crying. The traditional, I don't know what they call the new age role, I don't know what they would call them, maybe androgynous, or something, I don't know. But it's just different. I just think it's a whole lot different.

The use of "I don't know" and repeated use of the word "different" indicated a belief in this connection between men and killers is eroding, but also contained uncertainty about what may

replace it. Further, Dan provided this piece of data that further disassociates the connection between men and violence: “It's okay to have feelings and have your heart broken; it's part of being a man. You don't have to be like a video game in there killing everybody.”

John and Matt, however, both used video game allusions to suggest a connection between men and violence. John described a character known for “being a bad ass,” and Matt described the “rugged action hero.” Likewise, Jake offered the maxim: “We’re shooting stuff, and we’re guys.” Josh provided an indirect connection through his connection that men must “[be] more assertive about things, trying to be dominant. I guess, yeah, when I was talking about strength before, what I was really meaning was dominant. Feeling like you have to be better.” Lastly, Mark invoked the image of a man “cooking meat with fire” to portray man as hunter. The notion of a hunter connects to violent actions necessary to kill for provisions and being a killer of other living things.

Exercise. The role of exercise and well-being as an action associated with masculinity was provided by three participants. Adam B. indicated his physical appearance and emphasized being “in shape”: “I don't think that I look like what some people think the stereotypical gamer looks like. I go to the gym four days, five days a week, and sometimes, I look in shape.” Jake backhandedly implied exercise is important within this piece of data: “I see [people who play video games] in the weight room. It's like people you don't see very much. You can just kind of tell by looking at them.” Last, Matt volunteered this emphasis about the role of exercise. Significant, this piece of data was volunteered unprompted during the closing section of the interview:

> I did want to say that being a gamer and a student doesn't always necessarily mean that you have to sacrifice health, and I think that a lot of people think that's what gaming does.

> While playing video games, especially when I was a lot more into *Call of Duty*, I trained for and ran a marathon by myself. I've also competed in a Tough Mudder, and finished an entire P90 X program." "Just because men are gamers and/or students, it is no excuse," in his opinion, to "sacrifice physical well-being."

Role of men and women. Six participants described sentiments associated with being a man and separations between men and women. Three used this separation to indicate a traditional aspect of gender-roles; three participants used this separation to suggest new roles emerging from the traditional roles. Adam S. rooted his ideas of masculinity in traditional roles: "like in the old days, so to speak. When the husband went to work and he worked full time, and the wife kept the house clean and stuff like that, and worked with the children, and took them to where they really needed to go." Matt continued this theme, remarking, "Men are there to protect, to give that sort of structure, whereas women are more of the caregivers, loving, kind of thing." Likewise, data from Nick also continued this separation of men and women:

> Men are typically more physically strong. Like, you see a lot of, in jobs and stuff there is still a lot of gender discrepancies. I'm going into to nursing, and there are more women than men in the nursing field. I don't know if that is because women's brains are physiologically built for that more. They're more of the caring and nurturing side. But, then, also the other side of that is males have, they're built stronger. I mean, I think the only difference is really the physical differences, or how your brain, a lot of times in psychology, you talk about men had better spatial skills and that was because when they were hunters they needed to get the lay of the land and all that kind of stuff. And sort of, all of that, I think is the difference.

Words and phrases such as "I don't know" and "I think (both emphasized and non-emphasized)," and the inclusion of "the other side," suggested a lack of coincidence in how these traditional aspects of men and women could or should be applied. It appeared this participant acknowledges them, understands they are present, but is not confident about why they exist. In fact, he later concluded, "I don't think that's the really stereotypical male hero saving the woman and all that kind of stuff, I mean, women can be the stronger ones. Males can be the stronger

ones." Adam B. used similar traditional gender stereotypes in this data, but did so to note a change in the men/women dynamic. The use of a popular male character, who is satirizing masculinity, as a framing device indicated this shift:

> I think it's more of that, you know that, Al Bundy type. *Married with Children*. You know, go home, sit on a couch, have a beer, your wife's gonna provide for you. You go off, you work all day etc. You know, I have some friends who are stay-at-home dads because their wives are super successful and they need somebody to take care of the kids, so they stayed home.

Brent used the workforce to articulate his belief in change: "More women are getting the higher jobs. More women are in managing positions or positions of power. I would say they are balancing out over all." George offered this piece of data to suggest how men learning from women is beneficial to defining new gender-roles: "I think it makes me more well-rounded. It gives me an aspect of being a man and knowing what do to. I also know what women want and what women are supposed to do. I learned a lot from my mom."

Actions Separating Men from Boys

The following data from eight participants suggested actions and attributes about masculinity that provide a separation between definitions of "being a man" versus "being a boy."

Responsibility. Responsibility, again, appeared as an indicator that separates men and boys in data provided by four participants. Adam B. discussed how his responsibilities as a student made him an adult: "My responsibilities as a student, it has a lot to do with the responsibilities of an adult, or a person in general," and he also stated, "One of the bonuses of becoming an adult is you get to play as many video games as you want. Be responsible with it, but no, they were just always around just as far." George indicated independence as a benchmark for being an adult, he said, "You have to do everything by yourself. We are not kids

anymore." Aligning with other pieces of data, this data offered by Mark continued the theme of adulthood and responsibility and invoked the larger social order that defines responsible actions: "One's conduct, you know, is appropriate in order, uh, to maintain the proper social status and permissions to continue accessing these thing, at least as a kid. Now, as an adult, I can do as I please. You know, having a clean apartment every once in a while pleases me." Jake connected responsibility to adulthood clearly in this statement: "[Responsibility] makes me think, kind of, of being an adult." He continued and offered this piece of data about how education is a part of adulthood: "I just see [going to school] as growing up, moving on, kind of opening up new doors to start your life, and your career or whatever."

Unhealthy actions. Two participants mentioned the distinction between adulthood and childhood by using examples of men not behaving like adults. George defined drunk driving as an irresponsible, immature action: "Well, if we are drunk, we don't go driving. That's the mature thing. You know it's wrong. A mature person says no; an immature person does it." John made a connection that kids are engaged in certain unhealthy acts in order to appear as adults: "I would say more kids are doing [drinking and smoking] just to be grown up."

Characters in video games. Two participants commented on the separation between men and boys being represented in video games. Both referred to games acting as *Bildungsroman* narratives. Brent remarked that video-game characters undergo a voyage to adulthood, and this was an enticing element for him. A key distinction for him was the ability to control one's actions and impulses:

> And then *Tales of Symphonia*, that's one I like because he is literally growing up into a man. He starts off very cocky and loud, but he balances out, becomes more reserved, and actually thinks about things before he acts.

Josh also commented on how video games represent this voyage as he described the plot of the video game *Loom:*

> Loom like, the whole character starts out as a teenager boy, and you just, you know, anything that is going on around him, like, all of his elders are calling the shots and he is just kind of there. And then he has to try to figure out, what his place is, and everything. And, there is so many times in that story where he keeps getting put down from everyone around him because he doesn't know as much as them. The whole game is just him trying to figure out what is going on and what he can do about it. And then he figures it out at the end.

Interestingly, George provided the definition that indicated his belief that playing video games is part of being a child. He was the only participant to indicate a decrease in video game playing: "I, I don't know, stopped doing all that. It's not that much fun. I'm not a kid anymore. I don't play video games much anymore."

Drugs and alcohol. Four participants mentioned the use of drugs and alcohol. John noted the positive benefits in *Dues Ex*, in which using narcotics can raise a character's health level and avoid death:

> Dues Ex, I was playing and you drink alcohol to raise your health. And, he (the character) is supposed to be the ultimate bad ass. He (the character) is half Cyborg, type guy. And, you are doing… alcohol raises your health. And I think it has some drugs and that.

Matt mentioned the presence of drugs and alcohol in video games, but specifically and emphatically rejected their representations in-game transferring into actual usage, referring to the *Grand Theft Auto* example. "You know, a lot of that is as you see in the media, drugs, violence, prostitution is a big thing. <pause> As far as how to be a man, no." George openly admitted to there being no connection between drug use and video games: "It wasn't like because I play video games, I have to do speed. I wouldn't say that because I play video games, I have to drink

alcohol." He did, however, reveal a connection to masculinity regarding the type of alcoholic drink men prefer:

> Men go out with men and drink beer. We drink big shots. What do you call that pussy pineapple drink in your tequila? I like it. Apparently you're not supposed to drink this if you're a man. As a man you are not supposed to a shot of tequila and a shot of pineapple.

This piece of data was provided with grunting noises and exaggerated hand motions to simulate drinking. Finally, Jake noted the presence of alcohol in his institution, but not in games. He defined the use of alcohol somewhat paradoxically: "There was a thing in the cafeteria where there was a slide show when they were talking about, like, being responsible, will you drink and stuff like that. It's like they encourage you not to drink. But it's like if you do, be responsible, well, you drink." Curiously, the word "responsible" appeared in this data, too.

Resisting masculinity. Four participants provided data that indicated some resistance to how masculinity is defined. Dan noted a change in masculinity and indicated some resistance to concepts of masculinity: "I mean masculine is not putting on your blue jeans and your wife beater, and I want my kids to be able to express themselves. It's allright to cry if you are a boy." George used grunting sounds and swinging arm motions to signify and mock drinking a mug of beer to emphasize his resistance to traditional forms of masculinity:

> Men go out with men and drink beer. We drink big shots. What do you call that pussy pineapple drink in your tequila? I like it. Apparently you're not supposed to drink this if you're a man. As a man you are not supposed to a shot of tequila and a shot of pineapple.

John, additionally, resisted this connection of men and alcohol:

> Men are usually not portrayed in a very good, stereotypical, way. They usually drink a lot, smoke, disrespectful stuff like that. Being like dealing with kids and that it shows, like, society the kids are becoming more disrespectful than they were. Just 'cause they see that's how men are supposed to act.

John summarized this effect as the result of a "brainwashing society to give you an idea what society thinks men should be like." Finally, Spencer offered this piece of data when describing actions associated with masculinity: "Probably being more free with body functions would be the first thing that comes to mind. Just, public display of body functions, farting, burping." Accompanying this data, Spencer shrugged his shoulders and provided a hand gesture suggesting ambivalence about this definition.

Anxiety. Data from six participants indicated anxiety regarding certain specific actions associated with non-traditional definitions masculinity. Adam B. emphasized his choice in grooming habits: "Just for the record, I've never gotten a manicure or pedicure." Clearly, Adam B. wished to distance himself from this grooming ritual. He further indicated anxiety over how society defines masculinity. This data indicated his desire to "get out" of stereotypical roles that define his masculinity and produce anxiety:

> It might still be self-inflicted but, you know, get out of the stereotypical abnormalities that come with being a man, going to school, you know. This macho guy that goes to school all blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I am a normal human being that goes to school. I enjoy reading books, I enjoy playing football. I enjoy playing video games. I enjoy hanging out with girls and drinking at the bar.

Interestingly, the latter data expressed a desire to be defined beyond traditional criteria of masculinity; however, the former data expressed a desire to avoid being categorized as deviating from those traditional aspects of masculinity. Matt also expressed this desire to move beyond certain definitions of masculinity. He indicated a gap created where conforming or not conforming produces undesirable results: "Being a man is like trying to live a common stereotype. If you don't fit it, this could be said for maybe more of a high school setting, but if you don't fit it, you are picked on." Likewise, Brent noted, "It's a party generation, or more,

more than a generation really. I'd just, people don't take things as serious as they should. They just don't seem responsible." More so, Brent provided this example, which indicated his belief that men in video games have changed:

> Like Boyd from *Tales of Symphonia*, fantastic character, he's responsible, he's taking care of things, and you should be. And he's trying to solve the problems. A lot of games with men characters, it seems to go towards that BS typical man now. Where it's more of a partier, do what you want and no regard to anything else.

Here the emphasis was on "responsible," which indicated strong feelings against "party" and not taking situations "serious." The men in video games reflect this shift from the responsible hero-character to this, as he described it, "BS typical man." Interestingly, data from Brent indicated anxiety about corporations and men being able to provide: "I personally wish we would jump back a bit and be a little more localized. Be able to provide, instead of, big corporations drive me nuts."

Internal conflicts. Data also provided a theme of conflict about masculinity. Adam S. expressed the following data to articulate anxiety about being a man:

> You don't spend all of your time wondering what should I do. What do I want to be like? But then, you exhibit sometimes, a lot of, like we were just talking about, certain things that men do just because they are men.

He then provided this piece of data: "So you know, it's almost like, [men] are having an idea, but it is just coming from situations they have been in or because they've interacted with." The repeated emphasis on the word "men" belied a desire to follow pre-established actions about how to act as a man. There was, as the rhetorical questions indicated, little thought toward choices about these actions; furthermore, the second piece of data offered the notion that men follow pre-establish actions: they have encountered depicting masculinity. Data from Josh also supported this confliction and raised questions about what makes an authentic man: "Everybody in, so

many types of different people, I don't know, it would be hard to really say nowadays is that this is how a man acts, and this is, if you don't act that way, you're not a real man."

George placed an angry pathos within this theme of conflict. He expressed, "Does that make me less of a man because I listen to my mom?" Apparently, "real" men do not listen to their mothers, based upon this data, which was an excited utterance. He continued expressing this anxiety and conflict with the question, "When the check comes, why does it always go to the man? That's his job. He has to pay it, or he's not masculine. He's got to be in charge, I guess." The clause "I guess" offered linguistic evidence to George's emotional state; these data underscored a pathos of anger and anxiety about not performing expected gender-roles.

Video Games and Learning

The following data displays themes and concepts about the relationship between video games and learning. This learning can be broadly applied to academic, metacognitive, and affects development.

Reflexes. Data from three participants indicated their belief that video games improved reaction time between seeing something and their physical reflexes. When asked, George provided data that directly stated, "reflexes." Nate described an entire genre of games that refers to a "twitch" to emphasize how some video games depend on reaction speed for success: "Twitches are like, there's a guy over there, quick shoot him." Matt connected reaction speed to decision making: "To live longer, you have to make a much quicker decision." Additionally, he referred to a research study that concluded that *Call of Duty* players made faster and more accurate decisions than the general population.

Hand-eye coordination. Related to reflexes, four participants mentioned, specifically, hand-eye coordination. Again, George provided data directly evidencing this effect by stating, "Hand-eye coordination." John also stated a connection between video games and hand-eye coordination. Matt qualified the learning with emphasis: "Hand-eye coordination, for sure. There is a lot of that, you'll notice that a lot of people who just pick up a controller right away." Nate also placed emphasis on hand-eye coordination via the word "biggest," and how it connected to a non-video-game physical ability: "I feel like the biggest thing I've gotten out of it is hand-eye coordination. I've gotten much better at throwing a baseball because of video games."

Critical Thinking

Although critical thinking and the associated strategy and tactics that accompany it were frequently mentioned, it comprised a broad umbrella for skills that fell into academic, metacognitive, and affective areas. This section starts with the large theme of critical thinking, established patterns related to strategy and tactics, and then the defined skills specific to academic, metacognitive, and affective zones.

First, critical thinking was referenced as integral to playing video games by 9 of the 13 participants. A key feature appearing in the data was a distinction between the strategy and the tactics related to problem solving. In fact, one participant, Adam B., referred to "extreme critical thinking, "which was defined as a mixture of reaction time, pattern recognition, and outthinking an opponent's movement and strategies during a metaphorical comparison between video games and chess". When classifying critical thinking, Adam B. also discussed how strategic and

tactical analysis is integral to this process. Although data provided from other participants favor either strategy or tactics, Adam B. connected the strategy and tactics:

> A way to equate, like, your *World of Warcraft* is your reaction time, like, how fast you can do something, and you get to a point with video games where you know something is going to happen because, you know, they're all scripted events, where you know something is going to happen. So I, you know, you do something and have a timer for it in your head. You know you see the boss do something, and I am like 10, 9, 8, he's going to do this, you know, so I am moving. And I'm like, 'Okay, let's be here instead of here because he kind of does a frontal cone of breath. Or in *League of Legends*, you know there's *warps* that reveal a short, little area, and you see people walking *through* different areas of the map, and you are like, "okay, if they were just there, and because if this is going on up here, chances are they're coming towards you, you know so, I like to equate *League of Legends* right now to adult chess.

Strategy

Five participants mentioned strategy. Adam S. provided this data by connecting analytical skills and applying them to the workplace: "There's lots of strategy and teamwork and things that I enjoy doing, and I feel like it's probably made me better at analyzing situations and options, and between video games and work, it's just another example of the better your analysis at work, the better you can plan for upcoming events." John described, "I enjoyed a strategic planning and that, just kinda, I like chess in general, too, so, games that requires strategy and planning ahead." Josh discussed the importance of perspective and trying new approaches when problem solving: "Just critical thinking skills. As far as, just seeing something and just trying to say 'this isn't working' and then trying to look at it from another way, a different perspective." Data provided by Matt also mentioned "strategy" when discussing problem solving in the game *Call of Duty*: "You had to develop some strategy." Nick also mentioned the importance of strategy and learning how to analyze his opponent's plans:

> The strategy, I mean, the whole purpose of the game is you want to destroy the opponent's base. So, there are different lanes that the lead, that are between the two

> different bases. A lot of the strategy comes in; there are three different lanes that lead to each base. And then there is what's called the jungle area that you can only see when you're in there, basically. And so, you do a lot of mind games with that.

Tactics

Accompanying strategy, three participants mentioned the tactics involved with critical thinking. Whereas if strategy refers to macro elements related to problem-solving, tactics refers to micro-elements concerning the actual execution of that strategy. Brent connected critical thinking and problem-solving, which he defined as "troubleshooting" to the workplace:

> Just trouble-shooting at work, trying to figure things out versus trying to figure out a puzzle in the game. It's just trying different things, the same tactics would apply where you have a set of questions you can ask yourself to break down the puzzle and figure it out.

George described how playing *Mario Golf* requires a tactical awareness because "in *Mario Golf*, you need to figure out slopes, clubs, things like that." He also made connections to other games in this data describing the tactics of problem solving: "like from *Resident Evil*. You have to get from this place to this place. You now solve things. For example, what you have to do to get to the next part." Lastly, Dan discussed how tactics in video games could translate into actions conducted in reality. As tactical options, the emphasis on hiding and surviving indicate the plan of action, and he described how understanding tactics in sports games shows, "you learn a lot from video games. You can understand the game of football better. You can understand basketball better. You can understand war better. The concept of hiding and surviving." He further states:

> I think that those types of games teach you how to be; if you can be sneaky in a video game, you can be sneaky in real life. I think those war games probably not so much more conniving but they give you tips on survival. If you're put in a situation like that, you would have some idea what to do. God forbid your city ever blew up, if you were ever in

> that type of position you'd know, this is what I had to do in the video game, so this is what I have to do now.

Academic Skills

The following categories described academic skills associated with playing video games.

Reading. Data provided by six participants indicated their belief that playing video games helped them learn to read. Nate provided the direct connection: "There are certain skills you can pick up from playing video games, like reading." John noted the sheer volume of text in RPG and how they helped him gain reading skills. He also noted practical skills such as learning his left hand from his right:

> A lot of RPG has a lot of story, and you have to read those. Occasionally, you read about someone who learned to read from playing video games. For me, I learned my left and right because of the SNES controller had an L and an R. That's how I figured it out.

Likewise, data from George also established this connection: "They help your reading. You got a lot of reading in there, too." Although, he also noted some games do not depend on reading: "Not all games require reading, some games don't have a lot of reading like football games"; however, data from Dan refuted this assertion about football games by describing how playing these games helped him "read" football teams and helped him win bar bets. "It's kind of a neat trick at the bar. You bet a dollar or whatever. I bet they are going to run the ball or, you know. With the *Madden* game, it kind of gives me the advantage of that hustle."

Additionally, two of the six participants extended reading skills learned through video games to other discourses. Matt described how reading in video games helped him perform better as a student—specifically test-taking skills:

> I've noticed that with test-taking, because of, it's my belief that it's a combination of probably reading and games, is that the thinking abstractly about questions, being able to

> take a step back from them … to see if I can get a clue out of there. You have to do that's a lot in games, especially RPGs.

Mark provided a direct connection to how video games helped him, at work by being able to notice and remember small details: "I'm part of an emergency response team for a large company. So, being able to pick out these details and keep them in mind as we progress, ah, um, is important. I think it's part and parcel, like the RPGs."

Math. Two participants described a connection between math and video games. John noted that one of his favorite games as a kid was called *Math for the Real World*. "You basically were in charge of a band and you had to, I mean, it had math problems that you had to figure out how to best fit the band to succeed and make money." Nick described, "I think in video games, it strengthened my math." Josh clearly stated, "Like a math problem or something."

Public speaking. One participant described how video games made him a better public speaker. Adam B. stated:

> You know I used to have a problem talking in front of people, but when you get into *World of Warcraft*, you get in these guilds, and you're talking with 39 other people, you know age range 15-40, you know you have to be able to pipe up, and you have to be able to dictate and get to your point and communicate while you're in the middle of an encounter.

Typing. John described how video games made him a better typist: "Mario taught me how to type."

Metacognitive Skills

The following sections describe metacognitive skills developed from playing video games. These skills represent strategies and skills learned from these games that impact skills regarding how to process and use information.

Memorization. Three participants indicated improvement in memorization skills. Nate described how games encourage memorization of codes: "It used to be back when you played *Mega Man* on the original NES, you had to memorize this code to this thing. You had to memorize up, down, up, down, left, right, and those sorts of things." The code mentioned was the famous Konami code, which, when entered correctly, would provide extra lives and benefits for games manufactured by Konami. Adam S. referred to how memorization helped with name recognition and improvement: "With reference to learning itself, I feel like the games force you quite often to memorize skill names or any number of things to do better in the game." Also, Mark provided a connection to video games and the workplace when describing how the tendency for video games is to emphasize small details and compile bits of information leads to better performance at work:

> I remember small details. I visually remember small details. I never used that skill professionally before. But, I find that I have it. So, basically, I was practicing for playing video games without really knowing about it. It made me good at work without even knowing it. And, the better I am at work, the better I am in games, and being able to tie things together and remembering things about occurrence and how things are impacted.

Goal setting. Connections between playing video games and learning to set established goals was provided by two participants; however, one of these participants expressed disbelief that video games connect to goal setting. Spencer provided the link between video games and goal clearly: "Working toward a higher goal." He further qualified this link by stating that persistence and determination are related to setting goals: "No matter how many times you fall in life, just keep getting up, and you'll be able to get where you want to go." Conversely, Jake stated a lack of connection between video games and prioritizing: "No, I just kind of do my own thing."

Resource allocation. Belief that video games help them improve, prioritize, and manage resources was indicated by five participants. Adam B. connected the gathering of materials and the importance of managing them to accomplishing certain tasks in games: "You would have to make sure you had materials to make potions or anything you needed materials for their raid." To clarify this example, "raiding" is a mass attack on an enemy stronghold in a video game that requires planning and strategic execution of the attack. John noted the presence of this type of thinking in games, drawing upon chess, which simulates warfare, emphasizing the phrase "strategic planning," and using the word "conquer": "I enjoyed a strategic planning, and that, just kinda, I like chess in general too, so, games that requires strategy and planning ahead and setting out to conquer other places." Adam S. provided this connection between video games and managing time during a description about how a character's daily schedule is managed in a video game: "So, anyway, in game, you're scheduling all of that stuff, and you can get better in each aspects, so to speak. And, like in school, you have to start out, you have to schedule yourself for classes." Matt simply stated, "good time management skills." Lastly, Nick crystalized the connection about how video games connects to time management and managing a budget:

> The first time I wanted this really good item on *Runescape*, basically, I would say 'well, I will play this game for an hour after school every day. I will put the first half hour towards making money and put this aside.' I learned some good planning and stuff from that. And I do the same thing now. Like every paycheck, I put this much in my savings and this much in my checking. It's silly that you'd think that I get far from a video game, but, I mean I honestly think I've learned a little life skills like that. Just, without even thinking about it.

Affective Skills

The following categories describe motivational and other affective skills learned from playing video games.

Morals. Moral development occurring through learning and video games was noted by five participants. Brent made the direct connection: "Learning morals, right and wrong." He further explained and defined concepts related to right and wrong: "Helping people in need, but not being an asshole. Thinking before you speak, don't just throw stuff out there. Money isn't everything." Aligning with Brent's notions of right and wrong, Matt described the game *Fable*, whose protagonist's physical appearance changes based on actions conducted in game:

> It's kind of teaching you how people might react to your actions. In *Fable*, if you were a *good* person, people will say 'hello,' or 'Thank you for saving us.' If you're a bad person, they run away from you, or shut the door. So, I guess in that sense I could say it's taught me that being a good person will have good reactions, and there are repercussions throughout my community and the world.

Nick described a process learned from games about being negative or positive and their effect on playing games with others: "Don't be negative, be positive. It will rub off on people, and they will eventually be positive if they started doing well. And, you can turn bad games around that you would have thought you would have lost." Last, Adam S. discussed how characters in video games should be more complex, and he specifically connected this idea to classroom learning: "I would just like to see more development of complex and developed characters. Generally, people are not as simple as black and white. Even taking a psychology course here, I understand that people change and grow."

Violence. Three participants mentioned the possibility of violence being learned through video games, but one refuted this connection. Dan noted the level of increasing violence in video games, and he described learning as, "There is a lot to learn from [video games], but they've become more violent, too." George also connected video games to violent behavior: "How to shoot people? It's lifelike." John entwined the notion of learning by using the words

"lesson," "social," "culture," and "shooting." "Whatever the idea of the lesson is, whether it be something to do with the culture, social, whatever you are shooting at." Further, he mentioned that inspiration can come from video games when describing the journey of protagonists: "Think it's supposed to inspire hope, to inspire whatever, to show that, you know, you can be something when you come from nothing." Also, Adam B. stated, in opposition, to belief that video games cause violent acts: "[Video games] taught me everything, but I don't want to go out and take my huge axe and put it through somebody else."

No direct learning. A self-described lack of direct learning appeared in the data from four participants. Spencer said he "wouldn't know" about skill development and learning through video games. Josh compared them to entertainment and found an absence of learning occurring with video games: "I have always just seen them as entertainment, but as far as learning life lessons to use in everyday life, yeah, I don't know." Jake flatly observed he "waste[s]" a lot of time. "I waste a lot of time; only play in free time when I have nothing better to do." Mark struggled for a connection between video games and learning. He noted a curiosity regarding learning, but did not clarify how learning occurs. He also was confident that "it's more academic. I might come across a historical happening, and it makes me curious, but as far as actually mirroring in my own life as what I see in the game as a, uh, positive trait . . . hmmm . . . I don't inventory these things. I'm sure that I have." What was interesting was that although these participants resisted making a connection directly between video games and learning, they clearly learned indirectly from experiencing these games and interactions with other games based upon other data provided.

Learning Social Skills

Another emphasized skill learned from video games was learning about social dynamics and interactions. Twelve of the 13 participants mentioned learning about social interactions through video games. Despite difficulty in expressing what he learned in video games, Nate provided this data summarizing this connection about learning, particularly in online video games, saying, "With more online gaming, there are more social skills being developed." Mark also provided data that summarized the value of video games and communities and the importance of teamwork: "When you are dealing with people who have your own common interests, dealing with these things becomes, uh, an important part of your social interactions—assuming everyone is on the same page." For Mark, there was an emphasis placed on "social interactions," and it was important for teamwork to occur for success.

Community building. Others also noted a component of social cohesiveness by being able to discuss common video games in casual conversation. Further, 8 of the 13 participants described how video games encouraged establishing and building a shared community. Nate stated, "You meet someone and it's like, I play this game, and I play this game, so we should hang out. It's like liking the same movie or TV show." Spencer described how games helped people stay in contact and communicate: "With *World of Warcraft,* you can go, and I have all my friends from high school, I mean some are in Germany, Florida, California, it's just one way to get back together." Dan provided a piece of data that defined an experience similar to Spencer's connecting with friends across vast distances: "I can play people from other places and talk to them at the same time: interact with people." Nick also described keeping in touch with friends: "I like to play it with friends, and we can go on Skype at the same time. And then, you can just

talk through what you are doing and all that stuff." For George, the social interaction provided a way to "connect with friends." It was a way to "connect with people." Interestingly, Matt provided data about groups formed in online-communities, called "clans," which require an invitation to join and completion of an entrance examination:

> … a clan and it is usually just. I got into it because it was a coworker of mine invited me into it. But, usually someone will recruit you. They will see that you're doing very well and they will send you a message or something saying 'hey, are you interested in joining our clan?'

Spencer provided a piece of data, that provided insight into how video games comprise a shared, nonjudgmental space: "I guess I am really indifferent, because for me, if I see a game that I like, I will play it, and I will sit and talk to people about gaming and their opinion is their opinion, I don't, it doesn't matter what you play." John provided data evidencing how interactions in video games offer various opportunities for some people to express themselves: "MMOs and that, give you a way of being social. There are a lot of people out there who are shy and, you know, wouldn't normally talk to people, type of thing." Data from Adam S. also supported this when he referred to games as a "social outlet" and described the process as "playing the right kind of game, and were talking to the right kind of person—it could probably help you there."

Teamwork. Teamwork appeared in data from 3 of the 12 participants. Adam B. described how teams communicate and relationships are formed in online gaming: "You have four other people that you're playing with that you have to try to, you know, converse with, and get them to do the correct things that they should be doing. And, you know, ultimately win as a team." Matt described the analysis involved when determining what members of the group perform what roles in order to survive: "A lot of people like *StarCraft, World of Warcraft*, there's team building, you have to talk to other people and communicate. I mean, you don't always have

to, but I would say 80% of the time, you're trying to build a raid or someone needs to do this job or be in position." Nick placed strong importance on team work because of the emphasis on being able to understand your team: "[Team work] really, how good of a team player you are. How good you are at adapting to your teammates weaknesses and strengths. And learning that part of the game."

Other Learning through Video Games

Data from participants also indicated that two other themes about learning occurred. First, video games were part of a process used to distinguish actions that marked a separation between "men" and "boys." Second, participants offered data that indicated a social separation that demarcated an "insider/outsider" dichotomy within video games that privilege certain types of actions, and marginalize others.

Specific actions separating between men and boys. Five participants provided data about actions separating men from boys. Adam B. connected playing video games and being responsible as part of maintaining civic duties. Interestingly, he placed an order of operation by using the preposition "after." As an adult, duties take priorities over video games, but an adult can play limitless video games: "One of the bonuses of becoming an adult is you get to play as many video games as you want. Be responsible with it, but no, they were just always around just as far … you're snowed in, you can't open your door, you go play video games for a while after you shovel the driveway." Mark adopted a similar stance by suggesting that responsibilities are part of being a man. The emphasis on "now" implied importance to this behavior: "Now, as an adult, I can do as I please. You know, having a clean apartment every once in a while pleases me." Adam offered this curious piece of data regarding a family member who plays video

games: “One of the main things he did as an adult is play video games.” The emphasis placed on being an adult and video games suggested a relationship between the two. Last, Jake directly stated the connection between responsibility and adulthood: “[Responsibility] makes me think, kind of, being an adult.”

George and John suggested that not playing video games as much indicates manhood from boyhood. George directly states: “It’s not that much fun. I’m not a kid anymore. I don’t play video games much anymore.” John, meanwhile, indicated reckless behavior as a false perception that boys possess about being men: “I would say more kids are doing [drinking and smoking] just to be grown up.”

Two participants directly discussed men and boys in their descriptions of video games. Brent noted this narrative theme as a reason he enjoys video games: “*Tales of Symphonia*, that's one I like because he is literally growing up into a man. He starts off very cocky and loud, but he balances out, becomes more reserved, and actually thinks about things before he acts.” Likewise, Josh described the protagonist’s journey into adulthood as the point of one of his favorite games, *Loom*, and the process of figuring out one’s role in the world:

> Loom like, the whole character starts out as a teenager boy and you just, you know, anything that is going on around him, like, all of his Elders are calling the shots, and he is just kind of there. And then he has to try to figure out, what his place is, and everything. And, there is so many times in that story where he keeps getting put down from everyone around him because he doesn't know as much as them. The whole game is just him trying to figure out what is going on and what he can do about it. And then he figures it out at the end.

Interestingly, Jake was the only participant who mentioned attending school as a distinguishing feature between men and boys: “I just see [going to school] as growing up, moving on. Kind of, opening up new doors to start your life. And your career or whatever.”

Insider/outsider status. For two participants, the genre of the game played marked the separation between an insider and an outsider. Nate remarked, using a funny voice, that people who play war simulators, like *Call of Duty*, are not insiders; to be an insider requires knowledge of RPGs, such as the *Final Fantasy* series: "Like, if I talk to someone and they say 'all I play is COD,' I don't think they are a gamer. If they are like I like FF and I have all the FF games, that's a gamer." He further made the distinction that this type of knowledge is "like art. You have to know Rembrandt or Picasso." Mark also expressed the type of game played as a separation between the insiders and the outsiders. Additionally, he emphasized the engagement required of the game being played: "The standard is if you can be engaged in a game and it doesn't demand more from you than a sitcom, you are not a gamer. Posting high scores on FB, and not engaging in anything more complicated than that, they are playing games, but are not gamers." Brent continued this theme and supported data offered by Mark by emphasizing the collectability and dedication to a game: "I go through the game to do everything the game has to offer. People I know, literally, rushed through the game as quickly as possible to just say they beat the game and go 'ha, I beat the game.'"

For Josh and Adam B., there was a time commitment. Josh believed, "if I were to, like, label somebody as a gamer, then I would say that they have to spend at least the majority of their spare time playing video games or talking about video games." Much like Nate, there was a requirement about dedication to knowledge present in this definition, too. Adam B. offered this separation:

> The casual player is looking at more of, like, you log in for a couple hours a day and just goof around and you know, kind of kill some monsters and be done with it. If you're more hardcore, players want to be asked, like, you're online every, it's a second job for you. you get done with your 9-5.

With the idea that it is a job, Adam B. also described the separation as dependent on recognition, and used the word "work" to allude to the workplace: "Recognition in the gamer world that the more hardcore gamers work towards where the more casual players just go to you know, pick it up and have fun with it." Much like the workplace, practice, dedication, and time-on-task provide recognition and prestige.

Nerds. The word "nerd" appears within this theme and was present in data provided by four participants to demonstrate criteria that makes a person an "insider" who is a gamer or an "outsider" who is just someone who plays games. Nate used the term "supernerd" to describe gamers engaging in the memorization and richness of fantasy-worlds; likewise, he used the term "bro-chad" to describe a casual gamer "who goes to the university, [drinks] every weekend, [plays] football, he's more attracted to the shooter." J.H. further supported this distinction by stating, "Gaming used to be like the nerds, I mean the ones who used to be like an outcast because they did that. Then you had, like, your jocks, or whatever, that would go and do sports and that." Data from John also supported this distinction with his laughing when providing this label: "The first-person shooter gamers are usually jerks." Interestingly, when he described various as aspects of games, Jake showed a sense of discomfort by stating, "I feel like a nerd when I'm saying, talking like ... and then you can get, like, perks." He also referred to nerds as someone whom "you can tell by looking at them," although he did admit, "that sounds bad." Likewise, Mark offered a sense of this mental judgment, but he made it part of being an insider: "But, if it something you are enthusiastic about … maybe I shouldn't be so judgmental … I'm a nerd, we do this."

Connections Between Games, Work, School, and Men

Data was also analyzed to understand how connections were made between video games and work, school, and being men. Because discourses are not fixed boundaries, it was important to understand how activities learned through the mimetic process of playing video games frequently applied to areas beyond those video games (Gee, 2011). The following categories represent data from participants used to provide connections among their video games, workplace, institutions, and construction of masculinity. Also, seven participants indicated how video games provided a connection to all three areas.

Video Games and Work

The process of video games fulfilling a social function at the workplace was described by three participants. Nate stated it best: "They are a good bonding place with coworkers." The word "bond" in this utterance signified the connection between video games and coworkers. Adam S. denoted the value of video games to making friends, especially in the workplace. He said, "Making friendships once again, that's a lot harder at work." Additionally, Brent noted their popularity in the workplace and their function in social conversation: "Gaming has gotten more mainstream, I mean, it's not all geeks … and, out of school, people at work that talk about gaming, adults, and now."

Actions for success. First, four participants described a connection between actions required for success in the workplace and for success in video games. Mark provided an explicit connection between video games and "the real world," as he describes it: "Noticing things that work for the characters that are successful for the marketplace. It informs me as to what is going to be successful in the real world." He also provided a direct example:

> My work has a lot of information coming from screens, and I have to thread and process and analyze this information. Take action on something. I'm part of an emergency response team for a large company. So, being able to pick out these details and keep them in mind as we progress, ah, um, is important. I think it's part and parcel like the RPGs. There is some synergy.

Brent made a connection between the problem-solving involved in video games and how it connects to "trouble-shooting" at work:

> Trouble shooting at work, trying to figure things out, versus trying to figure out a puzzle in the game. It's just trying different things, the same tactics would apply, where you have a set of questions you can ask yourself to break down the puzzle and figure it out.

Adam B. noted a process of "taking attendance" before executing a raid and compared it to workplace success and taking the process seriously:

> You know, and you got points because of your attendance, and you know if there was a time where somebody was there and never actually raided with us. They came when the content that we've been working out for a while, and that we killed the boss, where if somebody was goofing around and they'd get kicked out just like they would at a job.

Lastly, Nate simply implied that video games have no place in the workplace, other than for social relationships: "I think the most relationship they should have is that they have no place in the workplace."

Wealth and work. Brent made an interesting observation about work, wealth, and representations of class in video games: "A lot of video games have elitists and then the poor area. And that's in *Ragnarok;* there's the rich areas and then the slums. Sometimes in the same town, but also a different towns in general, there's different wealth statuses. And corporations do whatever they can to make the money." In conjunction with this analysis, Adam S. described an ideal fantasy of where gamers are paid to play video games: "It's everybody's dream. You know, who wouldn't want to get paid to sit in the desk chair with your best friends and play video games. It sounds perfect to me."

Video Games and School

Much like the relationship between video games and work, there was a connection between video games and school. Themes emerged about this relationship and how it affects this discourse.

Lack of institutional support. Interestingly, nine participants noted a lack of relationship and connection between work place and their education institution. Brent simply answered "no" when asked the question, and George offered the statement, "I don't know." Further, Dan provided the following data that stated that institutions are ambivalent to gaming: "I don't think that [my institution] promotes it or negates to promote it. I don't think that they really care. I don't know. I don't' feel anything from [my institution] as far as my gaming goes." Josh noted that, "I can't think of anything off hand [ways school supports gaming]." Jake observed, "[Our school], they don't really say anything about video games." Following this theme, Matt described, "there's really not a whole lot of school activities in relation to video games. Like, I don't see a whole lot of students getting together to play and study, or something. Not that that would probably work." He did, however, note there was no stigma against it; much like data from Dan, he presumed that schools are ambivalent to gamers. Mark noted the ambivalence, too, and stated, "It's not something that is shunned. I don't see a lot of coursework regarding games, but there are no real barriers to it, and it's subject neutral. There is no push for or against being a gamer." Nick described it in a way that noted it as a social function and not an academic or institutional function, "I don't really talk about video games and stuff that much unless I am just with a group of friends before class, or something."

Connection to student and academic services. Six participants noted student groups as a possible connection. Nate provided the following description of how the school does not support gaming, but some students might: "I don't think schools support gaming at all, unless you count the groups of students within. They will make groups because it has become much more social." While initially Josh could not connect video games to school, he did suggest the possibility that, "I don't know, maybe like a club or an organization." John also continued this theme and made a distinction between academic and student services: "Most schools don't really support it. I mean, it really doesn't support gaming. I mean, there are clubs and that, which you can get involved with, and they game, so I guess that's one way they support. But, in actual academic part, there is probably zero support, or very little." He did, however, provide this example of individual teachers supporting gaming through integration into classroom assignments: "I know there are some professors that tried to use gaming and that … It was teaching through social media and through gaming and of that." Jake also noted a classroom connection, but the use of the word "sometimes" suggested this was not a regular or intended occurrence: "We talk about it in my marketing class. We talk about video games sometimes." Nick provided an interesting twist to how video games are a distraction from learning: "Video games would come up more in classes and stuff. Because people wouldn't be talking about the class." Last, Mark noted it as an emerging theme in conversations about video games and schools:

> I don't think we are quite to that point yet. We are getting to that point that play is part of the academic process. It's definitely part of the, uh, social aspect of, uh, academic learning. Um, but, um, you meet people over these things and bond from there. It's a good way to bring people together and build social fabric.

Video games and academic skills. A connection between skills developed by playing video games and how to apply them to situations in school was articulated by five participants. Adam B. noted how video games made him manage time and resources better:

> So I feel as though playing the game early in my life has kind of made me realize the punctual. You know, you have to be prepared or else other people are going to suffer because they have to be explained to you over and over and over again, and they might not get their work done on time; says the teacher is sitting there talking to you before they can actually start the lab, or whatever they're supposed to be doing.

Adam S. also described how video games helped him schedule and manage time better: "Even when you're making the schedule, for example, in that game I was talking about, *Persona 3*, you are basically running a character's life." He also connected video games to test-taking strategies:

> I mean, really, the more you remember, the more you can put down the test: the better you'll do. So even, of that, I wouldn't call it short-term memory, it's more like long-term memory. If you forgot it, in a couple minutes you probably wouldn't do any better, and an hour from now, will you still be playing the game or still taking the test, for example.

Matt described a plethora of ways video games connected to skills:

> Learned it from video games that can be applied to school? Yeah, actually yeah. But that hard work and due diligence does pay off. I mean, you can see that a lot in your RPG games … You know, the more time you put into a video game, the more weapons you get, the better upgrade you have, the better spells or equipment. And I can apply that to my own personal life. The more time I put into it, the better the outcome is. And I've noticed that a lot; the more effort put into it and to homework and everything, the better grades that I've gotten. The better study skills that I've had and just overall better quality of life is because I'm not stressing so much. I mean, really any game you put the time and effort in, you're rewarded for your efforts, I guess.

George noted the process of advancing through courses was similar to gaining experience and levels in video games, and he also described the implication of cheating and cheat codes: "[Playing games is] like school where you have to take these courses to get this program to get your degree. If you look at it that way, it teaches you how to do stuff in order. There are cheat codes, just like being able to cheat in school and life. Keep it real." John noted a reverse process

by describing how classroom assignments can incorporate video games to teach classroom content and instructional strategies: “It was a little harder to do it than just making a normal lesson, but for the kids, or for the people who actually like gaming.” One participant, Dan, noted a possible connection, but denied that connection being personally important to him:

> No, because, while I am in the software development program, I've got no desire to make a video game. Yeah, I love to play them, but I have no desire to make one. I have no desire to; I draw, too, like tattoos, so I'm graphically there, I just, I have no desire to make a video game.

Negative consequences of video games. Three participants described potential negative consequences to video games and learning. Adam B. established an indirect connection by acknowledging that, although his situation is different, video games can be a cause for failure: “I was very irresponsible. That had nothing to do with video games, it actually had to do with me finding a group of friends that were in a fraternity.” More to the point, Mark implicated video games as a cause for his failure with heavy emphasis: “That’s been the bane of my schooling. I enjoy them too much. I tend to improperly prioritize.” Jake provided the following data to indicate that video games can become too addicting and have a possible impact on grades: “It can get addicting, but, you've just gotta know when to stop and when your grades start dropping!”

Video Games and Men

Data from three participants noted the physical attributes of men in video games. First, Adam S. noted physical aspects being connected to men in video games. He used the word “bodybuilding” to describe how men are visually appealing to a female. He also noted “having a cool car,” being “shirtless,” and “wearing a hat” as vital aspects of being men. Dan supported this point by providing this data: “Okay, they're definitely, they're defined more masculine. As

far as detail-wise, I mean the masculinity of muscles is more graphic-wise, They're showing more detail." Josh noted a shift from a hyperbolic aspect to the physical attributes to a more realistic representation: "[Men] are getting more realistic portrayals of actual people instead of just this stereotypical big guy with muscles and a big machine gun."

Men, heroes, and video games. Participants provided data indicating a separation between men in video games and men in reality. The representation of men within these diegetic worlds provided significance for participants. Adam S. provided this point by describing the boundary between video games and reality: "There's two realms there, so to speak. So, I feel like it hasn't affected me greatly. But I wouldn't say that it hasn't." He further mentioned that the transferability of games is low: "I feel like few games could ever suck you in so much that you see yourself doing a certain thing that a character would do."

Four participants also shared this sense of physical attributes related to men, but they also connected it to an ideal man and the nature of being a hero. Brent noted a sense of idealism about men in video games. Men, in his opinion, are, "responsible, he's taking care of things and you should be. And he's trying to solve the problems." Jake further defined ideal behaviors, such as "killing and stuff," in men as "heroic stuff." Noting this sense of idealism and heroism in video games, Josh recognized that these action heroes are "stereotypical" but connected these ideals and stereotypes to a sense of "wish fulfillment": "Recent popular male characters, they are definitely more action, using weapons. Getting ahead with force rather than intelligence with any puzzles they might come across." Matt compounded the notion of wish fulfillment by describing the role of the hero as, "the role I think a lot of guys want to fulfill. Obviously, that masculine role. The God of War. Powerful. Basically, can do whatever they want without

consequence." He did note, however, that these are "fantasy things" and things "you cannot do in real life" to evince the gap between games and reality." Matt stated, "there's just not a lot of good examples in my opinion of being a good a man in video games, unfortunately." To him, good examples of men are as follows:

> They have those old-school, male, in my eyes, good stereotypes. They are always up to save and make the world a better place, and use their constructive ideals to do good, and I like that. And that's kind of how I feel being a man should be.

Nick also noted "the good effort" being made by video games. He described men in video games: "I think the men in video games, they've been pretty static. And, I mean, very rarely, but I have seen a little bit a man in a position to be saved by another character. But, like, I think they've pretty much remained static, from what I've seen."

Men, women, and video games. Concerns were noted by three participants about how video games represent men, and they noted concern in how women are portrayed, too. Dan provided the following data, which also reinforced gender-roles, but he believed women were succumbing to this masculine action-hero stereotype: "*Street Fighter* maybe had a couple women, but now you just get on there and you can build a female character to look like something that's seen out at Hugh Heffner's house, and it's loaded and accepted, and she's running around killing now, too." Nick noted, importantly, that the level of heroism normally seen in male protagonists was shifting to include female protagonists but suggested that it's been taken too far:

> I think it's a good effort. But, I also think, I know, I mean this isn't really a video game and masculinity. This is femininity, too. But I think they're moving in the wrong, a little bit over the top with female role models and stuff. I mean, nobody is that one, really, strong person who is good at everything and has no shortcomings and all that kinda stuff. I think, video game creators and writers, and all that sort of stuff, their mind, is in the right direction, but they're over shooting it.

Mark offered insight into these roles in video games, too. For him, however, "whether men are constructed in video games to, uh, be heroes or villains, they tend to mirror traditional gendered social norms." He noted that "masculinity is always a figure of strength, and these flavor characters are auxiliary to the plot and mission when it comes to male and female characters. Men are still dominating in some way." While he, like Nick, noted that changes are being made to the genders in video games, Mark still concluded that, "it all feeds back into the dominance and traditional gender values and thinking about the men that I see, those are the men who do follow through. They tend to be in more action-orientated settings, so there is an emphasis on protection."

Men, video games, and violence. As a connection, three participants described a relationship among men, video games, and violence. George described the level of action and responsibility regarding men and video games, even going so far as to label this behavior as "old school men": "All the men in video games are die-hard, blow shit up—Wow. They are all old-school men. They are how they are supposed to be. They take charge. They do it all their self. They are the tough guys." George even went further to suggest that non-traditional forms of masculinity are characterized as villainous in video games: "Men who are gay play small roles and tend to be wimpy and pussy and get beat up. It's messed up." Data from Brent also rejected modern notions of men and masculinity. In this discussion of the ideal man, he noted that modern video games have shifted away from his ideal form: "A lot of games with men characters, it seems to go towards that BS typical man now." Jake made the direct, explicit connection between men and shooting: "We're shooting stuff, and we're guys." Dan also noted that, "the boy games were for killing. I think that's pretty much stayed the same."

Video games, work, and school. Another connection described by six participants articulated how video games connect to both work and school. As previously mentioned, Nate described how video games provide social connections at both work and school: "It's like going to work. Hey I like this game. You like this game. Let's play. People who go to school are like 'I bet you like this game, other people like this game, let's get together and play this game.'" Adam S. provided a similar definition: "I guess, most of the things that would apply to school or real life in general from video games probably apply to work in similar ways; the only difference is that it's a different place." Nick indirectly connected the problem-solving skills learned in video games to problem solving at work or in school:

> I have my part time job, I work at Godfather's [pizza]. In my opinion, being a student is just making it your fulltime job, do your homework, studying, and all that. But, I mean, a skill is just thinking about things differently. I mean, if you're stuck somewhere, like, in a strategy game or something like that, you think of different ways to do it. I mean, problem-solving skills and stuff like that. I mean, a lot of skills that have come in handy at school, but not necessarily about being a student.

Matt provided this example that explained how skills developed playing a game connects to skills needed in the workplace and school:

> You know, some [games] have better rewards and others. It's just like in life, going out on a Saturday night and spending 70 bucks may not be essentially 'my top quest.' Getting a 40-hour workweek in and cashing my check would be, like, a number one. And that could be, like I said, that could be applied. I know if I put in 'this' many hours of studying, my grade is going to be better. Like a work week, the less hours I put in, the less my paycheck is going to be. You know, I mean, to equate that I guess if I put in two hours of studying for a 100-question exam, it's going to be like an F, or like an $80.00 paycheck. Where if I put in 10 hours of studying for that same exam, you get a $400 paycheck or a 90%.

Although many of the participants connected video games to work and school, only Jake connected them to work, school, and being a man: "If you're being a man, like, family, friends, work. If you're being a student, you have work, if you're in intramurals or stuff like that. Having

time for homework. Studying for tests. And for video games, trying not to play them too much. So you don't waste your time away." Conversely, only Adam B. embedded a notion of responsibility into his description of how video games have been a relaxing reward after a hard day of work or school: "I feel when I should play video games is when I'm home for the day and I have no other obligations." Given his prior emphasis on responsibility and being a man, there was an indirect, tentative connection that playing video games responsibly are part of being a man.

Intertextuality, Politics, and Knowledge

Finally, the intertextuality tool illuminated pathways that connected with political and epistemological aspects of video games. This tool examined how power and knowledge is constructed and used throughout the discourses (Gee, 2011). An important distinguishing feature of this application concerned how stereotypes were interrogated to determine if privileging or marginalization was occurring. Additionally, data provided themes related to other important areas.

Stereotypes of People Who Play Video Games

Gamers. Six participants noted the stereotypes of "gamers." This stereotype depicted gamers as being "anti-social," albeit to varying degrees of anti-socialness. Nate, Brent, Josh, and Spencer used the term "antisocial" to describe how gamers are stereotyped; Adam B. used a similar term, "socially awkward", to describe stereotypes about gamers, as did Mark when he described, "questionable social skills." Adam B. qualified this description by expressing how some gamers start "freaking out during video games if they lose or something." Nate, Spencer, Matt, and Adam B. also made reference to gamers being obese or "over-weight"; although,

Adam B. defied this stereotype with the personal admonishment, “I look in shape” and Matt actively resisted this stereotype in his declaration of intensive exercise programs he has completed: “I trained for and ran a marathon by myself. I've also competed in a Tough Mudder, finished an entire P90 X program.”

Participants also noted, strongly, that this stereotype of the overweight, anti-social gamer was changing, if it had not changed already. Nate attributed this change to the social popularity of games:

> More people consider themselves gamers now. It’s not just the people sitting in their basement anymore. It’s the people who go out every Friday and Saturday night and go to the bars. They’ll play *Madden* and COD all the time when they are not going to school.

Dan offered support by asserting,

> Now it's more socially accepted because of the internet: you're not just sitting at home, you're chatting with somebody else. You're not just looked at as lazy anymore, you're seen as being socially active, it's part of social activity now, it's not just being lazy and sitting on your ass at home doing nothing, it's more socially acceptable.

Adam S. noted a change in how, while being more socially acceptable, the popularity of technology in general has changed the stereotype: “I would say so because I feel like yesterday's coke-bottle-glasses video-game nerd is like the IT [information technology] help guy now, perhaps. So, I feel like, literally, it has just changed to a different sort of person.” He further describes:

> I feel like it's more broad, now, perhaps, that more people are gamers. But that probably has everything to do with the fact that video games themselves are more pervasive. There are more publishers, producers, and manufacturers of video games than there used to be. There are more kinds of consuls than there used to be. You can play video games on the computer, which before, computers were for scientific use only.

Mark also supported this assertion: “It’s different now. Everyone plays video games now. I may not accept them as gamers, but they play them.” Josh also stated, “I think at this point, there isn't

really ‘a gamer,’ it creates less of a concrete picture now than used to,” to describe how the old stereotype has disappeared. George, likewise, articulates, “people can be successful. They don’t have to be losers,” when describing how stereotypes have changed about gamers.

Females. Shifts in stereotypes about females were discussed by two participants, and both noted that the increased presence of females had shifted stereotypes about gamers. Spencer suggested that the increase of female gamers also has resulted in the changes: “That's, uh, a little while back, like I say, it's almost refreshing to see more female population as gamers, and you can't tell out of a crowd anymore. It's almost refreshing now.” Mark, in a list of people who now play games and have helped change stereotypes, also mentioned women as a demographic for this shift.

Last, Matt offered this data about how gamers can transcend stereotypes associated with men and gamers: “and I, kind of, got that more being a gamer. So I was able to develop stronger bonds with people that were also gamers. They understood. They knew that being a man was more than just fitting a stereotype.”

Popularization of Video Games

When discussing stereotypes about gamers, participants noted that video games becoming popular and socially acceptable influenced this change. As video games became more popular, the stereotype also evolved. Data from Nate, Spencer, Adam S., Brent, Dan, Jake, and Matt mentioned how popular and mainstream video games have become in recent years, suggesting that with popularity comes familiarity and understanding. Adam S. provided this quote that summarized this point of view:

> I feel like it's more broad, now, perhaps, that more people are gamers. But that probably has everything to do with the fact that video games themselves are more pervasive.

> There are more publishers, producers, and manufacturers of video games than there used to be. There are more kinds of consuls than there used to be. You can play video games on the computer, which before, computers were for scientific use only.

Mark also provided an interesting bit of data about video games, why they are popular, their connection to technology, and how the availability decomposes stereotypes:

> Technology has become more pervasive and much more accessible. When I was kid, the top-of-the-line computer, uh, the Apple 2E, was $6000, and that is mid-80's dollars. It was something you had to seek out. It wasn't as user friendly, um, so, the population was smaller, you had to be an enthusiast. You had to be a nerd, which was a different thing at that time. Anyone can get online now. It explains things to you, at least for the younger people who have always had the Internet. It's always been there. Its automatic, it's a given. So, that releases an awful lot of stigma.

As video games (and technology) become cheaper and more accessible, the stigmas and stereotypes have been broken down.

Sports. Two participants mentioned video games and sports as a cause for why video games are popular. Nate described how video games are marketed now to reach out to more traditionally non video-game players:

> Companies that make the video games realize that there is a huge untapped market of all these people that don't play video games and how to cater to them. Well, let's give them a game like *Madden*. A game that comes out every year and allows you the same type of things, but it's a different genre, like a shooter. They see that and branch into that. It's better marketing, mostly.

Josh described how sports "diversify" the stereotype because as more people play, more stereotypes are broken down:

> *Madden*, the whole 'sports games,' have really helped to diversify what people see as a gamer. Sports games and the first person shooter's, *Call of Duty*, is getting really popular among non-gamers, so to speak. And then, even that more recently with, just, casual games, mobile devices, and in Nintendo just trying to, saying that everybody can have fun playing these video games.

Competition. As noted by three participants, the rise of competitive gaming has contributed to why video games have become so popular. Adam B. mentioned that spectators watching professional video-game players act like spectators watching professional athletes: "and go from there, you always start off wanting to play and then after you see professionals do it, you're like 'well, I can do that,' then you realize, no you can't. <Laughs> Perfect armchair quarterback, but I couldn't throw a pass." Adam S. described the direct effect of *DOTA 2* becoming a competitive aspect, and he also compared it to football:

> New favorite, *DOTA 2,* because you can watch a competitive aspect. And you can really enjoy. Like, people sit down and watch football games, you know, in a normal context, and nobody questions it. And I feel like it's becoming more respected as a e-sport, and so it's more of a normal thing to do that. And I really enjoy doing that.

Last, Nick mentioned how the rise of competitive teams caused games to treat this like a job, which, in turn, has broken down the stereotypes:

> comparing [The League of Legends World Championships] to the past year, looking at all of these other teams, it seems like a lot of the, it's becoming more of the socially acceptable, like, this is their professional job. You know, there are places around the world, in North America, I still see it as it's not really as, taken as seriously, but, like, Korea, they actually have intro videos where they introduce the whole team, you know, 'In the Top Lane' and all that kind of stuff. They're almost seen as superstars.

Corporate marketing. Five participants mentioned the role of corporate marketing. To them, the expansion and social inclusion of video games was to expand profit-sharing. Nate remarked, "I think [the changes in stereotypes] goes along with the whole: they've marketed to more people." Spencer stated, "But other things that I think that companies are relying on to sell these games to guys, which, obviously, I'd know more, obviously. I actually know more females that game than I do guys." The inclusion of female gamers, as mentioned, also changed the

stereotypes and the marketing demographics. Adam S. attributed this to the expansion of "publishers, producers, and manufacturers of video games." Matt stated, "I think it had a lot to do with, kind of, they're trying to expand their markets to make more money. I mean, to be a realistic, I think that's what a lot of it is. They're trying to design games that are more geared towards everybody and not just the guy anymore: just broaden their markets to sell more."

One participant, Brent, expressed frustration at the role and influence of money; although in this context it was not specific to video games, but rather a general social ailment: "Money isn't everything. Unfortunately, money is important, which bugs the hell out of me. I really wish it wasn't so important, but that's just kind of how stuff functions. I love the concept of bartering; trading services. I think that would be phenomenal, unfortunately, government can't really tax that."

Stereotypes of Men

Broadly articulated, two participants provided data that expressed opposing views of stereotypes and men. Mark provided the comment indicative that stereotypes have not changed: "Stereotypes haven't changed. The amount they are believed has changed. A man is still a man." Similarly, Spencer simply stated: "Men don't have to be just one thing anymore," to note changes in male stereotypes. Men, as he saw it, can resist them and be more than just the stereotype.

Leadership. Men are leaders, as noted by four participants. Adam B. described men as being stereotypes such as "the alpha male," which is a concept referencing men-as-leadership qualities, and being "the provider," which has referenced the stereotypical nature of men bringing home the most income. Dan mentioned that men are "supposed to be providers." Jake

described a stereotype about men as "the head of household" and as "higher up positions like CEOs and stuff like that, or president." Brent mentioned that men still dominate the wage scales: "men always seem to get paid more, even though they're not supposed to, and they get the jobs over women."

This was not universally accepted, however, as three other participants expressed difficulty accepting stereotypes about men as leaders. Matt connected to this idea with the examples of "beating your chest" and "out there to be a womanizer." The allusion to masculine domination and primal actions taken in conjunction with the emphasis on "womanizer" displayed some desired distance from these stereotypes. He further expressed disdain about career paths concerning men: "Our career paths are pretty much limited to something that's mechanical in nature or sports-related." Mark suggested that men are "more likely to be aggressive and territorial." With some sarcasm, George also defined stereotypes about men as, "pays the bills… goes out to eat … get's the door for the girl all time … carries her books … does everything for the women." He, more so, questioned this stereotype and its role in society: "Why is that, the guy has to do everything for the women? Are their legs fucking broken? Did she close the door on her hand? You know what I'm saying?"

Stereotypical attributes. Data from four participants also displayed similarities in actions and behaviors associated with being men. Spencer described men as "rough, tough, and dirty." Dan, after expressing difficulty about male stereotypes, conceded that men are "more apt to be violent and easily amused." Mark noted that while not "easily amused, men are often stereotyped as not fully emotionally developed, and being all about sex, and interested in sports." John noted a connection to "drinking and smoking," and he also expressed difficulty providing

data. Jake, in the form of a question, which denoted some difficulty, said, "Aggressive, maybe? Abusive or alcoholic sometimes, or stuff like that." The phrase "stuff like that" was interesting because it supported and reflected the uncertainty expressed in the question.

Stereotypes of Two-Year Students

Interestingly, four participants noted stereotypes about being students related to two-year institutions. Jake defined one stereotype, which connected to stereotypes and actions about men, as students being, "immature sometimes" and that they "drink a lot." George noted an emphasis on studying and work associated with being a student: "You have to read, read, read, or study, study, study. You got free time, what are you doing, get your ass a book. You're expected to work 40 hours a week."

Intelligence. Questions of intelligence were raised by two of the four participants. Two-year students are no perceived as being as smart as their four year counterparts. Jake noted a "stereotype that comes to mind is [being] not as smart as a four-year." Dan also affirmed this stereotype by saying, "If you go to community, you're probably not as smart as university students." He, however, also connected being a student to work, similar George: "Jobs, the better paying jobs, come out of university, I think. I think you pay more for education, then people look at your education a little more seriously." Thus, not only was there a perception of intelligence associated with institutional type, there was also a compounding of cost: The more someone pays, the more someone knows.

Sociopolitical Dynamics

Along with stereotypes, data displayed privileging of other political aspects related to video games. First, there was a dichotomy between reality and fantasy, along with how it

affected people experiencing video games. As part of this discussion, themes regarding violence, escapism, ludic, and narrative elements were also mentioned.

The Role of Parents

The role of parents and their relationship to video games emerged as a theme in this study. Six participants indicated that parents have a role to play in how video games affect people who play them. Adam B. provided a defining quote about the role of parents and video games: "Video games don't kill people, you know, parenting is what affects, ultimately, your child." Dan supported this notion as he described parents as sharing some responsibility in video games: "It's got to come from the parents. If you're not explaining it to them, then your kid's not grasping it; then you've got to pull your kid from it.… You've got to pull your kid away from it." Nate described that parents need to monitor video games, but only to a certain extent: "That game it is too violent for you. You can't play a game meant for 17-year-olds when you are 10." He further described the role of his own parents and their connection to video games: "My parents never let me play violent video games as a kid. They never let me play *Mortal Kombat*. I didn't play pretty much any violent video game until I was 15." Likewise, Spencer mentioned the role of his parents controlling the amount of time spent playing Game Boy: "Once the parents caught on, by how fast we were going through the double A batteries, they were a little more strict on watching me and how long I played." Likewise, Matt stated, "I think a lot of that has more to do with parenting." Finally, Nick offered this piece of data that suggested parents have more influence than video games:

> I grew up, like I said, in a house where gender wasn't really like a thing that was stressed. I saw it in other families, and stuff, where they had stay-at-home moms. That was more stereotypical but, like, what I, kind of, grew up to be normal is just that gender doesn't

> matter, and I'd just, kind of, learned that it didn't take anything else along those lines from video games.

Video Games as Social Scapegoat

The notion that video games are a social scapegoat was mentioned by three participants. Adam B. expressed frustration that video games are blamed as part of a cycle: "It just bothers me when, you know, people just want to use excuses in video games, you know when something goes wrong, everybody's going to blame everybody else." The emphasis and elongated syllable contained in the word "bothers" provided evidence of his frustration. Dan openly advocated for video games and stated that video games are not part of the problem: "I'm all for video games, I like them. I think if you're monitoring people properly and explaining to your kids this is not reality, you are not going to end up with Columbine, and people can't blame video games for the problems." Matt referred to the media stigmatizing video games, and he equated them to criticism level against film when it was an emerging art form:

> I think that's just the general stigma of most gamers. I also feel like, that the media enjoys portraying video games as only violent. And people that play them as only violent. You know the school shootings have been equated to playing *Call of Duty*, or *Grand Theft Auto*, *God of War*, any of those bloody, violent video games. I think it's funny that they miss out on the fact that there are just as many movies produced that do the same thing. But everyone likes to equate it to the video games.

Reality and Fantasy

Data from seven participants indicated that a dichotomy between reality and fantasy occurs when playing video games. Nate made this connection relevant by describing how many gamers understand the difference between reality and fantasy but claimed that there are exceptions: "It's the old argument about being able to differentiate between reality and what isn't reality. Most people playing games are able to differentiate between reality and video

games. Of course, there are the exceptions to the rules." He further stated, "The biggest part is the differentiating between reality and video games. Even so, there is still a desensitization. When you see that violence over and over again, you get desensitized to it." Adam S. provided this piece of data that depicted the distinction between reality and fantasy provided by Nick: "I feel like probably as a result of my playing role-playing games, perhaps like, I have a distinct boundary between what a character does in a video game and what a real man, in real life, might do with reference to other people." Not only did Dan describe how playing video games helps him understand football better, but he applied the same logic to war and fictional scenarios:

> I think that those type of games teach you how to be: if you can be sneaky in a video game, you can be sneaky in real life. I think those war games probably are not so much more conniving, but they give you tips on survival. If you're put in a situation like that, you would have some idea what to do. God forbid your city ever blew up; if you were ever in that type of position you'd know, this is what I had to do in the video game, so this is what I have to do now.

Importantly, too, data from Dan underscored how reality and fantasy can collapse when playing video games: "I take myself and put myself in that reality. My reality becomes the video game is, I guess, the best way to say it." John provided the following data about how video games provided relief from problems and hardships: "It's kind of a false reality that just gets your mind off of your reality." He did, however, provide a lengthy example about how fantasy and reality merge in *Minecraft*, which allows players to, "essentially feel like you are taking, you start off as literally a blank slate and they give you, like, one by one cubes, that you use to build whatever you want." He mentioned how pieces of scenes from movies, characters, and famous buildings were created through this game and shared with others. Adam B., furthermore, showed how reality and fantasy can collapse by mentioning that his in-game persona reflected his out-of-game persona: "My persona in the game is me as a person." Lastl Spencer described a

connection between reality and fantasy by explaining how a video games produces a physical effect on the keyboard during the game based upon actions performed in the game causing the keyboard to emit different colors: “The keyboard … and then it's just lights all around it on the laptop itself, and then you can pick the colors you want. Like, the mouse pad will light up, and so the game will actually control your computer’s external colors.”

Not all participants agreed, however, as two of the nine also expressed a lack of connection between video games and reality. Jake expressed denial that a connection between reality and fantasy exists: “It's not, like, portraying back to us. It's a video game. Like, if we play the soldier game that they expect us to be in the game. I don't really see it back into my real life.” He further added, rather bluntly, this simile that suggested there was not a connection between reality and fantasy: “It's like watching a cartoon to me. It doesn't mean anything. It just takes my mind off of stuff.” The juxtaposition between cartoon and “doesn’t mean anything” created a junction at which it became apparent that video games and cartoons are wastes of time. Although, his assertion of “taking my mind off of stuff” indicated a sense of escapism, George, likewise, also stated, “Video games are not real. School is,” but then he qualified this connection in a manner echoing the exception noted by Nate: “Pretty much the whole thing, but you have to know what is real and what isn’t,” because he observed the lack of being able to “hit the pause button” and “re-spawn.”

Wish Fulfillment

Connecting to fantasy, four participants also described an act of, as Josh. put it, “wish fulfillment” occurring in video games. Adam B. described how gamers visualize making money when playing video games:

> You know, and that's always a pipe dream in the back of everyone's minds when they start playing video games is, 'hey, you know, I want to compete on the global scale, you know, I want to get paid to play video games.' It's everybody's dream. You know, who wouldn't want to get paid to sit in the desk chair with your best friends and play video games? It sounds perfect to me.

Josh described how video games provide this fulfillment: "With *Halo,* it's more just fantasy fulfillment, you know, being someone who has these power and can do these things." Likewise, Matt repeated the word "fantasy" when he described what makes video games popular: "It's just a fantasy thing. Like, a lot of games are trending towards the 'do whatever you want,' like *Grand Theft Auto*. It's a fantasy fulfillment I guess. Something you can't do in real life." Interestingly, Mark juxtaposed the words "fantasy" and "desire" when he discussed video games' popularity: "It feeds into, a good deal into, um, sort of, like the common male fantasy of being strong. It's alluring that way. It engages, uh, one's own desire."

Aesthetics of Realism

Data from six participants indicated that video games have become more realistic, which complicated the dichotomy of reality and fantasy. Dan attributed this to how games look better: "Graphics get better in the newer games. So, it looks more like real life, or whatever. Interestingly, John used the words "realistic" and "actual" when he described a shift in how characters are now portrayed in video games: "Realistic portrayals of actual people instead of just this stereotypical big guy with muscles and a big machine gun."

Two participants provided descriptions how the graphics in video games mirrored reality and how people can mirror themselves in video games. Adam B. described: "People go for that just try to look the coolest and the biggest and the baddest ass that is in the game." Adam S. noted, "I felt like *Persona 3* is such a good game; in the first place, it gives you this sense of,

almost like the reason that people like the *SIMS*, for example, is they can do all sorts of semi-realistic to what you really do in real life." Finally, Matt connected realism and video games to a capitalistic agenda: "I think it had a lot to do with, kind of, they're trying to expand their markets to make more money. I mean, to be a realistic, I think that's what a lot of it is."

Escapism

Participants connected video games to the notion of escapism, and two participants used the term "stress relief." Adam B. emphasized the word "stress relief" to explain the importance of video games in his schedule. Jake describes: "I just, kind of, play as a stress reliever or something: to take my mind off stuff." Although not using the term, the expression was implicit in John description, "it also helps with venting, you had a bad day? Go and shoot a whole bunch of zombies."

Rewards. Two participants mentioned video games as an act of escaping from work or studying, almost as a reward. Spencer described how he would "unwind for the day, especially now, it's more or less, go, go, go, like school, tests, jobs, still constantly going. You can come home, turn on the computer, and just let everything else go." Likewise, Adam B. also described this effect: "I think that what video games are is a way for people to escape their 9-5, and to me, it's more relaxing after a long day to sit in my chair and play video games." Jake mentiones, "it's a kind of relaxing. I spend days on days studying, and then I just want to sit there and do nothing. Have time to myself. And let your mind rest a little bit."

Escape from mental anguish. Two participants expressed video games as a way to escape from mental anguish. George noted that video games were a relief from boredom, and they were an alternative to breaking the law: "It was kinda because I was stuck in the house. We

lived in a city, but on the edge of it. Couldn't do much because I was 12 years old. I was bored. Where do you break the law? We stayed home and played video games." Meanwhile, Brent referred to an event indirectly; from the tone and expression used, this event was not positive or remembered with fondness: "I guess, for me, it's mostly an escape. I started playing in 2004. And some crap happened in life, and I used this as my escape. And it just stuck with me."

The Enjoyment of Video Games

Data also uncovered a theme that the story was what caused people to play and enjoy video games. Six participants mentioned the role of stories, in either the form of characters or themes, as important to why they enjoy video games. Adam S. said, "It has building of your character, the character you play as in the story." Brent also referred to the narrative twists in games as exciting and a reason to play, "just because it reminded me of *Castlevania,* just in the sense that there were twists. About halfway through, you think you're done, and you're really only half with the game. But so, there's a whole other story to it. And its nothing you would've thought."

John emphasized how games are "well-written, good stories" when describing what he liked about video games. Interestingly, he also provided criticism against popular FPS games because they "require zero storytelling." Josh also indicated that it is the "story and the worlds that they generate." Matt described how the themes in RPG, which are heavily dependent on story, impacted him: "and that's always been another thing that has turned me on to Studio Ghibli, up front of are very kiddish messages. But, if you're able to look past that into the deeper meaning of things, like, that's a pretty hard message." Succinctly, Nick offeres: "Playing through the story line of the unlikely hero," to explain why he liked video games. Mark,

however, provided important data about the value of video games. To him, the act of being able to "talk story" and "talk problems," taught the best way to interact with "things with other people." It created a "shared experience," and was an important value to playing video games.

Mechanics

Conversely, five participants also mentioned the role of mechanics driving video games. Interestingly, there was overlap among some of the participants, indicating that games operated on a continuum between ludology and narrative. Brent remarked, "It doesn't end. But there is no end to it. They are constantly adding new areas, new quests, new classes," when expressing his admiration for his favorite game. Further, it was the "sense of completion" that drove him to play the game so intensely. Josh remarked specifically that for his favorite game, it was "not as much for this story as it is for the game play." Jake stated directly, with emphasis, it is "game play" that makes video games enjoyable. Matt noted he liked innovations in games "that set standards." Dan indicated the mechanics of *Madden* football games were enjoyable for him:

> You're playing *Madden* football, then you watch the game, sometimes you will see a play that they are running, I mean you can almost bet it's going to be a play-action where you can bet it's going to be run because you see those plays so much when you are playing online, and picking plays when you watch the game, you actually see the offense so, you know, you can predict plays.

Metaphors

To further provide insight into the construction of masculinity, video games, and being a two-year college student, open-ended metaphors were asked and the responses noted. With these three topics acting as the source domain, noticeable themes occurring within how the participants provided a target domain are indicated following (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Being a Gamer is Like_____

Overwhelmingly, the data suggested strong positive connotations about being a gamer and playing video games. Terms like "fun," "awesome," "rush," and "free-minded" appeared in the data. Of note, two participants recognized liberation through playing video games, and how video games helped them break free of stereotypes. Matt described it as, "not caring about social norms." Nick noted them as, "being a problem solver," and Spencer used the term "diversity" to describe how gamers are not just stuck on one thing. It appeared that the problem-solving process encouraged a multiplicity in thinking that can be applied to social norms and stereotypes.

Being a Man is Like_____

Although, overall, the participants viewed being a man as favorable, there was data consistent with the previous themes about anxiety or tension regarding masculinity, as 6 of the 13 participants expressed a sense of confusion or doubling in their responses. Data provided by Josh best described this commonality: "It's like having a lot of expectations put on you. But, then finding out, 'oh, it's fine, you don't have to'. So, for me, it's just initially just being really stressed out and then being relieved." Mark also used the term "double-standard" to provide a connotation of this pathos.

An additional theme appearing throughout this data was a trace of traditional constructions of masculinity. Matt referred to it as, "trying to live to a common stereotype." Nate used the terms "independent," "self-sufficient," and "by your own hand." Last, Spencer described it as a "competition to be bigger, stronger, and faster." All these descriptions connoted men as leaders, being independent, and having to be the best.

Lastly, two participants expressed strong positive emotions when answering this question. Adam B. stated emphatically, "awesome", when providing data; John contributed "great." Although there was some hesitancy and ambiguity about masculinity, there also was some positive acceptance, too.

Being a Student is Like_____

Whereas positive connotations appeared in the targeted domains associated with masculinity and gaming, being a student provoked negative connotations. John emphatically referred to "debt" when describing being a student. Complementing this, Jake referred to being "poor." Further, Adam B. mentioned that it was "exhausting," and Adam S. referred to it as his "only option on the ladder up." Last, Mark described it as "settling for a cheap glass of whiskey." The word "settling" was noticeable here as a descriptor about his feelings toward the glass, and toward college.

Yet, some positive connotations about being a student appeared. George straddled the emotional divide by expressing some doubt about it with the term "hopefully," and then using the terms "accomplish" and "looking forward." Brent clearly used the terms "enriching" and "best" to convey his happiness about being and desire to be a student. Meanwhile, Josh expressed sentiments of being able to turn back time by returning to school, and Dan connected this to "job training."

Maintaining a positive pathos, Spencer and Nick connected being a student to being social. Nick noted the positives of "being surrounded by people who all have the same goals"; Spencer described it as "being more social because you have all these different groups of

people." Of note was Spencer's response also connecting to previous data about social learning and diversity.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented data gathered from 13 participants to establish the significance and meaning involved with this discourse of video games, masculinity, and learning. The data was compiled and arranged using tools from Gee's (2011) critical discourse analysis methodology and aligned with his building tasks. Through this process, critical themes concerning the interaction of male community college students using video games to construct their masculinity were uncovered.

Incorporating the semantic and semiotic structures appearing in the data, findings emerged about how these subjects entered the discourse. Significant emergent themes concerned the role of family and friends, and these participants description of being video game players, being students, and being masculine. There also were findings related to popular male characters in video games and what they contributed to the discourse.

Findings concerning notable habits, actions, and routines were documented. These actions constituted what were and were not associated with masculinity, in addition to what actions separated men from boys. Findings concerning these actions extended to learning in video games. This learning included academic learning, metacognitive learning, and learning social skills. These actions also uncovered themes related to video games and work, video games and schools, and video games and men. Some participants used video games to connect to work, school, and men.

The themes concerning this discourse's influence social and political goods emerged from the data. In particular, stereotypes about people who play video games, men, and two-year college students both emerged and were challenged in the data. Additionally, the role of parents and video games was a theme, along with video games as a social scapegoat.

Finally, themes concerning the dichotomy of reality and fantasy, escapism and why people may escape to video games, and what enjoyment can be derived from video games also emerged. Concluding these findings was data from critical metaphors regarding what it was like to be a man, a gamer, and a two-year college student, which was used to verify and support other findings.1

The next chapter contains a discussion and recommendations for the field based upon these findings, and they are connected to the established literature base to contribute and determine the significance of the study to the established knowledge base. Additionally, limitations germane to this study are also documented.

Chapter Five: DISCUSSION

To review, the findings that emerged from the data provided insight into three critical areas: first, how participants entered the discourse of video games; second, what activities and habits were learned and developed there; and, lastly, how these activities and habits connected to political and social goods. The findings illustrated how these participants used video games as part of their lifeworld to construct their masculinity and learn to be a man; furthermore, other learning and development was uncovered as well. The findings illuminate the role two-year institutions play in facilitating this learning and development.

The results of this study exposed three critical gaps consistent with the literature, and they represent areas in which this discourse can grow and expand. Video games are part of college men's lifeworld—a place where they learn how to be men—and contain hegemonic elements that can be internalized or challenge as they construct their masculinity. More so, there has been a paucity of research that examines the relationship between college men, masculinity, and video games. Especially given the predominance of Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity, this relationship has been a critical area to understand. Also important has been the role of two-year institutions and their affect on this masculinity development. The nature and function of their involvement on this construction of masculinity was explored and examined in this study.

Chapter Overview

First, this chapter explores the gaps among hegemony, popular culture, and video games as a thematic category for analysis. Within this category, concerns relating to the colonization of

the lifeworld are documented. As part of this colonization of the lifeworld, video games, as also a part of a culture industry and their associated aura, are examined to uncover how hegemonic narratives and counter-narratives are experienced in these video games. With their aura destabilized, acts of critical consciousness are also examined to understand how participants may avoid internalizing hegemony within this discourse. Video games have been situated within popular culture and acts of play, with an examination of ludic and narrative elements that have inspired wish-fulfillment and desire in the people playing them. Also, an important dichotomy emerged between reality and fantasy, because participants experienced more than just a game within this discourse.

Second, the gaps among college men, masculinity, and video games are explored as the second thematic category for analysis. Although some participants expressed the desire to define gender based on biology, hegemonic masculinity appeared predominately in the data. Thus, hegemonic masculinity was examined in relationships to masculine scripts. Likewise, gender-role conflict was present within the data, but there was a lack of gender masks expressed. There was, however, an attempt to marginalize certain male actions, which gave rise to archetypes of "the Nerd" and "the Bro." Also, the model gender majority myth and Harris' model of masculinity development were critically examined.

What follows is an examination of other learning and development occurring through video games. The data presents insight into what men learn through video games. Although the focus of the study was on masculinity, participants expressed other learned behaviors and concepts. This section connects the participants' learning and development to social learning, skill development, cognition, and sociopolitical concerns.

Finally, the specific roles two-year institutions play in fostering this learning and these learning spaces was examined and form the third thematic category. Data indicated that two-year institutions provided little to no impact or assistance regarding video games and learning. Instead, participants indicated that learning was conducted through co-curricular activities.

This chapter then concludes with implications and recommendations for future studies. Following these implications and recommendations are limitations of the study and the conclusion.

Summary of Critical Gaps

This chapter presents major findings appearing throughout the data collected and analyzed to determine ways to fill gaps within the current literature and research. As noted, there was a gap between the development of college men and their use of video games. Further, the gap concerning the role of two-year higher education institutions affected this development. Hence, this chapter is structured to present findings and research related to those gaps. It concludes with implications, and recommendations for future studies and limitations to this current study.

The Gap Among Hegemony, Popular Culture, and Video Games

As previously stated, the study situated itself at the intersection of college men and masculinity and video games to research the critical gender constructions embedded in this overlooked aspect of popular culture and its impact on learning and development. The study examined the connection between popular culture and video games to analyze potential hegemonic effects on college men experiencing these video games. A gap existed in the relationship among hegemony, popular culture, and video games. Video games, as a part of the

popular culture topos, are subject to challenges and concerns associated with hegemony, as are television and film. In particular, the semiotics involved with play and video games have created opportunities for participants to engage and potential internalize hegemony (Myers, 2003). More so, the position taken was that video games must be examined as a part of the lifeworld and, therefore, something complicit in the production of and resistance to hegemony. Issues surrounding the colonization of the lifeworld are present within the discourse of video games (Habermas, 1985).

Additionally, although the negative stereotypes and connotations of video games were established and pervasive, the body of work from researchers such as Gee (2004), Gee and Hays (2010), Jenkins (2008), Johnson (2006), and McGonigal (2011) pushed beyond this negativity to examine what was learned and developed from playing games; however, they did not specifically examine issues of masculinity. Additionally, much research has considered video games within the context of formal education associated with educational institutions; however, the study of video games needed to extend past formal learning environments currently found in higher education to examine video games as a part of popular culture and play.

The Gap Among College Men, Masculinity, and Video Games

The body of research concerning college men and masculinity studies did not examine the relationship of video games to college men's development. The gap exists, and despite condemnation regarding video games' effects upon college men, little research has targeted this relationship explicitly. For example, Harris's (2010) model of masculinity development does not include video games as a separate peer interaction group as a site of masculine representation, and Kimmel (2008) argus that video games are a negative force in students' lives. Parallel to the

aforementioned gap in the previous paragraph regarding hegemony, an overlap exists between hegemony and hegemonic masculinity. Thus, more research needs to be conducted to determine the impact of video games on men's construction of masculinity.

The fact that such negative stereotypes and connotations exist regarding video games and men, these stereotypes and connotations need to be researched and challenged to determine how men use video games to construct concepts about being a man and masculinity. Given the explicit attention in the field of college men and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Laker & Davis, 2011), the exploration of hegemony within video games and how it affects the construction of masculinity had to be given consideration. Video games are a significant part of our college culture, and their effect on college men and masculinity require study.

The Gap Among Two-Year Institutions, College Men, and Video Games

This study has brought attention to the diversity of students at two-year institutions of higher education. It examined the relationship between students and the institutions. The gap exists because studies concerning college men examine men have only occurred at four-year institutions and not two-year institutions. As Harper and Jackson (2011) urge, more research was conducted to establish and delineate differences between student populations—especially the differences between four-year and two-year institutions. Students attending two-year institutions possess different desires, in particular, the desire to align their courses with professional success. Additionally of note, one area of particular importance was the relationship of two-year institutions, men, and vocation (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Hegemony, Popular Culture, and Video Games

Although it was clear that participants were encountering hegemony within the discourse of video games, it was ambiguous as to how much that hegemony was internalized and naturalized. Much like genres of art, there were competing themes and concepts within the narratives and counter-narratives that limited the effect of hegemony within this discourse. There was no presiding message originating from these video games; but multiple messages. By extension, there was not one singular construction of masculinity; there were multiple constructions emerging from the data.

Colonization of the Lifeworld

In alignment with Habermas (1985) and Gee (2004), there was clearly an act of internalizing the multiple semantic and semiotics components encountered within these video games. One striking discovery was that the participants carried skills and concepts from the video games into their workplace and academic experiences. The workplace, in particular, was an area in which participants expressed cognitive and social benefits from video games due to increased awareness for minute details and being able to converse about video games with colleagues. More so, cultural artifacts were used by participants to construct knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Through this act, there was hegemony involved due to the numerous responses indicating a strong relationship between masculinity and vocation. Along with Habermas and Gee, this aligned also with Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity and gender scripts associated with work/vocation (Brown & McDonald, 2008; Mahalik, et al., 2006). More so, the emphasis that many participants placed on "the family" also indicated that hegemony and hegemonic masculinity was at play in this discourse community. Men use the semantic and

semiotics of these video games to construct their masculinity. More importantly, these semantic and semiotic components comprise both the hegemony perpetuated by the dominant social order and counter-narratives intended to resist this hegemony.

Learning and development, however, was not fixed along one ideological line or another. Although there was a strong theme of hegemonic masculinity present within the data, it did not appear to limit the choices or social options available to the participants; furthermore, themes countering this hegemony were present, too. Significantly, two of the participants indicated that they were studying to be nurses, a traditionally non-masculine field (Evans & Frank, 2003). Data gathered from these participants did not indicate any persecution or marginalization; if anything, they demonstrated pride in their chosen profession.

Clearly, multiple meanings were being constructed within this discourse, which had implications for the development of multiple masculinities originating from it. The lack of one single emergent theme that clearly dominated the others supported the belief that video games are a rich component of the lifeworld that participants use to construct their epistemology. Hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, although present, lack the constructive dominance that limits men's development. While two participants expressed constructions of masculinity aligned with hegemonic masculinity regarding man as provider and man as protector, most participants expressed non-hegemonic masculinity—according to one participant, for example, men could and should cry to express their feelings. Multiple definitions of masculinity were expressed by the 13 participants, and, furthermore, these participants encountering hegemony did not display overt anxiety about their masculinity. Although gender scripts associated with vocation and work comprised hegemony, the participants demonstrated an ability to construct

their masculinity apart from it. Importantly, they acknowledged the importance of work and of family.

Culture Industry and Aura

Much of the attention and emphasis on video games has focused on video games themselves and the video game culture industry; however, other social aspects were examined in this study to determine how they affect the interaction between the video-game player and the video game itself and what habits are learned from these games (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2007; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Importantly, video games have been destabilized from having a sole or fixed meaning; thus, habitus associated with these video games has also destabilized. Despite attempts to control the production of hegemonic aspects or limit the range of meaning found in video games, multiple meanings were produced from interacting with these digital texts. In alignment with Benjamin (1936), their aura depends significantly upon the participants and these other discourses that influence them, which evinces the importance of friends and family. The notion that both hegemonic and counter-narratives can exist in this shared learning space also evinces the destabilization of their aura and meaning. Further, video games, as a culture industry, did not appear to possess sole control or sole influence over the participants. In fact, these other discourses influenced how participants processed and internalized meaning created via video games.

Most participants stated that their introduction to video games and the discourse of video-game studies was a result of someone else. Interestingly, while Partington (2010) establishes that a mentor-figure can hasten development of cognitive process associated with video games, these participants noted the influence of friends and family on video games and connected to

social development. Apparently, family and friends are the primary people responsible for introducing participants to video games, and furthermore, family and friends comprise a significant element in how these participants relate and understand video games.

From this point, the "mentor" did not fully emerge in this data as a source of cognitive development, but the data indicated the potential for a mentor-figure in social learning. Mentors did not foster cognitive development, but helped participants navigate social networks. For example, a few participants noted the presence of a teacher in facilitating learning with/through video games, although other participants displayed mentor-like attributes as they coached and guided other players. Interestingly, one participant noted how relationships with his family trumped relationships with video games. If participants are learning through video games, then a better understanding of other external influences must be understood. As part of the lifeworld, friends and family were also repositories that participants used to construct their epistemology, habits, and meaning-making structures. Given that hegemony is constructed and challenged through a destabilization of a video game's aura, the idea and application of this "mentor" was explored to establish other significant influences on how men construct knowledge through this discourse community.

Critical Consciousness

It was clear that video games comprised a critical section of the participants' lifeworld and that multiple interpretations originated from this text. Questions, however, concerning critical consciousness and liberation were raised. There were pockets of resistance formed to hegemony in these texts (Daspit & Weaver, 1999; Jenkins, 2007, Storey, 2009). Participants in this study obviously were not passive receptacles, waiting to have knowledge deposited into

them (Friere, 1973); they clearly were able to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct knowledge according to their goals and meaning-making structures. Connecting to hegemony and auras, experiences within these discourse communities afforded opportunities to both challenge and change hegemony. For example, participants frequently noted challenges to bigoted actions encountered.

These bigoted actions also connected to the idea of learning and play, for also present within video games was the blending of work and play (Giroux, 2001). Moreso, there was evidence that participation in these communities led to social transgression and moves toward social equality (hooks, 1993). Work and play merged in ways in which information and knowledge gained in one discourse connected to and applied to another. Encountering, for example, these bigoted comments connected to concerns about social justice and equality. Although the participants were able to produce information and knowledge about video games and learning, they were also able to produce information and knowledge that challenged hegemonic roles associated with gender and work. As noted earlier, these participants took pride in their work—regardless of being in a traditionally masculine field or not.

Participants also noted the presence of women and their changing roles. Including and recognizing women in these discourse communities and studies in the construction of masculinity, although beyond the scope of this study, may impact concerns with sexual violence, aggression, and other negative masculine traits. These negative traits have long been associated with negative aspects of men, masculinity, and video games, but particularly in male students (Berkowitz, 1994; Capraro, 2000, 2004; Foubert, et al., 2010; Kelly & Erickson, 2007; Kent, 2001; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Pleck, 1982; Rich, et al., 2010). Likewise, there were indications

that different genders in this discourse community led to transgressions against hegemony masculinity. Women, as it was described, play a significant role in how men construct their masculinity, how men should act in relationships, and how to interact with women personally and professionally. By extension, encountering various constructions of genders would also lead to destabilizing hegemony and hegemonic masculinity. Based upon the data, encountering women in video games, education, and the workplace helped facilitate transgressive actions against hegemonic masculinity.

Video Games and Popular Culture

Video games have been used as cultural repositories in students' lifeworlds, and have also been used to analyze and synthesize abstract, larger concepts and categories—usually associated with mythology and archetypes. In short, video games have needed to be perceived as part of the popular culture media-scape. Importantly, video games contain elements that afford participants the ability to transgress against, challenge, and change negative perceptions and stereotypes. Thus, the assertions made by Gee (2004), Jenkins (1994, 2007), and Johnson (2006), that popular culture has reached a level of depth and complexity that prevents any one, single meaning from being reached, appears correct. Narratives are less didactic; they are more open and complicated to encourage multiple readings and meanings (Eco, 1980).

Ergo, video games have been participatory narratives used by participants as part of their lifeworld critically to examine and create meaning. It is an active process, too, to engage in this participatory culture (Jenkins, 2007). Although there were no themes about commandeering these themes, or "poaching" them, participants did express strong desire and engagement with many of the narratives. There was an almost personal investment in them. Rather than passively

consuming and internalizing information and habitus, these participants actively made connections to issues of personal and professional significance to them. More importantly, other discourses affect both this video game discourse and how information is processed. There are some elements encourage the internalization or resistance to hegemony emanating from these video games. They become the consumer/producer theorized by Jenkins (2007; 2008) as they participate in this community. Using the knowledge and skills gained from the video games, participants connected them to other discourses and used them to confront issues concerning them. Further, they did not appear regressive or diminished because they played video games. Especially concerning the roles, expectations, and responsibilities of men and women, and their own masculinity, the participants, indeed, appeared smarter, not dumber (Johnson, 2006). As Johnson argued, video games, as part of popular culture, makes people more aware and able to process information. The participants appeared to be progressive, not regressive, based on these findings.

Ludology and Narratology

On this point, participants expressed appreciation for elements of both ludology and narratology. The participants supported the notion expressed by Murray (2005) that video games need compelling mechanics and stories. There was attraction to both the mechanics and the story within video games, but, to be clear, it was not necessarily equal. Depending upon the person, the attraction was either to the ludic elements, the narrative elements, or both; however, both the ludic and narrative elements were acknowledged and supported. The combination of engaging mechanics producing mimesis and rich, compelling stories was clearly the desired result of experiencing video games. It appears that the more compelling the mechanics and the story, the

more likely people experiencing video games use them to construct their definitions of social concepts.

Regardless, video games have not been an isolated part of the lifeworld; they are deeply embedded within the complex network of discourses, semiotics, and affinity groups; however, it also makes them vulnerable to hegemonic influence (Egenfeldt-et al., 2008). Thus, the construction of these video games has created a situation aligned with those expressed by the Frankfurt School and the culture industry. The potential is there for hegemonic influences to entwine and embed themselves within realistic mechanics and compelling stories. Importantly, both ludic elements and narrative elements are complicit in creating this potential. People playing video games to escape have the potential to internalize hegemony, as they remain unaware of its presence or influence. Frequent mention of military games and the solder profession supported the idea of Wark's military entertainment complex (2007), in which the hegemony in video games produces the ideal that men must be soldiers to experience the full range of power, prestige, and glory produced by this role. There also were implications that this same entertainment complex could extend to athletes and, thus, be used to promote a construction of man as athlete/competitor.

Reality and Fantasy

Regardless of affinity toward the ludic or narrative elements of the game, participants expressed deep enjoyment in playing video games. Importantly, participants used terms such as "wish fulfillment" and "desire" to describe personal ideals and values constructed within this discourse community.

As video games mirror and construct images that mimic reality, this connection has been an important way for video game players to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Embedded within this connection is the concept of wish-fulfillment that appears as a theme and as a reason for why participants engage in video games. As video games appear to be more realistic in terms of graphics and their mechanics, players experience stronger desires and motivations to experience these narratives. The mimesis created by these games influences the players to imitate the behaviors, concepts, and ideologies present within them. This is not, however, an inherently negative effect; positive effects occur, too.

Certainly, video games have acted as a cultural repository, and participants use these narratives as critical components of their meaning-making devices. Yet the point about reality and fantasy underscore this position via the concern that video games can be used, much like any piece of art, to perpetuate false conceptions and assumptions about reality. Because of this, the relationship between video game players and other affinity groups and discourses is a critical component. Video games are no longer played in tangent to other groups; they are a shared learning space. Part of this learning space is abstract concepts associated with myths, desires, and morals. With this, the thought that participants reject the idea that things experienced in games affect their reality was interesting and must be explore further; clearly, these video games impact the participant's epistemological construction and development.

Epistemology and hermeneutics regarding the distinction between reality and fantasy must be part of the conversation about video games, college men, and learning. If nothing else, this emphasis should occur because many participants noted video games were an escape for them. Initially this appeared in alignment with anxieties expressed by Giroux (2000, 2001),

Kimmel (2008), and Marcuse (2002) that some participants used video games to escape personal or professional challenges or to simply relax. This escapism lets gamers face the potential of blundering into a labyrinthine discourse that allows them to eschew personal and professional responsibility. Yet participants made strong, resounding claims against this escapism: overwhelmingly, they passionately emphasized professional and personal responsibilities and made passionate attempts to emphasize physical and mental wellness. Although video games provided some escape and relief for participants (and, in fairness, concerns for some), video games were not defined or expressed predominately as an all-encompassing void to escape permanently from reality. Some participants noted resistance to the notion that experiences in the fantasy world of the video game could translate back into reality.

College Men, Masculinity, and Video Games

Of note, these ideas about "wish-fulfillment" and "desire" connected to abstract concepts that can be constructed to define social-cultural concepts, in this case, masculinity. Interestingly, even those participants expressing resistance to a connection between reality and fantasy provided data about how video games impacted their construction of masculinity. Video games are part of the popular culture media scape, lifeworld, and semosphere, but issues concerning the critical consciousness and liberation of college men and masculinity must be also addressed. As noted, the prevalent theme in the literature was hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), and this theme connected with the issues of critical consciousness and liberation. While present, the singularity of hegemonic masculinity is not present: men can develop multiple definitions of masculinity using video games. Participants noted that masculinity is changing or has changed, and this change is creating opportunities for men. Thus, strategies and tactics to help men

transgress against hegemony and liberate themselves must be examined to understand how these men can internalize habitus associated with positive, progressive, and responsible masculinity. At the same time, additionally, analysis of these strategies and tactics can also help avoid the internalization of hegemonic masculinity.

Floppy Bits

As noted, participants described that masculinity was defined by the "floppy bits" to indicate how they believed masculinity was related to biology and the physical attributes that separate men and women. Participants grounded this term in a belief that biology was the main distinction between men and women. Interestingly, there was resistance to the construction of masculinity being separate or distinct from other constructions of gender. These participants resisted the notion expressed by Laker and Davis (2011) and Harper and Harris (2010) that men have a specific gendered identity. It is not, however, that biology trumps society in determining gender; moreso, it is an issue that the social construction of masculinity and femininity has reached a point at which men and women are able to share and develop both masculine and feminine attributes. If there are differences in gender, these differences are tied more to biology than sociology. Importantly, the line of demarcation is significantly blurred and permeable so that men and women may draw from the same cultural repositories to construct and define their own masculinity and, by extension, femininity.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender Scripts

Aspects of hegemonic masculinity appeared overwhelming in the data. As posited by Connell (2005), several themes and scripts appeared associated with hegemonic masculinity. The themes and gender scripts were responsibility, the workplace and vocational success,

stoicism, (sexual) violence, and men as leaders. Most importantly, however, these attributes were not seen as negative; some participants even expressed desire for these attributes. These attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity acted as blueprints for successful behavior regarding family, work, academic, and social responsibilities. In particular, participants expressed a strong desire for vocation and workplace success, and clearly denounced acts of bigotry and sexism. For these men, these avenues were the way in which they processed information and constructed meaning.

Responsibility

A script appearing in the data was the internal sense of responsibility to a person's own integrity and belief structure. Being responsible to oneself was just as important as being responsible to others. This responsibility encompassed both professional and personal discourses. Being responsible was defined as being productive, taking care of other people, maintaining an income, and contributing positively to the surrounding community. Family, in particular, was mentioned frequently in discussions about responsibility, as was taking charge and being leaders. Also, this notion of responsibility did not come at the expense or dominance of others, but rather as a result of working with others. Some participants mentioned "bullying" as a type of male bonding, and there was significant disdain and avowal of such actions. This is an irresponsible act for men. Participants suggested, though, that escaping into a video game world may act as an antidote to bullying and be a discourse from which the bullied gained confidence. Behaviors and actions of bullying also connect to behaviors and actions of violence. Participants acknowledged clearly the prevalence of violence in video games, and there was

significant resistance to the notion that violent video games make violent people. Of note, being responsible was a new script emerging from the data and must be studied further.

Vocation

Immersion within these video games connects men to the attributes and values associated with hegemonic masculinity and to the workplace (Mahalik, et al., 2006; Sayman, 2007). The participants indicated several times that gender scripts supported the traditional construction of manhood attributed to hegemonic masculinity: men are the workers, the soldiers, the family providers. Moreso, words were frequently used to connote this idea of masculinity, as did the video games mentioned. Games with narratives invoking heroes, soldiers, and combat were mentioned more often than puzzle games. The combination of words and games invokes conceptions of men as responsible, chivalric individuals. Additionally, based upon the word "good" being repeated often among many participants, this conception was a desirable construct. Further, two archetypes, The Warrior and The Archetype, regarding men invoke aggression and combat strongly suggest that men must take action through violence, rather than diplomacy. Curiously, negotiation or diplomacy was not mentioned at all.

Stoicism

The theme of stoicism as a gender script did not appear predominately in the data. Unlike positions taken by research, participants expressed little to no difficulty expressing their feelings and emotions about men and masculinity (Blazina, et al., 2008; Cochron, 2005; Mahalik, et al, 2003). Participants were comfortable talking about the subjects and were able to provide rich data. More so, several indicated that men should express their masculinity through their feelings. There was also no indication that men would remain silent or follow "The Code"

(Capraro, 2004; Kimmel 2008). Many men, directly, spoke out against negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity, bigotry, and sexism, which violate this unspoken code of conduct.

(Sexual) Violence

More so, elements of overt sexism and bigotry were not clearly expressed in the data. Men expressed desire and concern for some hegemonic actions articulated about women and their representations and gender definitions in these narratives. More so, participants either actively or passively rejected acts of violence and/or bigotry experienced in game. They did not follow the code of silence attributed to men witnessing these acts. These actions support the desire of researchers who wish to challenge and change these gender scripts (Berkowitz, 1994; Capraro, 2000, 2004; Foubert, et al., 2010; Foubert, et al., 2010; Kelly & Erickson, 2007; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Rich, et al., 2010). Furthermore, anxiety over the relationship between men, alcohol, and substance abuse was addressed. Participants were not clearly comfortable with this association.

Men as Leaders

While hegemonic masculinity may be the dominant form of masculinity expressed, themes regarding the construction of multiple masculinities and/or positive masculinities also were mentioned by the participants. The dominance and prevalence of hegemony splinters and allows the presence of other constructions of masculinity within the discourse. A single unifying definition of masculinity did not emerge from the constellation of myths and archetypes within video games. Participants in this study appeared to enact and resist many of the definitions of hegemonic masculinity noted in the research; although there was a strong connection between masculinity and work, this was also incorporated into an ethos of responsibility.

Even the traditional definition of hegemonic masculinity changes: it moves from a definition built on asserting power over others to asserting power over their own actions, or maintaining integrity, as several participants mentioned. A curious dichotomy emerged from the data that suggested that men are men-of-action, but not men-of-talk. As noted, diplomacy was not mentioned in relationship to masculinity. As indicated in the data, although the myths and archetypes associated with masculinity still depicted men as strong, responsible, and leaders, the results of those actions change. Men have responsibilities still to their family, their work, and to themselves, but there is more space available for collaboration and discussion with others.

Moreso, many participants described an ideal form of masculinity, connecting to wish fulfillment and desire represented in video games. This ideal form represents a muscular individual, usually with a "big" gun or sword. The symbolic connotation, it appeared, still connects men, masculinity, and the idea of "big." Yet, curiously, there was also a distinct separation between reality and fantasy here. The line between the two, while being blurred, still remained intact—so, the notion of "man-as-big" did not necessarily transfer into other discourses associated with work or social communities. Certainly, the notion of man-as-leader was present, but the question about what and whom men lead has changed. Participants did not express desire or anxiety about being the "biggest" person in the room.

Also of note was the implication that men possess a desire to act rather than to talk. In alignment with hegemonic masculinity, men must be men-of-action, take charge, and be responsible for those in their care. In alignment with the research, however, men desired and valued a strong gendered script that equates masculinity with their vocation and, moreso, success in their vocation. Men take action, and that action is to work and be responsible. When

discussing definitions and applications of "responsibility," the participants frequently included a sense of others and not just themselves. This has roots in some of the archetypes within video games that depict an ethos of man/hero-as-protector. As expressed, men possess a duty to act out against (sexual) violence and aggressions, and it appears men are learning to express their intimate feelings. Curiously, elements of stoicism did not appear strongly in the data.

Gender-Role Conflict

Indicative of the multiplicities of masculinity occurring with this discourse and appearing through these budding archetypes, the tension between masculine roles aligned with gender-role conflict (Davis, 2002; O'Neil, et al., 1986). In the context of defining masculine values, men display anxiety and hesitancy to offer a clear definition of masculinity. Even the actions of drinking and smoking were questionably defined as un-manly actions: there was indication that these elements in video games represented desirable actions. More so, there was indication that men do drink alcohol, but anxieties presented when the type and quantity of alcohol was called into question. What and how men drink is a habit that separates various types of men: some men prefer the "big" drinks, others do not.

This conflict extended beyond alcohol drinks to grooming habits and fashion to questions of normalcy. The lack of a clear distinction and definition can create spaces of anxiety and confusion within men as they construct their masculinity (Davis, 2002, O'Neil, et al., 1986). Not only does this make them vulnerable to hegemony, but it also makes them vulnerable to the self-destructive behavior they seek to avoid. In a desire to establish an acceptable definition of masculinity and associated actions, the concern remains that men experiencing gender-role conflict may imitate perceived acceptable behavior.

Gender Masks

Gender masks did not appear. Although men express anxiety and tensions about conflict associated with being a man and masculinity, there was no noted performance of acting like or being like the norm in order to gather power and prestige (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Although participants expressed anxiety from perceived deviations of what it means to be a man or be masculine (Davis, 2001; O'Neil, et al., 1986; Philaretou & Allen, 2001), they did not indicate falsifying or performing gender-roles to conform to social norms or fit in. The participants expressed no need to hide their masculinity, although some distanced themselves from certain masculine actions (such as pedicures). The act of performance or passing associated with gender masks did not appear predominantly in the data. Of note, though, participants in this study were all members of the presiding social class in the community. This important indicator may be why gender masks did not appear in the study.

Nerds and Bros

What did appear, however, was an internal hierarchy regarding actions associated with masculinity and video games. When asked about stereotypes related to video games, the participants made clear connections to the stereotype of the anti-social, overweight, video game player wearing glasses who lives in a basement—this stereotype was resoundingly rejected and abhorred. The participants rejected this stereotype because of the marginalization of their affection for video games and the implications of this lifestyle. Participants mentioned efforts to maintain health, wellness, and the ability to socially integrate into a community. Additionally, and this challenges beliefs about hegemonic masculinity asserting control over women and femininity, many participants welcomed the inclusion of women into this community because

their presence challenged the stereotypical definition of video gamers. Along with the increase popularity and mainstreaming of video games, participants noted the progressive changes within this affinity group.

The tension among hegemonic masculinity, counter-narratives to hegemonic masculinity, and internalization of some gender scripts and the rejection of others leads to the creation of potential archetypes for gamers. These stereotypes, furthermore, align with constructions of masculinity. "Nerds" comes to represent a positive form of being a gamer and man; "Bros" represent the negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity and gamers. As such, nerds are a transgressive, liberatory stereotype that promotes responsible masculinity, but bros are the embodiment of negative, destructive masculinity.

Nerds. First, application of the word "nerd" conjured images of, as stated, an IT professional or someone competent with technology and computers. A dedication was embedded within this new conception of "nerd" that, while not completely embraced by all, moved away from the negative perceptions of the overweight, antisocial stereotype of gamers. The abilities associated with "the nerd" have become positives: their level of technical expertise, ability to memorize codes and facts, and intense desire to time on a task are now attributes for professional and work place success. Participants, also, directly connected the skills learned as a nerdy video game player to job performance—skills learned in the game affected skills applied to the job.

"Nerds" are insiders who internalize video games and who identify as a gamers. There is a rich knowledge base of prior video games and narrative experiences that one should have to be considered a gamer; furthermore, there are time-commitments and a sense of dedication and

responsibility to the game itself. For the most part, video games engage the players mentally and philosophically through the richness of their narrative experiences. According to some, engaging in video games is similar to engaging in a job, and with professional tournaments offering prizes worth thousands of dollars, becomnig professional gamers, like professional athletes, is a possibility. Embedded within these possibilities, however, is the dedication and responsibility to a task, which connects to myths and archetypes about masculinity and gender scripts of vocation. These pieces of data have implications for dedication to vocation, and how vocation is defined by members of these communities.

Bros. Along with the construction of "the nerd," participants refer to its antithesis: The bro. Whereas the myths and stereotypes within video games are fracturing and engaging in multiple definition and applications, negative associations concerning "the bro" are related to negative associations concerning hegemonic masculinity. If possible, "the bro" is the mythological and stereotypical personification of hegemonic masculinity. Participants suggested that "the bro" was the boy/man who consumes the alcohol, engages in reckless behavior, and performs actions detrimental to society. Further, these actions were those described in Kimmel's (2008) *Guyland* and demonized in higher education research about college men (Capraro, 2000; Peralta & Cruz, 2006; West, 2001). "The bro" is the boy/man stuck in Guyland; "the nerd" is the man who escapes.

Mythical and stereotypical memes are competing for replication with this discourse and within these affinity groups. The nerd and the bro come to represent positive and negative aspects of both masculinity and video gamers. Constructs of hegemonic and positive masculinity engage each other within the narratives and counter-narratives comprising these video game

narratives. As men experience them, they are exposed to and start to incorporate them into their meaning-making process. The video-game players internalize these memes, which makes them appear natural and obvious to the men. Embedded within this discrepancy is the notion of responsibility as a part of manhood. Whether the participants are encouraging more or less use of video games as an integral part of manhood, the notion of responsibility emerges as a defining separation between being nerds and bros, and part of being a man. Both may play video games, but men and nerds do it responsibly.

Model Gender Majority Myth(s)

The model gender majority myth articulates five myths about men and gender privilege. They are listed as follows:

1. Every male equally benefits from gender privilege.
2. Gender initiatives need not include men.
3. Undergraduate men do not receive harmful stereotypes.
4. Male students do not require male-specific resources.
5. Historical dominance and structural determinism ensure male success.

As the field of college men and masculinity continues to grow and expand, it is vital to consider the cultural artifacts that represent myths that men use to construct their definition of masculinity.

To this end, data supported that the model gender majority myth (Harper & Harris, 2010) should still be used to challenge the notion that all men construct their masculinity equally, all men are privileged, and all men benefit equally from gender norms and beliefs. Additionally, this myth must be considered in the discourse of men and masculinity. Tellingly, many of the

video games represent figures of traditional, hegemonic masculinity—warriors, soldiers, knights. There is a connection to the traditional myths used by Bly's Iron John Movement. What is interesting, however, is the disconnect between these symbols of hegemonic masculinity in video games and the lack of hegemonic masculine traits in the data provided by participants. Although privileged in video games, they did not appear to be privileged in reality. This also connects to the emerging archetypes of the nerd and the bro. They represent a fracturing of masculinity, which connects to these mythical elements. As issues of representation and mimesis continue within the contested hegemonic and counter-narratives regarding masculinity, there must be vigilance against the normalization and internalization of hegemony and associated pejorative myths.

Given that participants expressed anxiety and some difficulty conceptualizing masculinity, there was still evidence of struggles internalizing positive or progressive forms of masculinity. Although certainly worth more research and study, it is also indicative of multiple conceptualizations of masculinity being constructed by men and through video games. Although masculinity, as a monolithic construction, has fallen, men still need assistance to dispel myths perpetuating negative stereotypes and assumptions about masculinity (Davis & Laker, 2004).

Additionally, data indicated that Harris's (2010) model of masculinity development should be expanded to include video games as a unique male peer-group interaction. As a cultural repository, college men encounter many representations of mythic structures and are afforded changes to internalize them through social interactions. Although many social groups are clumped together under this umbrella category, it should be unpacked and explored to determine unique compositions of each social group. There are more than "interactions" within

this site of masculinity development. As a virtually limitless repository of cultural information used in meaning-making and the prevalence video games occupy within college men's affinity groups, they should not be lumped into a broad category (Vygotsky, 1978).

Video games, too, should be considered as part of entertainment media (Davis, 2002; Davis & Harrison, 2014). These cultural artifacts do not operate within an isolated space in either media studies or student development. There are simply too many connections to other discourses that affect and are affected by video games for an inclusion into other categories. They are a site of masculine interaction in and of themselves, and should be researched, treated, and examined as such. Gender myths and hegemony are being created and challenged, along with significant other types of learning and development.

Thus, the recommendation is that a sixth and seventh point should be incorporated into the model majority gender myth:

6. Men construct the same masculinity in the same way.
7. All mentors used to construct masculinity are similar.

It is clear that men do not construct the same masculinity in the same ways. Given the various constructions, definition, and applications of masculinity, it is fallacious to assume that men use the same cultural artifacts, cultural repositories, and social interactions in parallel manners. Multiple masculinities are constructed from multiple sources; many of these sources contain mythic elements. If the assumption embedded within these myths is that men are not all the same, neither can there be an assumptions that masculinity is constructed in the same way. Various men internalize various myths to construct various definitions of masculinity; it is not a universal or unilateral process. There cannot be an assumption that men construct their

masculinity from the same source(s); many representations of myths and culture can be internalized to define masculinity.

Tangent to the questions of myths is the role and function of the mentor. As noted, the mentor plays a significant, if ambiguous, role in video games; it is also a component of myth, too. Heroes often learn about their journey and themselves with the assistance of a mentor (Campbell, 2004). Challenging the assumption that men construct the same construction of masculinity from the same sources is also to challenge the assumption that men possess the same mentor who facilitates this process. For example, which mentor and which process encourages the construction of the nerd, but avoiding the construction of the bro. Moreso, as indicated earlier, differences in peer-group interactions should be considered because different peer groups contain different mentor figures. Expanding the model majority gender myth also encompasses an expansion of Harris's (2010) model: the role, function, and type of mentor must also be examined in relationship to campus interactions and myth.

Learning and Development

Whereas the myths, definitions, stereotypes, and traits of masculinity merge together in the semantic and semiotic discursive soup of video games, participants were clear on what was learned through their experiences. Interestingly, when posed the question about learning in and through video games directly, few participants mentioned socio-cultural elements. Emerging from the data were clear themes and implications about social learning and skill-based learning.

Current research from Gee (2004), Gee and Hays (2010), and McGonigal (2011) assert that learning and development occurs within these video-game affinity groups, and this learning and development affects how learners perceive reality, which is point strongly asserted by

McGonigal. Emphasis exists, however, about using video games in formal learning environments to direct specific events (Barab, et al., 2010; Hall, 2013). Only a paucity of participants indicated a theme of learning about classroom content and video games. The predominant theme regarding learning and video games concerned informal learning, as participants expressed learning independently and learning with/through others by playing video games.

Video games are certainly no longer an anti-social, isolated discourse; there is social connectivity. This theme connects to research about how video games can encourage learning (Abrams, 2009; Hromek & Roffey, 2009; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011). The stereotypes and (mis)conceptions have been challenged enough through the increased prevalence of video games in society and the inclusion of various sociocultural groups in these communities. Numerous times in the data, too, video games functioned as a bridge between people to encourage discussion and camaraderie. They become shared experiences from which participants could know and understand others. Video games, simply put, facilitate socialization and community building. As video games become more complex and dependent upon other players for a full experience, players must interact successfully and navigate with each other to accomplish their objectives. They are participatory in nature (Jenkins, 2008).

Teamwork

A clear result from this socialization was the emphasis on team work in video game communities. Although not explored specifically in the literature, this theme emerges strongly from the data. When playing video games, there is a dependency created amongst players to work in a team environment. Many of the challenges are so strong that a single player can no

longer surmount them on his/her own. Hence, players must learn the intricacies of team work and team environment to be successful. Much of these skills associated with teamwork in game carried over into workplace environments. The example used of attendance and participation is a striking example, as is the idea of inclusion to "elite" gaming communities, such as the clans mentioned. Successful performance both in the video game and in the workplace leads to prestige and promotion. Video games contain aspects of the workplace, and participants expressed remarkably internalization of this habitus and applied it to their workplaces. It also exposes the player to the hegemonic influences that create the perception of what is necessary for success. Although the imitation and execution of desirable skills equates to success in game and in the workplace, these skills are generated by the dominant social order, and, therefore, are subject to scrutiny.

Strategic and Critical Thinking

Learning to work as a team in video games overlapped with another prevalent theme: strategy and critical thinking. The sheer emphasis placed on strategic and critical thinking connected to research done about potential cognitive growth and analytical thinking (Partington, 2010; Smith, 2008; Steinkuehler, 2010). For video-game players, critical thinking encompasses strategy, which is an analysis of the larger objectives for success and the minute details required to achieve that success. These minute details comprise the tactics necessary for successful execution of the strategy. Responding to and working with others is a key component of the execution of strategies and tactics. It is also worth noting the hegemonic militaristic overtones connoted by "strategy" and "tactic." Further, many participants mentioned the usefulness and application of strategies and tactics to the workplace, and some connected to academic success as

well. Regardless of the discourse, these strategies and tactics were being connected to, participants displayed an ability to determine their objectives, analyze their resources, and construct a detailed plan from which to successfully use those resources to accomplish their objectives. Strategic thinking was clearly present with the discourse of video games; however, connecting that strategic thinking to sociopolitical and cultural challenges was not. This tension must be explored further in future studies.

Growth, unlike the suggestion made by Kimmel (2008), does not have to be hindered by video games; it can be encouraged. It aligns more with development opinioned by Ventura, et al.'s study (2011) suggesting positive results from playing video games. Men are not automatically trapped in Guyland or by the model gender majority myth; there are a plethora of counter-narratives and discourses available to challenge hegemony and promote healthy, positive, respectful definitions of masculinity. The connection establishes a clear link to formal, tangible challenges associated with the workplace, not abstract challenges associated with hegemony.

Metacognitive Skills

Metacognitive skills, surprisingly, appeared in these responses. The strategic thinking previously mentioned goal-setting and time management. Prioritization and resource management were two other themes that appeared. Video games frequently offer multiple goals and various ways to accomplish them, thus forcing players to make strategic decisions about how to spend their resources effectively. A striking example of this practice in action was participants equating time and effort spent in video games to time and effort spent at work. The analytical thinking defined the opportunity cost of spending time on one task versus the reward

gained on that task. Managing time and money, along with determining the most effective strategy to yield the maximum results, was a critical skill learned in this video-game affinity group.

Practical Skill Development

Practical skill development also emerges from this conversation about video games and learning. Development of these practical skills aligned with the research conducted by Gee and Hayes (2010). Participants mentioned metacognitive and affective skill development that complements the cognitive skill development. Participants noted skills such as memorization, reflexes, and hand-eye coordination as benefits of playing video games; however, interestingly enough, development of skills related directly to an academic content area was scarce in the data. Reading and math were mentioned as content areas in which these skills were developed.

Morals

Likewise, morals were mentioned, but connecting them to specific aspects of moral or analytical philosophy was not. There was limited application to culture dynamics or politics, too. This aligned with research conducted by Botzakis (2009) and his work about readers produce meaning from the texts they encounter. Morality was embedded within larger questions about being good and being evil without specifically mentioning what was good or what was evil. Less an issue of academic content, concepts of good and evil motivated participants affectively as they strived to imitate the good and avoid the bad.

Sociopolitical Concerns

An area for future study is the understanding of sociopolitical concerns and themes in these video games. Researchers (Hung, 2011; Toscano, 2011; Walton & Pallitt, 2012; Walsh &

Apperley, 2009) discussed the potential for this type of learning and development—and it certainly aligns with critical consciousness and multiple definitions of masculinity. Although this study focused specifically on college men and masculinity, there is potential to investigate other sociopolitical themes and hegemony. To this end, research in adult education should be used as a model. Research conducted by Wright and Sandlin (2008; 2009) and Tisdell and Thompson (2007) examined how popular culture affects socio-cultural issues—in particular, *The Avengers* and female identity—and how popular culture promotes community building and community education. This research could, and should, function as a model for future studies.

The Role of Two-Year Institutions

A critical discovery found in this data was the largely absent presence of formal learning environments that facilitate this skill development within two-year institutions. Given the pervasiveness of video games, some connection was expected. In the context of examining what other cultural elements and discourses connect to affinity groups, there was a stark absence of formal direction and support occurring through the guidance and counsel of higher education institutions. Most of the support described was informal support gained through active participation in the discourse; it was trial and error.

Contrary to much of the research regarding learning and video games, these participants valued the social development and analytical skills that organically emerged from their game-playing experiences. This point is not to minimalize or trivialize the efforts made by these researchers and formal environments; rather, the data gleaned from these participants suggested that informal learning be examined within these affinity groups and how institutions of higher education can maximize it.

Given the dominance of the workplace and video games emerging from these themes, further investigation must be conducted about how two-year higher educational institutions can bridge this gap. In conjunction with the student needs expressed by Cohen and Brawer (2010) and the workforce needs expressed by the U.S. Department of Labor (2013), using video games to merge student needs with skill development could alleviate the workplace skills gap. Combining the passion, excitement, and learning produced by video games could be one potential strategy to accomplish this goal. Further, more investigation and more research regarding two-year schools beyond its current discourse of academic success (Gardenshire-Crooks, er al.,; Sanchez, et al., 2012; Sontam & Gabiel, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013; Winter, 2009) is needed, and should include issues of hegemony, ideology, and workplace success (among others). It would, as Harper and Harris (2010) urged, expand the research being conducted at two-year higher education institutions and on the students at two-year institutions.

A striking emergent theme in the data connected the benefits of learning in these informal learning environments to these video game affinity groups. More so, there was a noticeable disconnect between this informal learning and a fostering campus environment. Quite simply, many of the participants stated a lack of connection or support originating from their institutions. At best, the participants indicated a connection to student organizations that were allowed to host events on campus, but there was no direct emphasis placed on learning with or through video games, neither was there mention of a "mentor-figure." Participants also did not mention a particular emphasis or desire to create or support one. Although a few mentioned that video games appeared in certain class conversations, these conversations were minimal. Learning

through video-game affinity groups occurs without much direction of guidance from the two-year institutions.

Implications and Recommendations

Critical Discourse Analysis

One implication for this study from a methodological standpoint for research is the consideration of how participants use semiotics to create and construct meaning, along with semantics. Along with the words, phrases, and expressions, other cultural artifacts should be incorporated into the critical discourse analysis. Although Gee (2011) devotes much attention to the semantics used, but more attention should be given to the semiotics used in conjunction. Many participants referenced specific characters and video games, along with repeated phrases. More is at play in these responses than linguistics. Given the relationships to other discourses and the interconnectivity of the semiosphere (Lotman, 1999) and the media (Fairclough, 2001), it stands to reason that other cultural elements are at play within these responses.

Another area for future consideration is the joining of critical discourse analysis with critical metaphor analysis. Implications would be to investigate how the target domains and source domains used in metaphors also connect various social discourses (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They act as a potential bridge. Additionally, this would also encompass semiotic theory as the act of coding and decoding metaphors involving referents provided by the participant (Eco, 1984). They act as a conduit for processing meaning. In this case, as the hegemony and progressive influences found within video games are internalized, the participant then applies this internalization to other discourses. The participants in this study became centralized for this

meaning-making process. As many of them noted, skills learned in the video games are applied to skills needed in the workforce.

College Men, Video Games, and Hegemony

Critically, participants exhibited responses that aligned with hegemonic masculinity or positive masculinity. These participants equated notions of masculinity with responsibility, being a provider, and being a leader. Curiously, Kimmel (2008) accuses video games of trapping men within Guyland; however, the participants did not support this accusation. A significant finding was that participants expressed a clear connection between video games and academic and professional work. Connected to this, too, was the issue of responsibility. Because this word and concept appears overwhelmingly in the data, more can be done to explore the relationship between masculinity and responsibility. There also are critical applications as well for this connection, because issues of responsibility could be subjected to hegemony, power, and control. It is this connection that deserves more exploration and study: because of the relationship between two-year institutions and the workforce (Cohen & Brawer, 2008) and the strong connection between masculinity and vocation (Brown & McDonald, 2008; Mahalik, et al., 2006), more research must be conducted to establish how men understand and perceive constructions of vocation, along with their masculinity.

Further, participants displayed some evidence of gender-role conflict (Davis, 2002). Continued research needs to determine to what extent video games alleviate, exacerbate, or obfuscate these tendencies. Although appearing infrequently through the participants, hesitancy and some anxiety was expressed over how men should and could behave. Importantly, many of the participants expressed confidence about their comfort with their own masculinity, but some

expressed difficulty understanding if and how society would accept it. Future programs and research studies should include Davis and Harrison (2014) as a guide to help men (and others) navigate social justice issues. Media—including video games—should be a part of this programming.

There is, additionally, a critical learning space to explore how men can develop more positive, progressive constructions of masculinity. Issues of gender scripts appeared in the data, and these scripts aligned with hegemonic masculinity or positive masculinity. Video games still depend upon hegemonic masculine archetypes, but their effect upon the player is ambiguous. The scripts of vocation (Brown & McDonald, 2008; Mahalik, et al., 2006), stoicism (Blazina, et al., 2008; Cochron, 2005; Mahalik, et al., 2003), and (sexual) violence (Berkowitz, 1994; Capraro, 2000, 2004; Foubert, et al. 2010; Foubert, et al., 2010; Kelly & Erickson, 2007; Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Rich, Utley, Janke, & Moldoveanu, 2010) were present, but not monolithic. There were few definitive conclusions because although the participants clearly acknowledged the hyper-masculinity of these video-game characters, many acknowledged them as acts of fantasy, and not reality. More so, attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity were not definitely replicated through the habitus of these video games.

Along this point, given the intense emphasis on vocation and responsibility, more research must be conducted to examine how the social construction of "work/vocation" changes as a result of this discourse and how the notion of "responsibility" is operationalized. As noted, video games are having an effect on changing expectations within the workplace (McGonigal, 2011). As video games continue to occupy more space in society and the lifeworld, their effect on social constructs must extend farther, too. This is important especially because of the

relationships between men, masculinity, vocation, and responsibility expressed by these participants.

There are questions, though, of how marginalized aspects of masculinity are constructed and treated among video-game communities because of the emphasis on bigoted language and some discomfort with “non-traditional” masculine acts (such as “pedicures"). This last point connects to issues of transgression and play (Giroux, 2001; hooks, 1996) because of the embedded critical social issues within it. As evinced by the emerging archetypes of the nerd and the bro, there are issues of privilege and empowerment even within this sub-culture. Its effects on the larger culture of men and masculinity are certainly worth future study and research. Within this learning space, more research can be conducted to evince some of the participatory aspects of video games as media and popular culture (Gee & Hayes, 2010; Jenkins, 2008). This would also align video games as both entertainment media and issues of social justice (Davis & Laker, 2004; Davis & Harrison, 2014). Importantly, Johnson’s (2006) notion that popular culture does make participants smarter should be addressed empirically within the discourse of video games, partly because of the stark contrast between the early video games and the complex modern games (Kent, 2001). This last point would also address learning theories as well, and explore how and why men learn through video games.

Further, the emergence of the mentor-figure and the categorizations of the nerd and the bro must be explored further. Connected to this, these mentor-figures should be examined in conjunction with the replication of the nerd or the bro. With this, the notion that women (or a woman) could act as a mentor-figure must be explored and researched. Additionally, given that women are able to challenge and change (hegemonic) masculinity, how women construct

masculinity should be explored and researched. As such, the implication is that by introducing new elements, such as women, into the discourse pre-existing elements in that discourse would change. As these negative perceptions of stereotypes are challenged and changed, influences leading to transgressive actions against them must be studied further. Also, it would be worth studying how women facilitate archetype constructions of the nerd or the bro, as they assist men in internalizing habitus from these video games along these archetypical categories.

Finally, although this study focused on how (White) college men construct their masculinity, it would be worth investigating how members of other communities construct masculinity. In particular, women as a "mentor-figure" should be explored to determine how their presence impacts the construction of masculinity. Additionally, based upon the emphasis of "floppy bits", it would be interesting to see if women share this point of view. Along with understanding how women construct masculinity, attention should be paid to determine how this construction affects their definition of masculinity. Attention also should be paid to how men construct femininity, too. Also, the relationship between men of color, video games, and masculinity development must also be explored, and for the same reasons as those for studying women. How members of these communities construct masculinity (among other terms) is of value as well as how that construction impacts others. On this point, the issue of gender masks should be addressed explicitly to determine if members of the non-dominant social class experience situations in which they feel they must "mask" their behaviors for social cohesion (Edwards & Jones, 2009).

College Men, Video Games, and Adult Education

Clearly, more research needs to be conducted upon the effects of adult learning, video games, and adult education. The work of Barab et al. (2010) and their Quest Atlantis project (Barab, 2010), along with the work conducted in Chicago, New York, and other high schools (Hall, 2013) confirms that video games provide structure, with formal learning environments. Although the potential exists, based upon the participants noting course-content based learning, more learning occurs beyond formal environments. The social interactions and skills developed via experiencing the semiotics and semantics of video games has encompassed social and informal learning. Studies need to be expanded beyond formal learning environments to include informal learning as well.

The expansion into social and informal learning also continues the work done by adult education researchers (Tisdell & Thompson, 2007; Wright & Sandlin, 2009). Noticeably, the authors' research explores the community-building aspects of popular culture and issues of culture resistance and identity formation. Yet, this work was confined largely to television and film. Video games are also sites of learning and development similar to television and films, and, as such, must be studied. As part of the larger semiosphere and cultural lifeworld, video games are clearly semiotic repositories that are used to consume, challenge, and create information.

More so, video-game communities are participatory communities that depend on interactions and encounters from others to create learning experiences; as video-game players take an active role in these narrative structures, they are able to challenge and change pre-existing superstructures in them (Gee, 2004; Jenkins, 2007). In particular, because so many

participants noted an affinity between video games and the workplace, this connection must be researched and explored more to determine which and how skills are learned within the video-game and associated affinity groups transfer into workplace affinity groups. Video games, thusly, become participatory learning spaces where learners engage and develop a critical consciousness as they develop the tools to transgress against hegemony.

The question of video games, play, and the public pedagogy must also be investigated further. Importantly, Storey (2009) asserted that popular culture should be studied within the academic discipline of culture studies; thus, if video games are a part popular culture, they should be examined within this cultural studies framework. Researching this discourse also would address concerns raised about the public pedagogy because, in alignment with current research, popular culture has an effect on the public pedagogy, it helps shape perceptions (Wright & Sandlin, 2009). Further, there is potential to investigate video games as part of studies on culture and the public pedagogy to address corporate hegemony (Giroux, 2001) and culture transgressions (hooks, 1994, 2010).

Of extreme interest and importance, one area of potential future study beyond the scope of this initial study are applications of adult learning theory on *how* these college men learn through playing video games, not just *what*. Although the participants outlined specific content and skills, there also were critical questions and applications to what they learned. Considering that Barab (2009) mentions "transformational play," it calls into question how the application of Mezirow's transformation learning theory (2000) could articulate disorientating dilemmas experienced by video-game players and its effect on their epistemology. Because these participants possessed fondness, admiration, and passion for their video games, the possibility

exists that these games altered their perceptions or meaning-making structures. Moreso, as video games incorporate more cultural components and influence into their lifeworld, it will be necessary to explore how players transform as part of these video games.

Likewise, there are applications to experiential learning as well. As participants experience these games and use those experiences to construct new meaning and apply it to new experiences, they engage in learning process that connects prior knowledge to new knowledge. It builds and expands connections. In this regard, application of experiential learning theories from Kolb (1984) can explore this process. Applications of Schon's (1990) reflection-in-action examine how learning occurs as a result of a surprise or unexpected occurrence, too. With the heavy emphasis of strategy and critical thinking, learning exactly how and what is learned in the specific context of playing video games would be valuable.

Finally, with the strong connection to the theory of social learning, there are potential applications for Goldman's social intelligence (2007) to understand how video games create positive, progressive inter- and intra-personal relationships. Likewise, given the change in stereotypical constructs of gamers and the emphasis on anti-social skills, there is opportunity to apply emotional intelligence (Golemen, 2007) to the learning and development of men, masculinity, and playing video games. Bandura's social learning theory (1979) can be applied to understand how relationships are learned, facilitated, and developed within this discourse, especially given the intensity placed on social interactions both in and from this discourse community. Application of these theories is critical because it also challenges the notion that video games create isolated individuals in society, and this application could dispel or open new spaces for learning and examination.

College Men, Video Games and Two-Year Institutions

Interestingly, two-year institutions were indicated as having no direct support or connection with video gamers or video game affinity groups. At best, video game organizations are treated as clubs, but the participants indicated a strong lack of attention from formal members of the community. This is another area vital for future study, if for no other reason than the changes in college enrollment patterns and the crisis regarding college men (American Association of Community College, 2012; Center of Masculinity and Men's Development, 2012). The social connotations and denotations regarding college men have changed, and institutions of higher education must address this change in terms of their formal, curricular experiences and informal, co-curricular programming.

There is the critical potential for video games to bridge the formality of the curriculum with the informality of the co-curriculum. As shown in the research (Hall, 2014; Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012), video games connect to cognitive development and formal classroom learning; more so, there is a connection between video games and the workplace (Gee & Hayes, 2012). Given the nature and unique positionality of two-year institutions, pedagogy must incorporate video games and the digital environment. They should be fore fronted in assignments and discussion. Strikingly, many participants noted connections between skills learned in video games and skills needed to be successful in the workplace or academia. As such, the formal learning environments of the classroom can incorporate new concepts and development, and the informal learning environments of clubs and activities can afford opportunities for the skills to be mastered and applied. As so many of the participants indicated, using skills and techniques developed through video games in either their workplace or academic

courses, these connections must be fostered and nurtured through innovative programs. Whether they address social or technical skills, video games clearly have an impact on the cognitive, affect, and metacognitive skills of the players. More so, many of these skills encompass both the workforce and academic classrooms. Skills applied to one can be applied to the other.

The potential impact of video games should also be included. Several participants noted video games as the bane of their academic existence. Study skills and student success courses should discuss video games and their potential pitfalls; additionally, and perhaps more importantly, these same courses can foster the skills development in gameing and help students apply them to success strategies. Especially since Kimmel (2008) indicates such negative aspects to video games, specific strategies to promote positive video game use and study within educational institutions must be explored. From an administrative, curricular, and student affairs perspective, ways to integrate video games into the college culture must be explored. Although outside the scope of this study, there are indications that video games can be used to engage and motivate students throughout the learning process (Squire, 2011; Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012).

Given the expansive backgrounds that two-year college students have (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), and given the increase of video games in culture, both as a form of cultural expression and as an industry (Jenkins, 2008), two-year institutions must develop programs and student organizations to foster support networks and affinity groups on campus. Much like students are doing online and in-game, two-year institutions should encourage real connections using video games on campus and in the community to encourage student retention, persistence, and success. Video games, additionally, are multi-modal texts; so, there is application for various learning

strategies and development. Ultimately, given the role and presence of the internet, distance learning, and social media in the lifeworld, higher education must embrace this technology into their programming. For example, as an active learning assignment, students should be able to design (either theoretically or in reality) a video game.

Video games, as shown, are part of the entertainment media, and should be treated as such in curricular and co-curricular programming. If television and film are a part of college-level programing, so should be video games (Davis & Laker, 2004; Davis & Harrison, 2014). First, from a practical point, video games can be incorporated to recruitment initiatives and programming. Institutions can, with the assistance of video game clubs, organize events around video games, such as local access network (LAN) events. At these events, students and/or prospective students could use institutional resources to engage in online gaming. Off-line gaming in student spaces is possible, too. Complementing these programs should be information about the video game industry as a potential career pathway for students. Second, within video games and (college) men and masculinity, there are clear indications for how issues of critical social theory can be applied to this co-curricular programming to help advance raising critical consciousness and social justice in students. The construction of men and masculinity is one section of our society, the potential to explore other intersections of race, gender, and class (among others) exists and must be incorporated.

Along aforementioned point, connections among two-year institutions, video games, and men are also important to foster the co-curricular relationships on campus, too. As noted in *Aspirations to Achievement: Men of Color and Community College*s (2014), specific challenges and concerns related to these demographics. In particular, these challenges warrant

conversations about race and gender, equity, student engagement and achievement, and improving outcomes for Men of Color. As noted earlier, future studies examining relationships between men of color, video games, and masculinity, should take these positionalities into account. Thus, more research needs to align with Davis (2002; Davis & Laker, 2004) and Davis and Harrison (2014) to determine how to synthesize video games into student affairs culture to promote social justice and student success. Although this study focused predominately on gender constructions, there are implications for race and other sociopolitical constructs. Much like video games, gender does not operate in isolation.

Limitations

Several limitations impacted this study. First, given the limitations of qualitative studies, the results of this analysis cannot be generalized to other populations and/or communities. Due to the specific contexts of each participant, the results are not applicable to other institutions, either. They are context-bound because of the unique culture of the participants and the institutional composition of the two-year institutions for, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, "Local conditions, in short, make it impossible to generalize" (p. 124).

Second, the participants in this study were all White men. Moreso, the majority were between the ages of 21 and 30. Given the population of the area, however, this sample was not abnormal. It does, however, raise questions about how participants from various sociocultural backgrounds would experience playing video games and their effects on learning, the workplace, and academic courses. As noted, gender is not isolated from other sociopolitical constructs, yet, the scope of this study targeted masculinity. How members from other communities experience video games could be vastly different from how these participants experienced it.

Third, I acknowledge that by using this methodology to gather participants, I received self-disclosing members of the gaming communities. This type of selection bias limited the data-gathering process to participants willing and comfortable enough to share information about themselves as (a) gamers and (b) men. Additionally, focusing on the construction of men and masculinity marginalizes the "gamer girl" movement and does not account for women who may share these masculine traits or how women view the construction of masculinity. Further, it reduced gender constructions to binaries and not "blocs." In a response to hegemonic masculinity, Demetriou (2001) suggested that gender occurs in group formations that allow for various members of society to displays these gender-roles. Thus, women may also exhibit masculinity. Although I acknowledge this dynamic in the study, I am considering it an avenue for future research and outside the specific scope of this study.

Fourth, several participants indicated attending a different higher education before their current two-year institution. Although outside the scope of this study, future studies should take into account previous institutions, and any life-experiences occurring there to determine how they impact the experiences of the current institution. Specifically, research must include what effect video games had on their (forced) decision to transfer institutions. Why and how participants leave one institution to enroll at another could dramatically impact their meaning-making structures.

Fifth, the institutional mission and connection to workplace and industry of two-year institutions must also be considered. Two-year higher education institutions have a closer and stronger connection to local business and industry members, and their students frequently focus more on the workplace. Further studies conducted at various institutional types should examine

if different students have different goals that may or may not be associated as strongly with the workplace.

Conclusion

The learning, development, and socialization occurring within these participants indicated that video games comprise a significant discourse from which men construct their masculinity, among others on campus. In this study, the men's lifeworld encompassed these video games, and there was a clear connection between immersion in these affinity groups and narratives about how masculinity is defined and performed. Higher education institutions, especially two-year institutions, must engage students within this discourse to encourage the replication and imitation of positive masculinity. More so, challenging Harris's (2008) model of masculinity development, video games must be examined within their own discursive context and be better understood as to how and where they integrate with the campus culture. They should not be lumped into a broader category of cocurricular and/or extracurricular events, organizations, or peer interaction groups; they should be treated as their own social entity. There are significant connections between video-game organizations and the development of cognitive, metacognitive, and affective skills; in addition to connections to other discourses.

The connections made by participants underscored the importance of those among two-year students, learning, and the workplace. Clearly, video-games possess a link to both workplace and academic success. Given the emphasis on workplace success and the diverse backgrounds of the students learning within them, video games affinity groups occupy a luminal space situated between academic and professional discourses. Video games do not have to be a

place of permanent limbo for men. Rather, they can be a transitional discourse that connects their skills, learning, and passions to professional and personal success.

The danger, however, appears within the internalization of hegemony and the negative aspects of masculinity within this discourse. As video games become more mainstream and more integrated into society, hegemonic aspects are perpetuated through innocuous actions. Hegemonic masculinity still appears in many of the games' narratives, and it is present in the new stereotypes being created about people who play video games. More so, it appears in simulators, such as the *Madden* franchise, which perpetuates values of hyper-masculinity, competition, and domination.

In closing, adult and higher education has an opportunity, to create programs and events that analyze and critique the socio-cultural elements present within these narratives and ludology. Although hegemonic masculinity is clearly present within the discourse, so, too, are counter-narratives, that question and challenge it. Fundamentally, video games are part of the post-modern semiosphere. The semiotics involves, necessitates, and warrants the following recommendations for higher education institutions. Men clearly use playing video games to construct their masculinity and other practical and abstract concepts, and there are both hegemonic and counter-narratives about masculinity present within these video games. Ultimately, there is potential for adult and higher education researchers to better understand the growth, learning, and development occurring within these affinity groups to help men become productive, responsible members of a democratic society—men in these communities are actively learning and achieving.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you start video gaming?
2. What is your favorite video game and why?
3. What do you think are some of the more popular male characters in video games? What makes them popular?
4. What do you think being masculine, or 'being a man', in our society means?
5. What specific habits and actions do you associate with being a man?
6. What are some problems and successes you've experienced with being a man?
7. What do you notice about men represented in video games? What do you think this means?
8. How would you define what it means to be a man?
9. Describe any experiences related to what you think being a gamer is like?
10. What things do you notice in video games? What things do you notice about playing video games?
11. Tell me about some habits and actions associated with video games affect you as a man?
12. Describe some habits and actions associated with video games affect you as a student?
13. Tell me how you think your educational institution affects you as a gamer?
14. How do you think you community affects you as a gamer?
15. Being a man is like <fill in the blank>
16. Being a gamer is like <fill in the blank>
17. Being a community college student is like <fill in the blank>

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

< Date >

<Name>
<Address>
<City, State, Zip Code>
Dear <Name of Recipient>:

My name is Eric Niemi, and I am currently completing requirements for my Doctorate of Education degree from Northern Illinois University. As part of the requirements, I am conducting an independent research study. I am looking to interview community college students for this study, and I would appreciate your assistance in helping me complete my research.

My contention is that, while video games frequently appear in the news as the cause of violence and anger, they are important places where men construct their ideas about what it means to be a man. Thus, I am looking for community college men who would be willing to talk about their experiences playing video games and share their thoughts on what it is like to be a man. I wish to study their experiences, thoughts, and opinions about this topic.

Interviews would be approximately one hour in length, and the interviews would occur in a public place of their choosing, such as a restaurant, coffee shop, or a location on campus. Questions will pertain to their experiences playing video games, their experiences about being a man, and their experiences as students and community members.

Importantly, these interviews will be confidential, and students will be provided a pseudonym that will be used throughout the interview and any subsequent publications. . Of course, students will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time they choose.

In close, I thank you for reading this letter and for helping me find participants for this research study. If you could share this letter and my contact information with interested students, I would greatly appreciate the assistance to this matter. Additionally, I have enclosed a flyer that I would like display at your establishment.

If there are other questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Eric J. Niemi
Cell phone: 847-361-6696
Email: ericniemi@hotmail.com

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Gamer:
My name is Eric Niemi, and I am conducting a research study about community college men who play video games as part of my requirements for my Doctorate of Education degree. As a gamer, you know video games are said to be violent, gory, a waste of time—well, I think you understand the point.

Thus, this study looks to challenge these assumptions and stereotypes about video games to better understand what learning and development occurs from playing them. Specifically, I am researching how gamers construct their ideas about what it means to be a man, and I would like to talk with you about your experiences and opinions.

If you are a currently enrolled community college student, a man, and interested in discussing your experiences with video games, please contact me at the information below to arrange for an interview. The interviews will be approximately 60 minutes, be tape-recorded, and will take place in a public place of your choosing—a local gaming store or coffee shop preferable. Also, these interviews will be confidential, and I will take steps to ensure the information you provide will be kept private.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about this topic, and I sincerely look forward to hearing your stories and experiences. I can be reached at 847.361.6696 or my email at ericniemi@hotmail.com

Thank you,

Eric Niemi

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the research project *The Games Men Play: How Community College Men Use Video Games to Construct Masculinity.* This project is being conducted by Eric Niemi, a doctoral candidate at Northern Illinois University.

I have been informed that the purpose of the study is to understand how community college men use video games to help construct masculinity. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to participate in a confidential 60 minute interview. I also understand and agree to potential follow-up interviews if necessary.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Eric Niemi at 847.361.6696 or at ericniemi@hotmail.com. Additionally, I understand that I may also contact Dr. Jorge Jeria at 815.753.9375 or at jjeria@niu.edu. If I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 815.753.8588.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include an increased understanding of how men construct their ideas about being men by playing video game. There may be personal benefit to myself as I better understand what I learn from playing video games, and there will be larger benefits about how this information can be used to help others understand what learning and development occurs through playing video games. Information from this study may be used to improve college programming and resources, too.

I have been informed that this study is confidential, and that records shall be kept by the research for a period of three years. These records shall be kept in a secure place located with the researcher's home office. More so, I will be given a pseudonym at the start of the interview process and this pseudonym shall be used in any subsequent publications using this interview data. Other information that could potentially lead to my identity shall also be changed to protect my anonymity.

I realize that Northern Illinois University policy does not provide for compensation for, nor does the University carry insurance to cover injury or illness incurred as a result of participation in University sponsored research projects.

I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I received a copy of this consent form.

Lastly, I _____ (name of participant) give my consent to have this interview session be recorded and kept confidential.

_____ _____

Signature Date