

Science AMA Series: I'm Dr. Rachel Kowert, a research psychologist, gamer, and parent based in Austin, Texas. I have spent my career studying video games and the gamers who love them. AMA!

RachelKowert¹and *ScienceAMAs*¹

¹Affiliation not available

April 17, 2023

Abstract

Hi reddit! Over the last 40 years, video games have transformed from a niche market to a multibillion-dollar industry. However, along with their growing popularity has come a growing concern about their ability to transform those who play them into antisocial killing machines who are desensitized to violence, have no friends, and will forever live in their parents' basements. But are these fears based in reality? Despite the fact that 'game studies' as a scientific field has been going strong for the last 20 years, the findings of the research in this field has largely remained insulated within scientific circles and inaccessible to the general public. Furthermore, sensationalized headlines continue to grossly misconstrue what scientific communities know about the science of video game effects. I recently published a new book, *A Parent's Guide to Video Games – The essential guide to understanding the impact of video games on your child's physical, social, and psychological well-being*, in an effort to break the long-standing barriers between science and society and better inform parents about the potential dangers and unique contributions that video games can bring to our everyday lives. Thank you all for your insightful questions! I will check back later and do my best to try and answer them all! I hope that my answers have provided some clarity to the science behind video game effects.

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Science AMA Series: I'm Dr. Rachel Kowert, a research psychologist, gamer, and parent based in Austin, Texas. I have spent my career studying video games and the gamers who love them. AMA!

RACHEL_KOWERT [R/SCIENCE](#)

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Thank you all for your insightful questions! I will check back later and do my best to try and answer them all! I hope that my answers have provided some clarity to the science behind video game effects.

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CORRESPONDENCE:

DATE RECEIVED:

December 16, 2016

DOI:

10.15200/winn.148180.06263

ARCHIVED:

December 15, 2016

CITATION:

Rachel_Kowert , r/Science ,

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The Winnower

3:e148180.06263 , 2016 , DOI:

[10.15200/winn.148180.06263](#)

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Hi Dr. Kowert, Thanks for heading this AMA. Where would you draw the line between a healthy gaming appetite and a problematic obsession, does it differ with regard to age?

[Grain-Fed](#)

I think there is a lot of confusion as to where clinicians and researchers would draw the line for problematic and/or addicted gaming. There is a lot of assumptions that a lot of playing = addicted or problematic playing. However, in the scientific community, video game play is not believed to be considered problematic or potentially addictive play until players have lost all control over their playing and it has begun to have a detrimental effect on all aspects of their lives (including education, work, friendships, hobbies, general health, and psychological well-being) for an extended period of time (3 – 6 months).

I haven't seen any research with regards to differences across age groups, though problematic game play and addictive behavior have been found to be more common [among males](#) and [players who show the symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#).

It should be pointed out that the rates of problematic video game play are generally low and typically reported to be less than [10% of the general video game playing population](#) (however, [some studies have placed the number closer to .02%](#))

The obvious question - is there any real credible evidence between violent games and real-life violent behaviour

[Chatsubo_657](#)

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You say this is obvious, but there are many people who still worry that there is a direct relationship between playing violent video games and committing violent crimes. I can drone on about this for ages, but here's the short answer: no. There is no evidence that playing violent video games makes someone more likely to commit violent acts or violent crime. In fact, a direct relationship between violent video game play and violent behavior is highly unlikely because if there were a direct relationship, then we should have seen an increase in crime over the last twenty years that corresponded with the rise in the popularity of violent video games. However, the opposite has been found. Over the last 20 years, violent video game consumption has increased alongside a steady decline in youth violence (see [here](#) and [here](#)). This is also discussed in more detail in [A Parent's Guide](#) and [The Video Game Debate](#) if you are looking for a more detailed, scientific analysis).

How do the psychological consequences of gaming compare to other leisure activities especially team sports or reading of fantasy books in regards to aggression and escapism?

[hooge86](#)

Not sure exactly what you mean - do you mean how playing video games may contribute to increases in aggression and/or how video games are used for escapism?

In terms of escapism, I think video games are on par with any other leisure activity that an individual can enjoy. Escapism is just a desire to engage in a leisure activity to seek distraction from day-to-day frustrations. In that sense, video games are great at that but so is reading a book, going for a run, painting, etc. I have not seen any research looking different leisure activities and how well they satisfy our desire to "escape" from time to time.

The research on video games and aggression is its own beast that I can speak to if that for some time in and of itself. In terms of as compared to other leisure activities, I cannot say that I have seen any research measuring direct comparisons to other activities.

Hi Dr!

I give a lot of credit to two of my former guild leaders for shaping me in to the person I am today, and made life long relationships with many friends I met online.

How do we quantify relationships like this and show the public that social interactions we make online can be as meaningful and fulfilling as interactions off the screen?

I'm going to get my Mom your book for Christmas. Thanks!

[Young_Zaphod](#)

I too have made lifelong friends with my former guildies and guild leaders and they have definitely changed my life for the better! Unfortunately, there remains a stigma to meeting friends online, especially through online games. Friends made through online games are often perceived as "less valuable" friendships because "how can online friends be be "real" friends if you don't interact with them face to face?". I think that this stigma and misperception of online friends as "not real" friends will begin to change over time as online games continue to become more prolific. Just like with online dating. [The stigma has only just begun to lift](#).

In the meantime, you can take solace in the fact that friendships made through online games have been found to be more intimate and more long lasting than friendships made through other mediated contexts (social networking, for instance) and can be as "real" as any "offline" friendship (see [here](#) and [here](#). I also talked about this a lot in [my PhD research](#)).

I hope your Mom enjoys the book! There is a little bit in there about the value of online gaming communities - hopefully, that will help to break the stigma!

Hi Dr. Kowert, thanks for the AMA!

This might be a little outside your field, but how do you feel about so-called "screen time" among small children? It seems to be a hot-button issue in parenting circles and I wonder what the scientific consensus is on the influence of device exposure at young ages.

[superhelical](#)

My personal opinion - I think that screens are everywhere and with every passing day it becomes harder and harder to keep our children from engaging with screens. I mean, pretty much every under 3 year old I know has a tablet of their own of some kind. I myself do let my 2 year old have some screen time – typically it is Skyping with Grandma or playing a game that requires you to identify shapes and colors. However, I never just give my child the tablet to play with at will. It is always treated as a shared activity where I am also there reinforcing the lessons about shapes/colors, what have you. Coincidentally, playing with your children is also a great way to [strengthen family bonds](#) - whether it is on a screen or at a playgroup.

Scientific consensus - The American Pediatric Association is the one responsible for setting screen time recommendations. They actually just came out with a new report that draws more of a soft line. The recommendation used to be no screen time for children under the age of 2. Now, they [differentiate between "good" \(i.e., Skyping with grandma\) and "bad" \(playing games by themselves in a corner\) screen time](#). While many in the scientific community welcomed this new distinction, some researchers in the field find their recommendations to [remain unnecessarily restrictive](#).

It is also important to remember that screen time should just be one of many activities your children engage in. Especially for small children, free, un-structured play, manipulating blocks and other objects in their hand (puzzles, building blocks, etc.), playing "pretend", and other forms of traditional play are [very important for the development of a range of cognitive skills](#) such as hand-eye-coordination, spatial awareness, and even social skills.

What is a common misconception about gaming that your research has dispelled?

[TheWorriedWart](#)

I am proud to say that my own research has helped to dispel the validity of the stereotype of online gamers as overweight, anti-social, socially inept, addicted/obsessive, loners (see [here](#) and [here](#)). As an online gamer myself, I was particularly disheartened at the incredibly negative stereotype that had developed around online gamers and online gaming communities ([Make Love, Not Warcraft](#), anyone?), Unfortunately, while my research found that this stereotype is largely not supported in reality (i.e., online gamers are not particularly overweight, anti-social, socially inept, addicted, or without friends) this does not mean that this negative stereotype does not persist in the minds of many.

Hello, do you believe there will be an emergence of psychological problems with virtual reality gaming... For example would at risk individuals to psychosis find it difficult to acknowledge reality from virtual reality?

[Mrpoopibuthole](#)

In my personal opinion, I do not think that the rise of VR will lead to a general rise in psychological problems. I also do not think it would necessarily exacerbate psychoses, especially in terms of any long-term consequences.

Perhaps in the short-term, VR could cause some psychological distress if the user could not fully differentiate between reality and virtual reality a la [Black Mirror Style](#). However, from what I have experienced with VR, we are still quite ways away from that level.

What games show the most development potential for younger children (~5 or so) I know many of them are starting to get into minecraft, and I feel like that can help them develop problem-solving skills, planning, research and a whole host of other real-life skills. First-person shooters I don't think they offer much in the way of development.

[nate](#)

Each video game brings along its own set of challenges and potential for skill development/learning. I can't say that one specific game is better than any other although different genres of games are better at promoting certain skills over others.

For instance, Minecraft can be a great learning tool for a wide variety of skills [-such as motor skills and creative thinking](#). In fact, many teachers are now [integrating Minecraft into their curriculums](#).

Also, you shouldn't discredit First-person shooter games so quickly! First-person shooter type games can also offer opportunities for skill development as these games are typically fast-moving, action based games. This requires the player to pay attention to small changes in the environment and react quickly. Over time, this could hone visual processing speed and accuracy (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

when doing a study for games, how do you select a control group? Do you choose people who aren't "gamers" or is it a mix of whoever you get. Also, how many repetitions are usually required for any statistical significance

[Masterdavis](#)

If you are conducting an experimental study about video games, the qualities of your control group will depend on the specific research questions you are asking. Are you interested in differences between video game players who identify as "gamers" (i.e., a social identity that indicates being a member of the gaming community) and people who play video games who do not identify as gamers (i.e., players who do not consider themselves a member of the gaming community)? Or are you interested in the differences between people who play video games and people who do not play video games? Or people who play online video games as compared to those who only play offline video games? It really can vary!

Not sure what you mean by how many repetitions. Typically data is collected and then analyzed. The analysis techniques should have been determined beforehand and therefore typically only requires one major analysis which either reveals significant differences or not.

Hmmm would you advise children, for example around 3-8 years old to play video games? Since playing is an important occupation for these kids as well as for their development. And at what age to what amount does it become unhealthy, is there a trend to this?

[notostarfish](#)

Video games are a common leisure activity for many kids in this age range and you can be assured that there is no evidence to suggest that playing video games at this age will be detrimental. The key here is to be intentional and present with the games that your children are playing. By intentional, I mean be aware of the kinds of games they are playing and make sure they are age- and content appropriate. By being present, I mean either play games with them or simply be in the room while they are playing. This will not only allow you to see what kinds of games your children are playing but spend quality time with them rather than having video games become a "digital babysitter" (like the TV was in my generation!).

In terms of your second question, there is no magic number that determines when it becomes unhealthy (see [here](#) for more details about problematic/addicted gaming)

Hi Dr. Kowert. Have you found any interesting correlation between gaming and the drive for success? I've been imagining that a gamers personal taste may be influenced by what they may be lacking in their lives. Could this be true in some way? I myself feel like my gaming can sometimes be an easy form of accessible achievement. It's rather pacifying, perhaps not in the best of ways. Thanks for your time and AMA!

[thebigmack](#)

I was just talking with a colleague about the achievement systems in games the other day and I can easily see how you could come to that conclusion. However, there is no research that I know of that has looked at the relationship between playing games and "a drive for success".

I can say that [research has found no differences](#) between video game players and non-video game players (we are talking about the average game player, the patterns are slightly different for those on the highest end of video game involvement) in their level of educational, academic, or occupational success. Drawing from these findings, it could be suggested that game players do not have a *greater* drive for success nor a lower drive (as insinuated by the stereotypes of gaming groups). However, further research in this area would be needed to clarify if these findings truly reflect a lack of difference in *drive* or simply achievement.

Hi Doc, 39 Years old gamer here with small kids. I enjoy playing GTA 5, including the violent stuff. But now my 4 year old daughter always wants to join. Usually just to change Franklin outfit and go to bed when it's dark outside. She is making it very clear to me that she doesn't want to fight, just me pulling out a gun makes her upset. She's not too upset with me racing around town and jacking cars though (she does say sorry with each fender bender). What do you think, should I let her? To be clear we live in a gun free society and English is not our first language.

[RentaAce](#)

I recently had another parent ask me a similar question. He was concerned that his 7 year-old daughter enjoyed watching play Halo as he wasn't sure it was the content was age appropriate for her.

I would not say you shouldn't let her play as it sounds you two are having a lot of fun. However, it is true that the content of GTA is not age-appropriate for a 4 year-old (as outlined by the [ESRB](#) and [PEGI](#) age-rating guidelines). If you are concerned that the content is not appropriate (which, from your question it sounds like you are), I would suggest finding a different game that is more appropriate for you and your daughter to play together. There are many action/adventure games available today on all gaming systems that would be more appropriate for the younger crowd but you would likely still find fun (To the parent who asked me the question about Halo, I suggested the [Ratchet and Clank series](#)).

What is the healthiest way to get children to play in moderation? Ways in which we can get their focus off playing the game all the time to playing when they have free time?

[AlgonquinPenguin](#)

It is always best to approach any kind of activity with a "moderation" mind set, including video games. If you are concerned that your child is spending too many hours sat in front of a screen playing video games during their free time, you could try to find some inspiration from the games that they play for other kinds of activities. For example, if they like playing sports games maybe they would like to join a team sport? Or attend a live sporting event? If your children like fantasy games, maybe they would like to work on a costume for Halloween next year inspired by their favorite character? Or perhaps they could be enticed to delve in to some fantasy novels such as [The Hobbit](#) or [A Song of Ice and Fire](#)?

What's your favorite game?

[remydantonswatch](#)

Of all time? Final Fantasy 6 (I know FF7 is the typical the fan favorite but I stick by my somewhat controversial choice)!

I'm a PhD Student in Geology, I have a girlfriend and I love gaming. Although I am not shy or an introvert, I quite enjoy being alone in front of my PC. Is there serious research on the effect of PC gaming on relieving lonesomeness for people that are isolated, deliberately alone or aged?

[KyrgyzManas](#)

This is something that I have looked at in my own work.

Researchers have long hypothesized that people who are lonely and/or isolated may be more likely to play online games. Supporting these claims, people who are lonely have been found to be [more likely to play online games than those who are not lonely](#). However, in regards to online games' ability to ease loneliness, there have (unfortunately) not been many studies looking at loneliness and game playing over time. Of the only study that I know of that has (that did not focus on addicted/problematic players), [online game play was not found to directly alleviate loneliness](#) (however, it also did not contribute to increased loneliness, which is a concern held by many).

Hello Dr. Kowert,

Thanks for doing this AMA, it's a really interesting research field to be a part of. I'm part of a research group (based in the Netherlands) that focuses on human and technology interactions and in particular aimed at technology acceptance and embracement.

One of our projects revolved around the development of games for use in therapeutic settings with adolescents that have issues with "externalised behaviour" (autism spectrum, aggressive disorders etc). I'm interested in hearing your view point on potentially using (existing and/or specifically developed) games for therapeutic purposes. What would be your biggest concern(s), but also your strongest reason(s) for trying it?

And expanding on that question, do you see video games as potentially more than just an entertainment media, and if so, how?

Thanks for your time!

[Koekjeerbij1](#)

This is a fabulous question and one that is very close to my heart. I think that video games have an enormous potential to be used therapeutically in treatment plans for a wide range of diagnoses. I actually gave quite a long talk about the use of video games as "social rehabilitative tools" (i.e., used as a potentially therapeutic space for individuals who are socially anxious, socially isolated, lonely/depressed) last year at the Clash of Realities conference in Cologne, Germany. [You can watch it here](#). This talk also touches on your second question (are games more than an entertainment media) - short answer: yes. Especially when we start talking about online gaming. I think that the unique integration of a *social* space within a *playful* space - that is highly accessible and affordable - provides an incredible range of therapeutic opportunities.

What type of games have had the worst impact on the people playing it?

--SOURCE--

There has not been any research (that I know of) identifying one specific game or genre of game that has any more/less impact on negative measurable outcomes than others.

Very interesting topic. I have too many questions to ask them all ;)

1. Have you studied and compared the different connection between gamers and the representation of sex, violence and drugs in game depending on the region the gamers are from. In the USA afaik violence is no problem, sex is evil. Ofcourse the "hot coffee mod" from GTA (San Andreas?) comes to mind. Afaik a grandmother bought her young grandchild the game and was furious when she heard about the hot coffee mod. I don't know if this story is real or not, but for me, an European, it was always strange to think about this: Using a sniper rifle to shoot the head of a civilian so that a little blood fountain comes out of the neck is ok, but pressing forward and backward as fast as you can to have pixelated sex is too much.
2. Overall it seems the region plays a major role in how games and gamers are viewed in the public eye. Have you studied these differences and how these differences influence the gamers?

3. Have you studied the different influences of offline and online gaming? As well as the difference between online PVP and online PVE gaming and the influence on younger children (<12 years)? I always think it is problematic if parents don't understand that the internet is a public space despite the children feeling safe because they are at home. I've started my online gaming career at 16, and I'm thankful for that. Seeing 12 years old playing Counterstrike is just terrible, not because of the violence in game, but because of the toxic communities.

[fastgiga](#)

Whew! This is a long one! I will attempt to answer them all:

1. Funny you should ask this question, because I recently worked on a cross-cultural study (Germany/USA) looking at the perception of explicit content (violent and sexual) ([you can see the slides for this presentation about this study as it was presented at the National Communication Conference in 2015](#)).

TL;DR version: As predicted, the violent content was viewed as more explicit by German than US players. Unexpectedly, all participants thought that the sexually explicit content was inappropriate but I think that is because our content was *extraordinarily* explicit (see slides for details!)

1. There does seem to be some cultural variations. For instance, the game [Manhunt](#) was banned from being sold in Germany, however you can freely purchase it in the US (if you are 18 or older). I think that the differences in how games/gamers are viewed culturally has to do with differences in the importance of various [morals/values within a society](#). As discussed in the study I linked above, Germans tend to place more weight on the importance of Harm/Care whereas in the US we place more importance on upholding the standards of Purity/Sanctity. There are not too many cross cultural studies looking into this in relation to games and gamers specifically, but I think it would be a really interesting line of research.
2. I have looked at differences between groups of online and offline players but not in relation to gaming communities. I do not know of any research looking at that or specifically between PVP and PVE communities. I can say there is a lot of research looking at toxic gaming communities (particularly in relation to sexism and misogyny (in fact, I have a whole chapter dedicated to that in [A Parent's Guide](#)).

I have spend a lot of time playing video games and I credit my reflexes and multitasking abilities to the time I have spent playing video games. Am I wrong to credit these skills being improved upon because of gaming or are those who have called my stupid and lazy and that video games don't develop skills wrong?

[KiltedDemon](#)

Video game play has been associated with the [improvement of a range of cognitive skills](#) including improved hand-eye-coordination (which is related to faster reaction time) and problem solving/multi-tasking. I wouldn't say playing video games deserves all the credit but it could have played a role.

Hi, Dr. Kolwert - thanks for doing this AMA!

I recently moved with my significant other (across the country, our first time living together), and it became clear to me that he was actually spending a lot more time playing video games than I had previously realized. I find the amount of time he spends playing - upwards of 8 hours a day, in some cases - concerning, although I have a hard time articulating why. I *can* say that it is probably hampering his search for a new job, and he doesn't seem to be building a social group here at all, which I think is probably affected by his engaging in one activity for so many hours per day.

When I bring it up, though, he points to all the positives of gaming and suggests that I am just being critical because of gaming stereotypes. What are your thoughts? Does your research suggest that gaming becomes problematic at a certain point? What recommendations do you have for having productive conversations about gaming with my SO?

[sospeso](#)

There are positives and negatives to any activity, including video game play. If you are concerned about problematic play/addiction, I would suggest [taking a look at this thread](#) If video game play has already interfered with his job search, then there may be some cause for concern.

Unfortunately, I cannot give specific advice relating to your SO as I do not know them or their particular situation. If you are interested in learning more about video game addiction specifically, I can suggest looking up the work of [Prof. Dr. Mark Griffiths](#) and/or [Dr. Tony Van Rooij](#). They are both leading experts in the field of video game addiction/Internet Gaming Disorder.

Would you say that in your own opinion that video gaming for prolonged periods of time at an early age increases the risk of disorders developing. Such as ADHD ? where constant new stimulation shapes the young mind?

[Wagamaga](#)

There is no scientific evidence to suggest this is the case, particularly with ADHD. In fact, preliminary research has shown that video games might useful tools for helping [reduce impulsivity](#) and [improve working memory](#) among those with ADHD (although, further research is needed before video games can be incorporated into treatment programs)

How long do you believe an adolescent should play video games per day? What are the negatives of playing too much?

[GutturalPine672](#)

There is no "magic number" in terms of how much is too much. If you are concerned about problematic/addicted play (and its consequences) please see [this thread](#)

You mentioned in the book that playing video games with friends after school is not necessarily something to worry about, but time spent alone could be. Given the data on the past and current states of the gaming industry, how plausible is the idea that (educational) video gaming as a family or classroom activity could become a cultural norm in the future? Are there any social incentives for game-makers to make more family-friendly, informational games versus the violent ones?

Has any of the research revealed the psyche and/or upbringing of the game-makers/storytellers and if so, in what way?

[figsaw](#)

I think that it is very likely that the gaming industry will begin to pay attention to family gaming/classroom gaming especially after the [highly successful integration of Minecraft classrooms](#). The interesting development here will be whether companies begin to specifically generate "educational" games or simply new games that can be utilized to promote education (like Minecraft has done).

The issue here is the fine line between "educational" games and games that promote education/learning. For example, when I was a child, I remember very clearly playing [Math Blaster](#) ...it was not very fun and I do not think it made a substantial difference in my learning. However, I also remember very clearly playing [Oregon Trail](#) which was also a designed for learning but not in such a 1+2 = 3 way. The point here is that that are typically created for learning are the kinds of games that no one wants to play - they are repetitive, the objective is obvious, and are not nearly as fun to play as other games.

I think if game makers can be creative and just keep creating fun games, the learning will follow. In fact, a lot of learning already happens in video games that aren't intended to be specifically educational such as [leadership, teamwork and creative thinking skills](#). Also, it is important to recognize that so-called violent games [can also be educational](#).

In regards to your second question, I am not sure exactly what you mean. Do you mean is there

something different/special about the personality of game makers/story tellers? I cannot say that I have come across any research specifically related to that question.

Thank you for doing this AMA! My question may regard parenting more than science, but I ask because I know you'll provide an answer that is sufficiently more scientific than my question.

Dr. Kowert,

I have a son who will be 6 next Summer. I will likely purchase a Nintendo Switch when it is released, and it will likely become his 'first' console. He has played games before with me on my PC and Wii U (everything appropriate, of course), but, what exactly should a parent consider when first introducing a very young child to videogames that they can approach on their own, in their own time, as they please?

[CrossMaster_Flash](#)

As every child is different, it is difficult to give "catch all" type of advice. I think I would suggest moderation for younger children (such as your son) as childhood is an important time for the development of a range of abilities - social, physical, and psychological (see [this thread]) (https://www.reddit.com/r/science/comments/5ihbpc/science_ama_series_im_dr_rachel_kowert_a_research/db8mdqt/).

The general advice I give parents to parents regarding how to best approach video games in their family lives (or any kind of media for that matter) is to try their best to **be intentional, be present, and have fun.**

By **intentional** I mean being aware of the content in the games that you are bringing into your home for your children. This isn't just about age ratings but also the content itself. The [ESRB](#) is responsible here in America for providing age ratings and placards describing any explicit content. So if you don't want your children playing games with suggestive themes or explicit language, you need to pay attention to the content descriptors alongside the age ratings. (this is probably less of an issue with a 6 year old and more applicable to the pre-teen/teenage player).

In terms of **being present** – Talk to your children about the games they want to play and the games they are playing when they are at other houses and ask them what kind of games they like (the Holiday season is a perfect excuse for this because you can ask them what games they are hoping to get for Christmas). This not only shows your interest in what interests them but gives you an idea of what kinds of games they might like to explore.

I also suggest that parents give video games a go and play the games with them. For the younger age (your 6 year old for instance) this is perfect because they are more enthusiastic about playing games with Mom and Dad and playing together is a great opportunity for [family bonding!](#)

Although, I understand not every parent wants to play video games and if you are the parent of a teenager it is highly likely they will not be as open to the idea of you playing with them. Instead, you could sit in the same room and watch them playing. Not only will this give you a first hand look at what kinds of games they are playing but it will also give you some time to spend with your child. Even if they are seemingly distracted by playing the game, your children will know you are making an effort to sort of get involved in what interests them and you may be surprised at how they might open up to you and talk about all of things just because you are there in the room with them.

I very clearly remember being a child and having my Mom sit and watch my brother and I play *Super Mario Brothers*. Sometimes she would play – and ALWAYS die on what she called "The first mushroom" – but other times she would just sit in the room with us and watch us for a bit and it was wonderful to have her there and feel like she was taking an interest in what we were doing and being engaged with the game and us.

And lastly, **have fun!** Games are supposed to be fun after all. And like I mentioned [in another thread](#), if you don't like video games, you can definitely use them as a jumping off point for other activities that your whole family might enjoy. For instance, if your child likes sports games, maybe that means they would also enjoy going to a sporting event. Or if they like fantasy-type games – like *World of Warcraft* – maybe they'd like to craft an elaborate costume for Halloween inspired by their favorite in-game

characters? Maybe that is something you could do together?

Hi! I ran an experiment for my undergraduate thesis that was testing for the impact of violent images from video games on stereotyping and prejudicial behavior (due in large part to the backlash against the release of Resident Evil 5). Ultimately I found extremely little in the data analysis afterwards and part of me has always wondered if my experiment design was fundamentally flawed, partially due to many participants' relative inexperience with console gaming. As someone active in research, have you found video games to be difficult to study the effects of video games due to the complexity of video games themselves?

[ChiUnit4evr](#)

I have found that it is very difficult to run experimental studies with video games because of all the extraneous factors that come along with it. The best attempt I've seen to control for these extra potential "noise" factors are the studies done by [Malte Elson for his PhD thesis](#). After reading his thesis and familiarizing myself with his work (I was lucky enough to work in the same research lab with him for two years), it became clear that video game modding was the best bet in terms of quieting all the extra factors and trying to only assess your actual variables of interest. I suggest giving his thesis a read - it is quite interesting!

Hello Dr. Kowert,

I'm 38 and have been playing games my whole life. I've been back and forth personally on my views of how violence/adult subject matter affects kids. This is what gets pretty much all of the attention and I think will still be debated for some time.

However, there is something much more deeply disturbing to me that I would be interested to hear your thoughts on. And that is of the racist/misogynistic/hateful comments that are spewed online. I don't mean the off color joke (which isn't ok in my book but will never be able to be fully stamped out in my opinion), but the outright, very blatant, extremely disturbing talk that goes on. The thing that bothers me most about it isn't so much that hateful people are saying these things anonymously (which will happen), but that I almost never hear anyone say anything against this. People often don't even "mute" the player (some do of course). My point is that there doesn't seem to be any social pressure in this area to NOT be hateful. I've seen popular twitch streamers of DOTA let SUPER messed up things go with just an uncomfortable laugh. You can tell the comment(s) bothered them but they let it slide.

Lastly, I've noticed a very sharp uptick in the amount and types of hateful comments since our election. Seems to be a sort of open season mentality.

Thanks for taking the time to do this AMA. Looking forward to hear what you and others think on this.

[capomico](#)

Oh gosh, this is a very complex question that requires a long answer!

There is a lot of research about why people [are more likely to be mean online](#) - they feel safe behind the screen, they feel relatively anonymous, there are little "real-world" consequences to their actions, etc.

In regards to your question specifically, the [blatantly sexist and misogynistic comments](#) in online gaming communities have been well documented and are absolutely cause for concern (In fact, I did not originally plan on discussing this topic in [A Parent's Guide](#) but ended up dedicating a whole chapter to it after I realized it is at the forefront of many parents' minds (right up there with violence/aggression)). I wish I had more time to discuss this (but my time is almost up!) but I did write about this topic in more detail about this in a [freely accessible 2014 op-ed](#).

Long story short, a lot of people stand idly when they witness this kind of behavior because they are unsure of what to do and/or because, while it may be wrong and horrible, it isn't impacting them directly.

My advice would be to speak with your children about the presence of this behavior and let them know that it is not acceptable and if they witness this kind of behavior they need to report it to the in-game moderators and/or via the game system moderation systems. The more we stand up to this kind of behavior the more it will (hopefully) fall out of favor.

If boys and girls were raised the same way would boys still make up the majority of gamers?

[aflockofhawks](#)

It is true that video games [are typically socialized as a more acceptable form of entertainment/play for young boys than young girls](#). Despite this, [male players do not constitute the majority of video game players \(nor have they for some time\)](#). They are, however, [more likely to identify with the social group of "gamers" \(i.e., identify as a gamer\)](#), which could be related to the difference in early gender socialization processes (i.e., the different ways in which boys and girls are raised in relation to the appropriateness of video games as an acceptable leisure activity).

Hi Dr. Kowert!

I noticed that you've done work on Facebook and attachment suggesting that usage was largely independent of social skills. And that people with social anxiety may find FB particularly useful. I would predict similar outcomes for a study done on people using Reddit. You suggest future work could use attachment as a way of examining other kinds of SNS work. I've recently been doing research with selfie taking behaviors and I'm curious about applying this to Snapchat and selfie sharing (private and public). Our current work finds no meaningful relationship between introvert and extrovert but this is an interesting way to examine it.

Do you think attachment anxiety may impact selfie taking and sharing behaviors? Especially since there is a wide range of selfie taking contexts and response norms are typically to say positive things or like/love the content?

[firedrops](#)

I'm not sure introvert/extrovert is really the right distinction you should be going for here ([this article has always stayed with me](#)). I think that it would be interesting to try and see if there is a relationship with anxious or avoidant anxiety as individuals with an insecure attachment have been found to use mediated communication in different ways as well as receive different perceived benefits from mediated communication (as explained in [my Facebook article you reference](#) as well as [this one about online gaming](#)).

I think it is possible that it impacts selfie taking/sharing as individuals with an insecure attachment may be seeking social validation through the use of this social media. It would be nice to have more research in this area to really get an idea of the global picture - i.e., the potential social and psychological benefits of mediated communication/social media for those who are insecurely attached. This line of work is rather patchy at the moment and definitely in need of some more data!

Sounds like you are on the right track for an interesting line of research!

Hello Dr. Kowert!

Based on your experience and research, what are the most striking benefits of growing up with video games and what's the age you would consider to be most appropriate for youngsters to start playing video games (suited to their age, naturally)?

[Borconi](#)

I don't know about *most appropriate* but I can say that I have a two-year old and pretty much every other two-year old I've met already has their own tablet with loads of games. I think that for the very young (under 5 or 6) games should be used sparingly as playing video game should only be one of many activities they are participating in during this critical period of development ([see this thread for](#)

[more on that](#)).

Most striking benefits? A love for the [Zelda theme song](#)? Knowing quirky pop culture references for the weekly pub quiz? I kid - there can be a lot of benefits to playing video games (it can [strengthen social bonds](#), it can be a great [activity for family bonding](#), it provides a safe space to [try on new roles and role-play, which can bolster creativity and creative thinking](#), just to name a few.

As someone thinking about having children soon I wanted to ask what do you think is a healthy balance between gaming and other activities for children of various ages? Any strategies to use to prevent or reduce children getting aggressive over being denied screen time?

[ixid](#)

I've spoken to this several times during this AMA now (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

In terms of reducing aggression because of being denied screen time, I'm afraid I don't have an answer to that. If your child is lashing out because they are not getting what they want, they are expressing frustration. Strategies to deal with frustration in your children vary, but I personally like the advice from this article from [Psychology Today](#).

Could you please rate game genres based on which age group they should be first played from toddler(?) to adolescent years?

[judygore](#)

Genres are such broad categories it is difficult to create a list like that. My suggestion, in terms of finding age and content appropriate games for your children, would be to follow the [suggestions provided by the ESRB](#). Age and content ratings are clearly placed on the packaging of all video games.

Doctoral student here. Looking to do a dissertation on the benefits of gaming to individuals who engage with mood disorders (primarily, anxiety, or depression). Do you have any specific ideas of what direction research should go, and examples of literature that should be referenced? Any assistance would be helpful! Thanks!

[speedforcejedi](#)

I think you will find [this thread](#) useful!

For more ideas on where to start with your literature search, I suggest starting with a search of [Ludodemia](#)

As a gamer yourself, do you struggle with confirmation bias? If so, how do you work around it?

[azureharri](#)

Yes, of course! No one is completely safe from confirmation bias. To do my best to avoid it, I always make sure my hypotheses are well grounded in the literature, that my data analysis plan is set prior to data collection, and avoid questionable research practices [like the ones discussed in this article](#).

What have you been playing recently?

[Bioluminescence](#)

Recently? A lot of kiddo games with my little one. So hard to find time between parenting + writing a book! I have found some time here and there to play a little Diablo 3 and am really hoping to have time this week to finally tuck in to Final Fantasy XV!

Does achieving success in video games lower our incentive to achieve success in real life? I've seen many gamers treat their gaming success like it's something real.

[nefuratios](#)

I'm not aware of any research specifically relating incentives/success from in game to out of game. But I think you might find [this previous thread](#) on video games and the "drive for success" interesting.

What would you say is the most prominent psychological effect gaming has had on our society?

[HuffMar](#)

I would have to say the social connectedness that online gaming has brought us. Online games are so unique in their integration of a social space within a playful space - that is highly accessible and affordable - provides an incredible range of opportunities.

The unique nature of online games themselves is likely why friendships made through online games have been found to be more intimate and more long lasting than friendships made through other mediated contexts (see [here](#) and [here](#). I also talked a lot about in [my PhD research](#)).