

# Not all gamers are low scorers on friendships, relationships

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Not all video game players are destined for lives filled with failing relationships and dwindling friendships, according to Penn State researchers, who say that a lot depends on the role of the game-playing activity in the gamer's life.

"There's a common stereotype that if you play video games, then you are a loner," said Benjamin Hickerson, assistant professor of recreation, parks and tourism management. "But it may have more to do with how a person is involved in gaming that determines how their social support is affected."

In a study of people who played multi-player, first-person shooter games, like the [Call of Duty](#) and Halo, [gamers](#) who organized their lives around gaming activities tended to experience a negative effect on their friendships and relationships. On the other hand, the researchers, who published their findings in the current issue of *Society and Leisure*, found that gamers who primarily played the [game](#) as a way to reinforce [social bonds](#) said they experienced higher levels of [social ties](#) and support.

Hickerson said that behavioral indicators, such as the amount of time and money spent on games, were not related to the gamers' success in maintaining their social ties.

"What the study does seem to point out is that video gaming is not always a negative," Hickerson said. "Players may actually be doing something positive when gaming becomes a way for games to connect

with friends who they otherwise may not be able to spend time with, especially friends who they are not near geographically."

Multi-player, first-person shooter games allow video game players to compete online by themselves against other players around the world, or they can team with other players in a variety of combat scenarios.

Hickerson, who worked with Andrew Mowen, associate professor of recreation, parks and tourism management, said that people derive meaning from leisure activities in a variety of ways, including using them to help establish and maintain friendships—social bonding—and a need to organize their lives around the activities—centrality.

The researchers, who relied on a scale that experts use to assess a person's involvement in leisure activities, said that the other factors of the scale, such as, deriving pleasure and self-identity from video-gaming, did not significantly affect social ties.

To collect data for the study, the researchers surveyed the gamers who were waiting in line for a late night release of a new version of the video game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, at two central Pennsylvania video game stores. Hickerson said that gamers who attend these new release gatherings tend to be both behaviorally and psychologically committed to the activity.

The researchers asked 175 video game customers to fill out a questionnaire about their video game playing habits and attitudes. Hickerson said 166 completed and returned the questionnaire.

To assess whether or not video game playing served a central role in the life of the gamer, the participants were asked to assess the truth of statements, such as, "I find that a lot of my life is organized around video gaming" and "I invest most of my energy and resources in video

gaming."

The researchers also measured what role social bonding played in their gaming by asking them to what extent they agreed with statements such as, "Most of my friends are in some way associated with video gaming" and "I enjoy discussing video gaming with my friends."

To measure the behavioral investment, the researchers asked the participants to estimate how much time and money they spend on video game playing. On average, the respondents spent 20.5 hours per week playing video games and a majority spent more than \$200 a year on video games.

However, some gamers who participated in the study were deeply invested in the game, both financially and behaviorally, Hickerson said.

"Some participants indicated they spent more than 100 hours per week on playing games, which is well above the national average," said Hickerson.

"These are people who are thoroughly invested in gaming and people who are organizing their lives around playing video games." Hickerson said that this information could help [video game](#) designers create games that identify problematic behaviors, such as excessive centrality, and build games with features that help the gamers maintain [friendships](#) and relationships.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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