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DEPROBLEMATIZING VIDEO GAMING AS A TOOL FOR COLLEGE STUDENT TRANSITIONS: WHAT STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS NEED TO KNOW

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Abstract

Video games have been a highly controversial topic throughout their lifespan, with some viewing them as beneficial and others as detrimental. During their transition to college, students may engage in video gaming in healthy or unhealthy ways. The authors examine this college transition through the lens of Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory to analyze current literature and inform recommendations for higher education student affairs (HESA) professionals. HESA professionals must understand how to support students' holistic development, particularly those struggling with the transition to college. This literature review explores how collegiate video gaming informs the efforts of student-facing HESA professionals to engage and support students through anticipated and unanticipated transitions in higher education. Applying Schlossberg's four S's framework—situation, support, self, and strategies—the authors synthesize research on the role of video gaming in college adjustment, emotion regulation, and social connection. This review reveals that video gaming can serve as both a constructive coping mechanism and a potential source of difficulty, depending on context and usage patterns. The authors challenge the prevailing deficit-based perspective on collegiate gaming and advocate for a strength-based approach that recognizes gaming as a legitimate tool for student development. Recommendations for practice and future research are provided for HESA scholar-practitioners.

Keywords

Video Games, Transition Theory, Student Affairs, College Students, Gamification

The popularity of video gaming has surged since its inception (Alzahrani & Griffiths, 2024), with a notable impact on college students. As of 2017, more than 95% of households with children under 18 years of age owned some form of video game platform (Entertainment Software Association, 2017, as cited in Halbrook et al., 2019, p. 1098). While video gaming persists as a quotidian activity among children enrolled in K-12 education, it accompanies learners into their higher education experience as a familiar friend. As such, video games remain embedded in college students' repertoire of strategies for approaching emotional and anxiety regulation (e.g., Desai et al., 2021; Al Kawadri, 2024), as well as college adjustment (e.g., Ochoa, 2024; Teng et al., 2024). Contrarily, faculty have vilified video gaming as a distraction to meeting academic outcomes (e.g., Brau et al., 2021); however, faculty have become more drawn to applying gaming principles in their curriculum or lesson design to engage their students (Adare-Tasiwoopa ápi & Silva, 2024; Wiggins, 2016). Between the video gaming collegiate student and the historically judgmental faculty member, student affairs staff and administrators often remain unaware and underinvolved in recognizing and supporting students as they learn to balance their studies and socialization. Drawing on the student- and faculty-centered literature, this essay presents a perspective on the collegiate video gaming phenomenon for higher education staff who may be unaware of its contemporary usage and reliance among college students during (un)anticipated life and academic transitions (Schlossberg, 2008). Hence, this review of the literature aims to answer the question through the lens of Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory: *How does collegiate video gaming inform the efforts of student-facing higher education and student affairs (HESA) professionals to engage and support students in and through transitions in higher education?*

A Brief Introduction to Video Games

History of Video Games

The gaming industry remains a major contributor to the global economy, with $217 billion in revenue, projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 13.4% from 2023 to 2030 (Grand View Research, 2023). Since the 1947 debut of the patented Cathode-Ray Tube Amusement Device—the earliest known concept of an interactive electronic game (Sambe, 2013)—virtual gaming has undergone an iterative evolution. The turning point for video games came around 1985, after the release of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and the integrated circuit shifted video games out of the dwindling arcade scene; before this point, any interactive electric gaming drew interested parties out of their home and into dwellings with rudimentary design, such as arcades or community celebrations (Jordan, 2021; Sambe, 2013). The emergence of high-bandwidth network connectivity, portability, and accessibility has driven a surge in domestic and mobile gaming, particularly among pre-teen and adolescent youth (Grand View Research, 2024). Over the last 20 years, Millennials and Generation Z users, spanning the traditional college-age range of 18 to 34, have accounted for the largest share of online gamers (38%). Generation Alpha, those born after 2010, make up the second-largest group (20%), with these users preparing to enter higher education in the coming years (Entertainment Software Association, 2021). As the gaming industry grows and technology becomes more prevalent in daily professional and personal lives, higher education faculty and student affairs staff must prepare to support and challenge students who have grown up with online gaming as part of their daily lives. These stewards of higher learning remain concerned about the effects of playing video games. They may consider entertaining the educational possibilities that games can provide, both in and out of the classroom (Beggs et al., 2009).

Understanding the Video Gaming Controversy

Video gaming as an activity has been the source of much controversy; some may recall Donald Trump speaking on mass shootings that occurred in August 2019, blaming violent video games for the tragedy (Martin & Allam, 2019). This phenomenon is not new; the earliest video game controversy dates back to 1976, when *Death Race* was removed from shelves due to its violence (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2022). Numerous studies have focused on the impact of video games on aggressive behavior. While video games including violence did increase self-reported stress and aggressive feelings, violent video games did not cause a change in aggressive behaviors (Chen et al., 2022; Wagener et al., 2025); however, it can be challenging to pin down the concept of violence in video games, as each style of game contextualizes violence in different ways. For example, a car racing game typically does not have the same level of violence as a first-person shooter, but violence is still present (Malanowski & Baima, 2024). Moreover, not all games contain violence, and nonviolent games have been shown to promote relaxation and reduce stress (Wagener et al., 2025). Specific video game genres have shown to have psychological benefits, such as (a) role-playing games showed an increase in feelings of relatedness and autonomy; (b) survival horror showed an increase in feelings of relatedness, competence, and emotional well-being; and (c) music games showed an increase in flow state, social well-being, psychological well-being, and emotional well-being (Hazel et al., 2022).

Gaming has often been associated with addictive elements, so much so that gaming disorder (abbreviated GD) was introduced in the eleventh revision of the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-11) with the following criteria: impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming, and continuing or escalating gaming despite negative consequences over 12 months or more (World Health Organization, 2022). Within this context, clinicians have counseled and advised patients who meet these criteria with another disorderly phenomenon in mind: gambling. Gaming disorder and gambling disorder are often comorbid, though that could be partially attributed to the common convergence of easy-to-use applications or devices and underlying motivations or satisfaction (Błoch & Misiak, 2024; Perreault et al., 2021). The presence of loot boxes in video games has long been a source of contention in the media (Allan, 2018), explicitly referring to the practice of making in-game purchases to progress or access rare or random rewards (Greer et al., 2025). Nielsen and Grabarczyk (2019) found in their investigation of different types of loot boxes that only one type could be classified as gambling, as many aspects of gaming center on random events that yield rewards. Many of the games that initially caused contention due to their loot box components have since been phased out (Nielsen & Grabarczyk, 2019).

The inclusion of GD in the ICD-11 in 2024 was a controversial action, with many clinicians claiming that gaming disorder does not have enough studies focusing on it. Relevant GD research remains insufficient in rigor and is often unjustifiably based on the unique gambling disorder phenomenon (Aarseth et al., 2024). Several healthy gaming behaviors have been stigmatized and viewed as unhealthy behaviors, even those present within the GD diagnosis (e.g., lying to others about the amount played could be due to the stigma surrounding gaming) (Malanowski & Baima, 2024). A systematic review by Wright (2011) of the effects of video gaming on college academics found that although several studies have claimed that video game addiction predicts poor academic performance, recent studies indicate the opposite. Excessive video game use may indicate poor academic performance, but this performance may not necessarily stem from what non-gamers identify as *problematic gaming*

(Alzahrani & Griffiths, 2024). For example, others are quick to judge students who turn to video gaming as a way to cope with breakdowns and depression after an unanticipated event (e.g., losing their scholarship); yet, the act of video gaming feeds into emotional regulation (Bleckmann et al., 2012). Given the widespread discussion of video gaming among education professionals, these adverse effects and stigmatized views obscure the positive outcomes it can yield for students.

Considerable research has focused on the adverse effects of video games on the cognitive and social development of youth, thus leaving employers, educators, and other positions of authority to their own devices to distinguish between witnessing problematic or helpful video gaming behavior. Making sense of the many conflicting ideals surrounding video gaming remains a challenge for these professionals, especially student-facing HESA personnel. Part of this is due to the ever-changing video game industry and the various reasons college students play video games, such as escaping adversity in their daily lives, socializing with others worldwide, and entertaining themselves while simultaneously learning more about video game culture (Fortin, 2025). At the same time, there is no single way to categorize video games as a help or hindrance to college students. This review aims to synthesize extant video game-related literature and advance the discussion on how gaming principles and philosophies (gamification) and college students' video gaming habits influence the college experience, particularly within student affairs contexts.

Gamifying the College Student Experience

Gamification of Academic Affairs

Gamification is a method that integrates game elements and techniques into non-gaming contexts, such as the classroom (Alonso-Sánchez et al., 2025). Faculty have perceived gamification as a way to increase student motivation and engagement, while also highlighting some of the positive effects that gaming may have (Adare-Tasiwoopa ápi & Silva, 2024). Loton et al. (2015) reported that action video games are associated with increased technology-related skills and cognitive abilities, including task switching, response time, and decision-making. In some cases, video games have been used as a tool for change. Some educators are beginning to bring video gaming into the curriculum. One such educator at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville structured a class around the game *Red Dead Redemption 2* and was shocked to find both increased attendance and student engagement (Benevides-Colon, 2024). "For professors like Olsson, finding fresh ways to get students invested in learning is top of mind, particularly after pandemic-era disruptions caused an uptick in students not showing up to class or doing assignments" (para. 6). This class provided students with preexisting investment in the source material of the game by attuning the class to their point of interest and making it easier to invest in the course's knowledge. Without video games, the course may not have achieved the same level of investment, and student engagement may have been reduced.

In concert with academic achievement, a student may feel less successful in class if they feel that their psychological needs are not met (Li et al., 2024). Gamification often comes into frame when attempting to encourage a student's intrinsic motivation. The most commonly employed gamification methods in this context are points, badges, and leaderboards (Khaldi et al., 2023). Domínguez et al. (2013) conducted an experimental study in which students used a gamification plugin within their institution's learning management system. The study noted that the experimental group achieved high scores on practical assignments but low scores on participation and written assignments. Additionally, Domínguez and colleagues (2013) found that certain game aspects, such as leaderboards, were deemed too competitive in an academic environment. Such results would tempt faculty to remove a gaming element from their courses; however, removing gamification elements harms students' learning (Seaborn, 2021; Thom et al., 2012).

There are many benefits to gamification, including increased student engagement. Faculty may observe increased student engagement when leaderboards, points, or badges are used (Abu-Dawood et al., 2015; Harrington & Mellors, 2021). When students see that they can earn a badge next to their name and showcase their accomplishments to their classmates, they are more likely to earn additional badges. Similarly, points can serve as motivators, with leaderboards often fostering a sense of competition that encourages students to progress. While points, leaderboards, and badges are the most tried methods, some less-used techniques include: (a) *progression*, which celebrates milestones to indicate progress toward an objective; (b) *status*, often another way to rank progress and display what rank or title a student may hold; and (c) *levels*, the element of including stages and areas that get progressively more difficult to promote interest in a course (Abu-Dawood et al., 2015). *Rewards* encourage motivation through incentives and prizes; these are often tangible and drive students through material desire. Lastly, *roles through storytelling* embody the final aspect of gamification, where students ground their learning by assuming an identity to solve a problem and then progress to a more challenging task (Abu-Dawood et al., 2015).

Gamification of Student Affairs

Higher education is an ever-changing industry that continually evolves to engage students and address the needs of new generations. Outside the classroom, students should be aware of and understand their institutions'

administrative or social landscape. One way to achieve this is by making tasks and requirements appealing to them. Drawing on the valuable insights from this section, HESA professionals may consider integrating gamification components into their administrative work and student-staff interactions. Similar to what occurs in the classroom, this could lead to increased engagement, improved policy learning, and foster a sense of belonging and well-being among students. Dungy and Peck (2019) discussed a conversation between a game developer at the airport, noting that "gamers he knew could never sit through a 60-minute lecture but could stay up for 30 hours playing a video game" (p. 9). The conversation also addresses the rewards implemented in video games to keep players engaged. Examining Diaz Jr.'s (2012) conceptual model of a video game, informed by institutional policies, reveals positive aspects of gamifying judicial affairs, including improved comprehension of university policies and reduced anxiety surrounding the disciplinary process through gamified simulation. More innovation is evident in the work of Abu-Dawood et al. (2015), who discuss a gamified advising system designed to engage students in selecting their major and to encourage greater exploration of course options.

Given the dearth of HESA research or guides addressing video gaming or gamification from student development or student affairs perspectives, this review signifies the need to provide student-facing staff with the necessary background and understanding. As HESA professionals, it is essential to understand new ways to engage students and inspire their interests in the activities they will pursue throughout their lives. In the post-COVID-19 era, higher education administrators must join faculty members' efforts to work with college students (Sharaievska et al., 2022) by learning more about video gaming or gamification in today's landscape. Within the scope of this review, the authors charge HESA professionals to shift their perspective from habitually viewing video gaming as a threat or an addiction (Kem, 2005) to recognizing it as a strength-based or wellness-oriented tool used during the transition into and throughout college students' pursuit of higher education.

Understanding Collegiate Video Gaming Through Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg (2008) described transitions as "vicissitudes that disquiet us" (Barclay, 2017, p. 23), particularly when they disrupt one's established expectations, routines, and relationships (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Components of understanding transitions in a college student's life include context and time (Barclay, 2017; Patton et al., 2016), with subsequent impacts based on whether the transition was foreseen or unanticipated. It is essential to note that transitions are neither inherently positive nor negative; rather, their impact is heavily influenced by the context and nature of the transition. In Schlossberg's (2008) theory, context refers to the relationship one has with the transition; an individual may be affected by someone else's change, and the setting of the transition may vary. Impact is also salient in understanding transitions, as it refers to the extent to which a transition can affect daily life, regardless of the degree of influence, and can create stress from an individual's perspective.

Rooted in the previous, synthesized video game literature, the authors imbue this essay with what Schlossberg (2008) identified as *taking stock* or going through "a process by which transitioners examine their situation and coping resources for the situation" (Barclay, 2017, p. 25), consisting of four domains: situation, support, self, and strategies. *Situation* comprises many aspects, but for this essay, it is essential to examine the control one has over anticipated and unanticipated events during their higher education experience; how their role has changed; the duration; concurrent stress; and the assessment of who is responsible for the transition. Regarding *support*, HESA professionals should direct their attention to social capital (e.g., family, friends, intimate relationships, roommates, faculty, and staff) and activities (e.g., financial aid, sports, games) that strengthen and encourage students during their transition experience. The *self* encompasses personal and demographic characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender), as well as psychological resources or ego development (e.g., maturity and outlook on life) that lead the individual to feel overwhelmed, challenged, resilient, or helpless (Barclay, 2017; Schlossberg, 2008). Lastly, *strategies* represent one's coping abilities, which fall into four categories (Barclay, 2017): (a) those that modify the situation, (b) those that control the meaning of the problem, (c) those that change the meaning of one's situation, and (d) those that aid in managing the stress in the aftermath. By taking stock of these four S's among collegiate video gamers, student affairs professionals can more effectively guide and support them through an informed, gaming-friendly approach.

Self

Schlossberg's (2008) factor of *self* encompasses both demographic characteristics and psychological resources. In the context of gaming, research highlights that college students' motivation to engage with video games often reflects deeper psychological needs. For many matriculating students, video games become an accessible space to regain self-efficacy and agency, especially when new environments feel overwhelming or unstructured (Monley et al., 2023; Mills & Allen, 2020). College students who perceive themselves as socially isolated, academically underprepared, or lacking confidence may turn to games to alleviate tension during this transition. For these students, video games are a context in which their actions are meaningful, feedback is immediate, and mastery is achievable (Alzahrani et al., 2024). Students who report high levels of psychological well-being often use games in moderation, suggesting that meeting their psychological needs elsewhere helps mitigate the risk of overreliance on

gaming (Mills & Allen, 2020). Gaming can also reinforce aspects of students' identities, particularly for marginalized populations, providing a sense of belonging and validation that the non-gaming environments may not offer (Hazel et al., 2022; Broman et al., 2022).

Situation

Situation frames the physical or metaphysical transition in question, leading the college student transitioner to identify the trigger, timing, control, role change, and concurrent stress (Patton et al., 2016). For the majority of students, entering college is a profoundly anticipated transition, but often students view this as a positive transition; however, unanticipated events like homesickness, academic pressure, or social disconnection can shift a student's perception from a positive transition to a negative transition (Benjet et al., 2023; Diehl et al., 2018).

Studies show that during periods of significant change, particularly when stress is high and perceived control is low, students may turn to video gaming as a coping mechanism (Salerno et al., 2023). For example, students who feel they lack control over their academic or social lives may gravitate toward gaming environments where they can set their own goals and manage their progress on their own terms (Halbrook et al., 2019). The ability to manage situations is paramount when the student's role is changing. The transition from high school to college can be disruptive, and gaming may provide a source of comfort in such a challenging situation. Gaming provides consistency for students during this transition by restoring a sense of role through familiar routines, achievement systems, and a sense of belonging within the community (Steadman, 2019).

Support

Support is one of the most crucial components for students' success during their transition to college. College students rely on various avenues for support, such as friends and family, institutional support, and, for some, an online community. College students who are dependent on video gaming may find support in multiplayer games or, in other cases, in an esports community, depending on their level of involvement. These support systems are a reliable space for peer interaction, identity exploration, and emotional connection (Cote et al., 2023; Hazel et al., 2022). For students who feel marginalized, geographically displaced, or socially disconnected, virtual relationships may serve as a replacement or supplement to in-person support systems (Broman et al., 2022; Diehl et al., 2018). The literature surrounding online friendships can warn students about the superficiality of these relationships. In contrast, others highlight the meaningful impact they have on self-worth and belonging, particularly when in-person connections have not been established (Hazel et al., 2022). However, a heavy reliance on online support can lead to reduced on-campus engagement, potentially complicating students' ability to connect with their institution (Pesonen et al., 2023).

Strategy

Students can use video games as a *strategy* to actively cope with anxiety and adjust to the situation they are currently in by engaging directly with an environment outside of the one they are presently in to enjoy compelling narratives or fantasy settings, allowing them to mentally distance from academic or social challenges and regain control of a situation (Seaborn & Fels, 2015). Others may supplement the meaning of this transition by playing games to complete quests or master in-game skills, thereby fostering a sense of achievement and agency to modify their current situation (Chen et al., 2022; Halbrook et al., 2019; Steadman, 2019). Still, others turn to gaming as a form of passive regulation, utilizing low-effort, familiar play as a soothing mechanism to manage emotional overload or burnout, much like watching a comforting TV show (Aarseth et al., 2017).

There are various strategies that reflect the flexible ways in which video games can be used as active and reflective tools for students; however, the literature on video gaming indicates that not all strategies employed in gaming are effective. Problematic usage of gaming may arise when video gaming is driven by escapism or emotional avoidance, as it can increase stress, reduce academic engagement, and lead to greater social withdrawal (Benjet et al., 2023; Loton et al., 2015; Salerno et al., 2023). Students who do not use gaming moderation may use games to avoid real-world obligations or problems, which can lead to increased stress over time (Dias et al., 2020; Steadman, 2019). Video gaming during a transition, such as entering college, can be either a helpful strategy or a harmful distraction, depending on the student's intention with gaming, their self-awareness, and other available supports.

Recommendations for Practice

Despite contrasting findings across empirical studies and systematic reviews on video gaming in college, some research has examined techniques to challenge students to reconsider how their self-concept crystallizes, the support they draw on through on-campus and virtual relationships, and strategies to cope with how they act and feel during transitions. For example, Baldwin and Hazard (2024) postulated that college students who are struggling with social media addiction can follow 12 methods to help curb their mobile phone use. Two of the methods may be applied to college students with intense or dependent gaming tendencies to aid in building self-efficacy. One

course of action is a gaming fast in which students abstain from playing video games for 12 to 48 hours and then reflect on their experience in an organized community. The use of a gaming time review may also be helpful in self-regulating gaming behaviors in community spaces, such as first-year seminars and residence life. Gaming time reviews require students to reflect on their engagement with video games for up to a week. Having students reflect on their activities may help both students and professionals gain insight into how time is spent gaming and how to supplement this time. Steadman (2019) referenced that an important way to assist with behavioral addictions is to find appropriate replacement behaviors. Collaboration with campus counseling services, clinical psychology faculty, and various student affairs functional areas (e.g., academic advising, career services, residence life and housing, student activities) may help raise students' awareness of their digital wellness.

Campus personnel assume responsibility for normalizing the video gaming phenomenon within college students' higher education experience. The student-gamer population is often overlooked in higher education and is frequently scrutinized and judged by public opinion (Kem, 2005). Student affairs professionals may benefit significantly from soliciting students' opinions on video gaming to better understand the gaming community. Having student affairs administrators collaborate with mental health professionals to educate students on the signs of behavioral addictions and healthy outlets for stress may aid both the prevention and redirection of maladaptive behaviors. This can be done in tandem with programs focused on awareness of problematic behaviors, discussions about healthy coping mechanisms, and an examination of current gaming behaviors. For example, career advisors have long turned to Savickas' (2013, 2015) career construction interview to guide students in navigating life-career transitions. To highlight one of the six questions—"Which websites, games, and apps do you regularly visit?"—an advisor may gain insight into a student's subconscious preferred work environment. Faidley's (2022) interview with intercollegiate athlete career advisor Tracy Montgomery emphasized the connection between students' sense-making of career prospects and the power of video gaming. Montgomery asserted,

> What are the go-to sources that show preferred activities and environments? . . . It's the video games you play. If you play video games a lot, are you playing video games with adventures that have stories? Are you playing video games that are more competitive in a battle? There are just so many cool things that these students are constantly putting their faces in front of on some kind of screen, and they don't realize that is revealing their interests. It's revealing that 'setting' that they prefer to be in and nobody has ever put that together for them. (p. 31)

Referring students to resources, such as counselors or peer support groups, is another crucial step in ensuring that struggling students receive the support they need. While these methods may not entirely prevent the development of problematic gaming behaviors, any effort to raise awareness of problematic gaming in an open and nonjudgmental manner is a step toward progress.

Malanowski and Baima (2024) recommended that "[r]ather than wean a problematic player off video games like they are a helpless victim of a harmful drug, the goal should be to find a way to integrate games into one's life in a healthier way" (p. 121). Collegiate esports have been shown to serve as a healthy outlet for students, offering support such as developing academic self-efficacy, building community, and promoting positive physical and mental health (Marsh et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2022). Marsh et al. (2020) summarized the benefits of collegiate esports as an active way to develop Mazurek Melnyk and Neale's (2018, 2024) concept of the dimensions of wellness model, where intercollegiate gamers may attend to their physical, environmental, emotional, financial, intellectual, career, social, and spiritual wellness. Higher education leaders may consider contributing to the ongoing discussion, organization, and legitimization of esports (Papadakis & Morris, 2024) and how effective organization and governance of this athletic phenomenon may better serve in destigmatizing and redefining collegiate video gamers' holistic development (Cote et al., 2023; Pereira et al., 2022).

Additionally, offices of student life and residential life may opt into intersecting video gaming, well-being, and community building through "cozy game" programming, or games that are often soft in tone and aesthetics, thus "offering a pleasing palette for the player meant to be calming and soothing" (Boudreau et al., 2025, p. 2649). With cozy games on the rise among young gamers (Carpenter, 2025), examples such as *Animal Crossing: New Horizons, Arcade Spirits, Coffee Talk, Farm Together*, and *Minecraft* offer a non-violent and mindful option for college students. The University of Colorado Boulder's (n.d.) Center for Student Involvement hosts a cozy gaming night on one Friday per month, lasting four hours, for all students, regardless of their gaming experience, as an event that transitions into weekends of study and socialization.

Video games are likely to continue evolving as technology advances; therefore, open dialogue and ongoing research can help student affairs professionals stay ahead of emerging changes in gaming and problematic gaming behaviors. It is likewise recommended that the video game industry—particularly those based in the United States—continue to implement features that promote self-regulation (e.g., playtime reminders, required breaks, and time-tracking systems) (Seay & Kraut, 2007). As scholarship related to this field emerges, it would be ideal for policymakers and clinicians to collaborate in creating clear definitions and diagnostic criteria for problematic gamers. Brown's (1993) explanation of six general criteria for diagnosable problem gambling—tolerance, euphoria,

salience, conflict, withdrawal, and relapse—grounds domestic understanding and diagnosis of Internet Gaming Disorder (*DSM-5-TR* used for diagnosis in the United States) and Gaming Disorder (*ICD-11* to conceptualize problematic gaming on a global scale). Student affairs professionals may not be licensed mental health professionals or counselors, but they must become educated on how to recognize and reconcile problematic gaming among college students.

Implications and Future Directions for Collegiate Video Game Research

As noted in the *DSM-5-TR*, research must explore the formalization of *problematic gaming* as a term rather than leading clinicians and members of society to turn to terms like *addiction* or *disorder* (Malanowski & Baima, 2024). Pursuing additional scholarship provides a foundation for understanding the nuances of problematic video gaming. The person who games for minimal hours each day may be just as (if not more) susceptible to maladaptive gaming as an individual who games for longer durations. Although they are still unable to draw major claims, students may engage in gaming for numerous reasons, such as meeting unmet physiological, psychological, and social needs or simply seeking stimulation. Problematic or overcommitted video gaming is a multifaceted issue necessitating further examination and assessment by clinicians and scholars; however, it should be simplified and applied to non-clinical, student-facing faculty and staff.

The reviewed literature indicates ambiguity surrounding video gaming, particularly when it is vilified by non-gamers, including HESA staff and faculty. Individuals who engage in video gaming typically possess a level of financial privilege (i.e., disposable income to access and upgrade the video game experience). The polarization regarding problematic gaming behaviors in the United States raises the question of whether individuals with such behaviors may be considered a marginalized population. Although not systematically oppressed, the financial privilege associated with gamers may contribute to insufficient research regarding problematic gaming (due to it being deemed a less important topic), thus perpetuating the pattern of ambiguity. Future researchers may also benefit from analyzing the phenomenon of collegiate video gaming through a critical lens that targets societal norms and systems of oppression. Liu's (2011) social class worldview model informs one's behaviors, lifestyle, relationship with property, and self-perception, based on comparisons with peers of higher socioeconomic status. Perpetual classism shapes how one perceives economic and experiential wealth (Liu, 2011), and the possession and experience of video games are not exempt from comparisons between students from rural areas and their metropolitan counterparts (Collie, 2022). Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model explicates the various forms of cultural capital that traditionally marginalized populations may need to develop, comprising aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic capital. By examining how, when, and why college students prioritize and engage in video gaming, scholars can identify the (in)congruence between Yosso's various forms of capital in a virtual setting and areas for growth in their approach to real-world progression through campus community interactions. Additionally, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) offers a theoretical opportunity to examine how race and gender intersect with video game use. Recent investigations of gameplay among college students of color have pinpointed the need for Black women and queer men to develop their intersectional awareness of racialized, homophobic, or gendered stress when turning to video gaming as a means to escape emotional or social discomfort (Rankin & Han, 2019; Rose, 2024).

Conclusion

Collegiate video gaming is not universally beneficial, but individuals should be mindful of the time they spend gaming. Extant literature has shown that there may be underlying mental health factors for those who become too reliant or dependent on gaming. With an increase in college students playing video games, the understanding of their impact on college-aged individuals remains an area that requires further analysis. The surveyed literature on the history and current state of video gaming in higher education leads HESA staff to question which interventions or supports are needed for college students. Through a transitions-oriented lens (Schlossberg, 2008), campus personnel may approach and care for college students developing maladaptive gaming habits. Through collaborative research and partnerships between clinical and non-clinical scholar-practitioners may wellness and community-building initiatives arise to address the ambiguity surrounding collegiate video gaming among college students. In return, campus community members may find ways to support college students as they develop the skills to play and succeed in higher education and life in healthy, unproblematic ways.

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