

**In a Rapidly Growing Industry, What Effect Does Video Game Use
Have on Romantic Relationships? A Qualitative Study.**

Stephanie Tan

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**In a Rapidly Growing Industry, What Effect Does Video Game Use
Have on Romantic Relationships? A Qualitative Study.**

by

Stephanie Tan

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Ethics Approval

As the current study involves human participants, an ethics application was submitted to Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). An ethics approval was granted by AUTEC on the 13th of July 2017 (Application #17/206).

Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'ST' followed by a flourish.

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ABSTRACT

The concept of gaming addiction is still only understood by few. Additionally, the definition of Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) has yet to be appropriately conceptualised as demonstrated by the majority of studies in the field. This paper addresses the growing phenomenon of gaming dependence and addiction in New Zealand, and highlights the effects it has on the gamer, their romantic partner, and the romantic relationship. The current literature supports the view that excessive video game use decreases the gaming partner's engagement in the relationship, much like gambling or alcoholism. This is demonstrated by reduced relational maintenance strategies and greater isolation in the relationship, allowing the relationship to slowly deteriorate unless gaming is reduced. Throughout this process the 'gamer widow' strives to cope with the emotional consequences and destructive effects on the romantic relationship, but often struggles greatly for a considerable amount of time until a state of learnt helplessness develops. The current study recruited 6 participants who all met the gamer widow criteria (to varying degrees). The findings of this study dictate that excessive use or preoccupation with gaming activities puts unnecessary stress on the romantic partner and the maintenance or growth of the romantic relationship. The possibility of gaming dependence (at the very least) must become recognised and accepted within broader society so that the romantic partners of problematic gamers, or close friends or family for that matter, are empowered to speak out about potentially harmful dependencies and to seek professional help.

Keywords: *IGD, Internet Gaming Disorder, Problematic Gaming, Gaming Dependence, Gamer Widow.*

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Gaming Industry

The video gaming industry is a growing multi-billion dollar industry which pre-exists the internet (Griffiths, Kiraly, Pontes, & Demetrovics, 2014). In fact, gaming giant ‘Nintendo’ is forecasted to make \$6.7B between March 2017 and March 2018 (Kharpal, 2017); Online subscription based competitors such as ‘Activision Blizzard’ (known for World of Warcraft) are also reaching new records, making \$6.61B in 2016 (Sarkar, 2017); and the highest earner of all is ‘Tencent’, a Chinese internet giant who developed a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game *League of Legends*, which was reported to earn \$21.9B annually (Russell, 2017).

‘Gaming’ has rapidly become the world’s most widely used entertainment medium (Ahlstrom, Lundberg, Eggett, & Lindsay, 2012). In recent decades, the general community and policy-makers have developed starkly conflicting opinions over gaming which has created an interest in the academic community to understand the effects of gaming on the players (Coyne, Busy, Bushman, Gentile, Ridge, & Stockdale, 2012). In 2015, most adults in one study reported games to be a waste of time for some games but not for others (Duggan, 2015). However, the majority of adults also reported that they thought games help to develop good problem-solving skills, promote teamwork and communication, and are a better form of entertainment than TV, again, for some games but not others (Duggan, 2015). Therefore, it seems

that public opinion taken as a whole ranges from fairly positive to mixed about video games.

On the other hand, policy-makers are highly concerned with the age appropriateness of video games, the influence of video games on violent behaviour, particularly in children and youth, and the possibility of gaming addiction (Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007). Although the concept of gaming addiction continues to be controversial, as many argue against pathologizing everyday activities, video game use, specifically problematic video game use, continues to be of contemporary interest to the academic community (Griffiths, Kiraly, Pontes, & Demetrovics, 2014). An overwhelming amount of literature on this phenomenon demonstrates that gaming has become the most problematic form of media consumption today (Griffiths, Kiraly, Pontes, & Demetrovics, 2014). On the other hand, many argue that gaming can increase pro-social behaviour, empathy, spacial awareness, and other cognitive functions (Charvet et al., 2017; Stanmore, Stubbs, Vancampfort, Bruin, & Firth, 2017). However, the effects of gaming differ significantly depending on a range of variables including age, gender, game, frequency of play, mental health etc. Therefore, the focus of this study will explore the effects of excessive or problematic gaming respectively, on romantic relationships specifically.

Clinical Significance

Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) has been included in the most recent Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-5) section discussing conditions for further study (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Aside from gambling disorder, IGD is the only non-substance-related, addictive disorder included in the DSM-5. The disorder is described as persistent or recurrent use of internet games, frequently with other

players, resulting in clinically significant impairment and/or distress. The symptoms include a preoccupation with gaming (thinking about previous activity or anticipating future activity with internet gaming being the individual's most dominant use of time), withdrawal symptoms on the occasion that gaming is taken away (including irritability, sadness, and/or anxiety), a dependence on the activity resulting in more time being spent with it, a lack of ability controlling the gaming, continual excessive use of games regardless of awareness of psychosocial issues, deception towards prevalent social figures regarding frequency of gaming, and sacrificing or jeopardizing significant aspects of life such as significant relationships, jobs, or education due to engagement in internet games (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Additionally, it is stated that severity of the disorder is dependent on the level of disruption of normal activities due to gaming (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Moreover, the disorder may not be limited to internet games but also non-internet computer games and console games. Though no personality types have been associated with IGD, some authors have associated the condition with depressive disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The disorder may have significant consequences on individuals as it may lead to a failure in school, a loss of employment, or loss of marriage (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Lastly, health may suffer due to excessive gaming. Notwithstanding IGD's inclusion in the DSM-V, authors have argued over inconsistencies in the classification of the disorder and have debated the limited amount of data describing the path and aetiology of the condition (Petry & O'Brien, 2013). More research is warranted to clarify the defining characteristics of the disorder, determine the prevalence of the disorder in representative epidemiological

samples globally, obtain reliable and valid cross-cultural data analysing the diagnostic criteria, and examine its course of history and biological features (Petry & O'Brien, 2013).

Researcher's Stance

Due to the highly controversial nature of IGD/problematic gaming/excessive gaming, the researcher would like to state that it is not their intention to antagonise casual gamers or critique gaming in general. However, the issue of excessive gaming is a growing one, particularly in romantic relationships. Therefore, this paper intends to address some issues associated with excessive or problematic gaming, increase public awareness of the existence of problematic gaming, and discuss how problematic gaming can affect romantic relationships. Additionally, the researcher believes that empirically tested treatments should be developed for those suffering from IGD or problematic gaming and more appropriate support should be provided for those who are indirectly affected by problematic gaming, such as the romantic partners of excessive gamers, in New Zealand.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

Public concerns about gaming largely focus on the prospect of video game use increasing aggression and violence and decreasing social functioning. With gaming being perceived primarily as a youth activity (Abadie, Drukker, Herr, & Imbens, 2004; Ward, 2010), it is unsurprising that there is concern over how gaming affects these demographics. However, the average age of gamers is 33, which may be a shocking statistic to some (Northup & Shumway, 2014). One reason for this is that a large population of gamers who began gaming in their adolescence/young adulthood when gaming was quite new, have continued gaming throughout their lives (Northup & Shumway, 2014). Moreover, with the development of technology, not unlike the development of the internet, gaming has become more accessible, faster, and more graphically appealing over time. In fact, video games are not only marketed towards grown-ups, but also designed for them (Northup & Shumway, 2014).

What is Excessive?

Caution is expressed over the effects of excessive and long term video game use otherwise known as problematic gaming. Excessive gaming can be described as a state in which an individual has lost control over their gaming and will continue

engaging in the activity excessively despite any negative consequences (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). Studies have found that both the amount and content of gaming may have independent effects on players (Coyne, Stockdale, Nelson, & Fraser, 2011; Gentile, 2011; Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004) which will be explored. Moreover, research on the indirect effects of gaming on friends, family, and romantic partners has captured academic interest, and the idea that video game abuse or dependence can be detrimental to relationships has been found in literature since 1998 (Young, 1998).

This phenomenon has since been compared to substance or drug use, in that it can negatively impact the “maintenance of the spousal relationship”, and even lead to divorce (Collins, Erickson, & Klein, 2007, p. 787, as cited in Chory & Banfield, 2009). Relational maintenance has been conceptualised as the actions and behaviours taken to maintain and/or improve a relationship (Pauley, Hesse, & Mikkelsen, 2014). Chory and Banfield (2009) explain how media dependence decreases relational maintenance, (1) when a person becomes dependent on a given medium, the activity tends to consume a large amount of their time, which detracts from nurturing interpersonal relationships; (2), individuals who are media dependent tend to be highly mentally preoccupied with the activity which is cognitively exhausting, this then hinders the level of engagement in relational maintenance, even when the individual is spending time with their partner; (3), those who are media dependent may be frequently exposed to violent and aggressive content and thus, may be influenced to think, feel, and behave unpleasantly towards their partner, which again, can disrupt relational maintenance. This dependence has been casted as the cause of relationship problems rather than an effect by the majority of scholars (Chory & Banfield, 2009; Horvath, 2004; Young, 1998, Young 2004).

Excessive or problematic gaming has been compared to a gambling addiction, particularly to online gambling. Striking resemblances have been found between the two in the way they are designed and marketed - the probability of winning, the wagering on an activity and delay in results, and the component of close wins; the effects it can have on players - physical consequences, emotional consequences, stress; and the indirect effects it can have on friends and family of the player - neglect, deceit, deterioration of relationships (Bargeron & Hormes, 2017; Griffiths & Nuyens, 2017; McBride & Derevensky, 2016).

Additionally, other structural similarities have been found including software loops, near misses, concentration required and occasionally a level of skill, the reward system, and potential positive feedback and/or attention from peers (Griffiths & Nuyens, 2017). Both activities share negative consequences when used excessively including reduced academic performance, negative affect, less interest in activities which were previously enjoyed, and increased interpersonal conflict (McBride & Derevensky, 2016). In saying that, there are two clear distinctions between the two. Video games are not always played for money. Whereas, gambling activity is always associated with money (McBride & Derevensky, 2016). Additionally, the level of skill required to succeed in a video game may be higher than the skill required to win certain types of gambling (McBride & Derevensky, 2016).

Studies have also found a correlation between gambling and video game use, as in, gamblers and gamers are more likely to engage in both activities than those who do not typically use either (McBride & Derevensky, 2016). Additionally, games such as *Overwatch* and *Counterstrike* have incorporated 'loot crate' systems, in which a set price is paid for a probabilistic attempt at attaining unique in-game items. Such features are functionally equivalent to gambling. More perversely, in the game genre

of 'eSports' (Electronic Sports) other dangers have been uncovered, with some phenomena distinctly akin to regular sports gambling, and others unique to the industry. These include the risk of children becoming addicted to gambling, doping in order to enhance their chances of victory, and organised match-fixing scandals in high-stakes eSports tournaments (Holden, Rodenberg, & Kaburakis, 2017). Accordingly, many countries are exploring how to regulate or ban the gambling aspects of eSports (Holden, Rodenberg, & Kaburakis, 2017).

Effects of Excessive Video Game Use on the Gamer

Violent and Aggressive Behaviour

Video game use is widely viewed as a harmless leisure activity (McBride & Derevensky, 2016). In fact, studies have found that video game use has the potential to increase experiential learning, and prosocial behaviour, empathy, and spatial cognition in teens and children under 18 (Granic, Lobel, & Engles, 2014; Harrington & O'Connell, 2015; Zanon & Kronborg, 2013). However, a large body of research has found that previously observed advantages of video game play are highly dependent upon the specific game, atmosphere, and/or samples, and are therefore, not a true representation (Boot, Blakely, & Simons, 2011; Collins & Freeman, 2014; Unsworth, Redick, McMillan, Hambrick, Kane, & Engle, 2015). Researchers have argued that this field of research would benefit from better measures of gaming experience and methods of describing and classifying games (Collins & Freeman, 2014; Green et al., 2015).

Since the 1970's when video games began to depict violent scenes, and/or require the player to engage in violent activity in-game (such as in *Mortal Kombat*),

the concern over violence in video games leading to violent behaviour (especially in children and adolescents) has become widespread (Ward, 2010). Policy makers in the USA, Britain, and China are continually attempting to restrict and/or ban violence in video games (Ward, 2010). A range of literature has supported this hypothesis by revealing correlations between video game use and violent behaviour (Anderson, 2004; Anderson et al., 2008; Gentile et al., 2004; Gentile, Bender, & Anderson, 2017; Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2017; Teng, Nie, Pan, Liu, & Guo, 2017). However, there is speculation over the reliability of the findings of correlational studies in this field, as other experimental studies, review studies, and meta-analytic studies have demonstrated that the correlations between violence and video game use may be overestimated (Bushman & Huesmann, 2014; Ferguson & Kilburn, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2015; Hall, Day, & Hall, 2011). Moreover, studies have found that family and social variables are more accurate predictors of youth violence than violent video game use (DeCamp & Ferguson, 2017; Ferguson, Olson, Kutner, & Warner, 2014).

Anderson and Bushman's (2001) meta-analysis examined 33 independent tests both experimental and nonexperimental, in attempts to understand the relationship between violent video game use and violence and/or aggression in males, females, adults, and children (3, 033 participants). They found a positive and statistically significant effect size across tests. The players experienced increased immediate physiological arousal, violent thoughts, and increased aggressive and hostile affect with violent video game play. They further separated their experimental and nonexperimental findings and found that short term exposure to violence in video games increases aggression, at least temporarily (in the 21 experimental tests); and aggression in the real world was correlated with exposure to violent video games (in

the 13 nonexperimental tests). Moreover, prosocial behaviour was also measured, and found to have a negative association with exposure to violent video games.

A later study expanding on this hypothesis found that game play condition highly influenced aggressive affect and hostility, which increased in the participants who played in isolated conditions rather than the local multiplayer setting (Mihan, Anisimowicz, & Nicki, 2015). In other words, playing violent video games in competitive, local multiplayer settings decreases feelings of aggravation. Moreover, those in the local multi-player condition experienced more positive feelings than those in the isolated condition.

On the other hand, Zheng and Zhang (2016) found contrary results in their study, which examines if aggression results from playing violent computer games. The researchers found that young boys displayed stronger aggressive tendencies than young girls, after playing Virtual Cop2 (a shooter game in which the player is required to shoot gangsters. The game displays blood, verbal assault, and physical combat) than Fight Landlord (a non-violent game in which higher scores are sought to win) (Zheng & Zhang, 2016). Additionally, children with high trait aggressiveness displayed more aggressive tendencies post Virtual Cop2 gameplay, whereas the children with moderate to low trait aggressiveness did not (Zheng & Zhang, 2016). The study concluded that gender and trait aggressiveness determine whether violent video games increase affect aggression.

The populations which largely correlate with violence are typically adolescent males who are characteristically more aggressive and violent due to hormonal development and changes (Ward, 2010). Ward (2010), used the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey to examine aggressive affect in adolescents. The YRBS is a survey conducted biannually by the CDC in the USA. The surveys strive to represent

demographic variables regarding youth activities, sexual activity, drug and alcohol consumption, and other risky behaviours (Ward, 2010). Ward (2010), examined the frequency and type of youths' fights, and how the statistics correlate with video and computer game use (also included in the YBRS). However, the YBRS does not distinguish whether violent or non-violent games are being used. Contrary to Anderson and Bushman's (2001) study, Ward (2010) found small effect sizes between video and computer game use, and fighting behaviour. Therefore, Ward (2010) concluded that unconditional correlations overestimate the relationship between gaming and violence. Ward (2010), found no significant relationship between gaming and violence in teenagers who gamed for less than 4 hours a day on average. However, the teenagers who played video games for more than four hours a day experienced an increase in violent behaviour which was statistically significant.

The findings of this analysis are mixed. It appears that the length of time spent playing violent video games may temporarily and slightly increase aggressive affect, and aggression in the real world. Additionally, a local multiplayer setting may decrease the effects of violent video game play rather than isolated play. However, gender and trait aggressiveness were found to be predictors of the effect of violent video game play in children, and prolonged use of gaming may be a predictor for increased aggression in adolescents. It seems overstated that video and computer games increase aggression and violence. However, it is potentially hazardous for select populations such as young boys with aggressive traits or those than engage in the activity for over 4 hours a day.

Mood

Video and computer games are designed to satisfy consumer's needs for enjoyment and emotional gratification. Therefore, some researchers have demonstrated how game use can facilitate mood repair and reduce negative mood state (Lee, Xiang, & Gao, 2017; Rieger, Wulf, Kneer, Frischlich & Bente, 2014; Russell & Newton, 2008; Russoniello, O'Brien, & Parks, 2009). However, each of these studies uses either puzzle, prosocial, or interactive video games that include exercise, which naturally enhances psychological well-being and mood improvement (Russell & Newton, 2008). Moreover, the studies examined casual use of the video game, and have not examined the effects of prolonged use. Therefore, excessive gamers may not receive these benefits.

Dong, Li, Wang, & Potenza (2017), conducted MRI scans on male university students to analyse the effects of gaming on mood (Young, 2009a). The participants were free of psychiatric disorders. The study included 67 healthy controls and 41 IGD participants. The IGD participants scored highly (over 50) in Young's online Internet addiction test focusing on internet gaming. Additionally, the IGD participants met the 9 scale IGD diagnosis in the DSM-5. The Profile of Mood States (PoMS) scale was used to measure the participants mood states (McNair, Lorr & Droppleman, 1971). MRI scans were conducted in resting state. These results indicated that the IGD participants were at least fairly dependant on the activity. Significant levels of depression and anger were found in the IGD participants, demonstrated by negative correlations between the mood states and functional connectivity (FC). Additionally, the IGD subjects experienced higher feelings of tension, fatigue, and confusion.

Bargeron and Hormes (2017) found similar findings. They conducted a study on 257 regular video game users and found that 8.7% (21) of them met the criteria for IGD. They engaged in the activity more frequently, for longer periods of time, and

had more urges to game than the other game users (Bargeron & Hormes, 2017).

Depression anxiety stress scales (DASS-21) were used on both groups and the 21 individuals who met the criteria for IGD had significantly higher levels of depression. Additionally, anxiety and stress were also notably higher in the IGD group than the control group, as well as substantially lower life satisfaction.

Procrastination and Loneliness

In a controlled study conducted by Yeh, Wang, Huang, Lin, Chen, & Ko (2017), 174 individuals underwent clinical interviews based on the DSM-5 criteria for IGD. Eighty-seven participants met the criteria for IGD. Upon completion of an additional questionnaire regarding IGD, depression, hostility, impulsivity, and procrastination, it was found that those with IGD scored significantly higher in all areas. Moreover, after controlling for depression, impulsivity, and hostility, those with IGD still displayed more tendencies toward procrastination. It was suggested that procrastination can help determine the clinical severity of IGD. Though procrastination is hardly the only reason people game, it has been found to influence the negative correlation between time spent engaging in gaming, and academic performance (Anand, 2007; Anderson & Dill, 2000).

The concept of ‘flow’ may be associated with procrastination and relational maintenance, and may be of interest to future researchers in this field. ‘Flow’ is a state of mind in which the individual develops a sense of timelessness which is achieved by feeling a balance of pleasure and cognitive challenge (Chory & Banfield, 2009). Due to the level of participation in gaming, rather than consuming other forms of media such as the internet or TV, gaming is capable of inducing a higher sense of flow (Chory & Banfield, 2009). Therefore, it may be that problematic or excessive gamers

experience more flow, which enables them to increase procrastination of their responsibilities and leads them to neglect relational maintenance (Chory & Banfield, 2009).

Studies have also supported the theory that those who engage most in the activity have less control over the amount of time spent consuming media and the content of that media (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001; Ward, 2010). Additionally, the time invested in the activity can detract from meaningful relationships (Campbell & Murray, 2015; Coyne et al., 2012), which can lead to loneliness of the gamer and of those closely associated with the gamer. There is speculation, however, whether gaming makes people lonely, or loneliness makes people game. Morahan-Martin (2009) states that loneliness is a consequence of excessive/problematic internet use, as consumers invest in online relationships and may sacrifice real-life relationships in turn. However, the causality seems difficult to determine.

Effects of Excessive Video Game Use on the Romantic Relationship

Much like social media, video game use cultivates a detachment from the outside world and real-life relationships (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Therefore, danger arises where video game use becomes excessive and other aspects of a gamer's life, such as the romantic partner and relationship, become neglected or sacrificed. Excessive gaming does not only affect the gamer, but those who regularly interact with the gamer. Researchers have suggested that there is a negative association between video game use and relationship quality (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Carroll, and Jensen, 2010). This is due to a number of factors, including the amount of

time invested in gaming which can negatively impact the couple's shared time, lower relational maintenance, and conflict surrounding absorption in the activity. For example Padilla-Walker et al., (2010) found a negative association between video game use and relationship quality with friends and parents. Moreover, the authors express concern regarding the impact of excessive gaming on the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships, including early marital relationships. This specific area of study is slowly growing. However, it is thought that qualitative research in this field will complement the existing research by adding context and a deeper understanding of this growing phenomenon (Hertlein & Blumer, 2013).

Quality Time

The importance of the shared couple experience is an increasing area of research (Ahlstrom, Lundberg, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Lindsay, 2012). This is demonstrated by the significant relationship between couple's time spent together and satisfaction in the relationship (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993). Couple leisure has been described as a comforting and relaxing experience which can enhance the relationship (Herridge, Shaw, & Mannen, 2003, as cited in Ahlstrom et al., 2012). Moreover, it has been reported that mutually enjoyable activities strengthen the aspect of companionship, bonding, intimacy, and overall satisfaction (Ahlstrom et al., 2012). Further, Crawford, Houts, Huston, and George (2002, p. 442, as cited in Ahlstrom et al., 2012), found that couples who participated in mutually enjoyable activities experienced an increase in marital satisfaction. However, leisure time alone does not sufficiently predict relationship quality (Berg, Trost, Schneider, & Allison, 2001, as cited in Ahlstrom et al., 2012).

Therefore, it is critical to understand that it is the couple's mutual pleasure in their shared leisure that is significant and not simply the proportion of mutual leisure participation (Ahlstrom et al., 2012). Hence, the chosen type and quality of a couple's shared leisure participation are essential for relationship satisfaction. Moreover, excessive use of video games may disrupt a couple's sleep rituals such as chatting, talking about their days, and reconnecting intimately. Ahlstrom et al., (2012) dictate that when one partner in the relationship spends time gaming at night, it is likely that the couple will not retire to bed together. With shared sleep ritual being a defining aspect of married or cohabiting couples, it is suggested that there is potential for couples to drift apart when the couple does not have the opportunity to reconnect with each other at a mutual bedtime (Ahlstrom et al., 2012). Thus, lower marital or relationship satisfaction may occur due to one partner's engagement in gaming during sleeping hours.

Video games are a significant part of a gamer's life and identity. It is a commitment. Griffiths, Davies, and Chappell (2004), reported that 79% of adults who gamed discussed having to sacrifice other aspects of their lives in order to maintain their in-game status and reputation; one of the sacrifices being their 'relationships'. The average time spent with the activity found was 24.7 hours a week. Quality time in the relationship, and relationship satisfaction, is therefore threatened when a problematic gamer consistently chooses to engage in the activity to satisfy their individual desires rather than mutually participating in a leisure activity (Campbell & Murray, 2015). This is further demonstrated by Ahlstrom et al., (2012) who conducted a qualitative study requiring players of Massively Multi-player Online Role-Playing Game(s) (MMORPGs) and their spouses to complete questionnaires (349 couples) to understand the effects of gaming on the marital relationship.

Two types of couples were differentiated, independent-gamer couples (132) in which one of the romantic partners was a gamer, and more/less-gaming couples (217) in which both individuals in the couple played, with one of the spouses playing more than the other. The questionnaire included the 14-item Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) measuring individuals levels of marital satisfaction (Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995). Additionally, the questionnaire also used the 20-item Internet Addiction Test (IAT) in which participants reflected on their gaming habit and gaming addiction (Young, 2009a), and the original 20-item Internet Addiction Test (IAT) targeted towards the non-gaming spouses.

After conducting data analysis, the scores found in the independent-gamer subgroup were significantly lower than the more-less-gamer subgroup indicating that marital satisfaction is lower in married couples where only one individual is a gamer. Independent-gamers spent 18 hours a week gaming, on average. More-gamers spent almost 24 hours per week. Sixty-two percent of non-gaming spouses and 54% of independent-gamers reported the frequency of conflict surrounding gaming being always, often, or at least once in a while. Seventy percent of independent gamers and 75% of spouses of independent-gamers reported gaming having negative effects on the marital relationship. In contrast, 34% of the more-gamers and 33% of less-gamers in the more/less-gaming couples reported the frequency of gaming conflict being always, often, or once in a while. Additionally, contrary to the statistics of the independent-gamer couples, 74% of less-gamers and 78% of more-gamers reported gaming having positive effects on the marital relationship. The study also found that different sleep rituals (not going to bed together) was a significant predictor of lower marital satisfaction for the both relationship types. Similarly, conflict surrounding gaming was significantly correlated with low marital satisfaction for both couple

types. The number of hours spent with the activity, and the level of addiction gamers presented, was not correlated with marital satisfaction in the independent-gamer couples. However, higher levels of gaming addiction were associated with lower marital satisfaction in the more/less-gaming couples.

Overall, the results were therefore inconclusive, in that the amount of time spent gaming did not directly predict marital satisfaction. However, it became clear that the ways in which couples participated in gaming and perceived gaming did influence marital satisfaction. MMORPG players preferred spending their time gaming rather than spending time with their spouse or family members. They also seemed to experience more pleasure and better socialising in-game, and appeared happier playing the game. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of retiring to bed together, as different sleep rituals can cause detrimental effects to the marriage, such as less shared time, more conflict, poorer marital adjustment, less time for serious conversation, and infrequent sexual activity. The researchers concluded that “Individual activities which appear to be excessive and lack the support of a spouse have the potential to be the most damaging to marital satisfaction and relationship quality” (Ahlstrom et al., 2012, p. 4).

Henline (2006) similarly emphasises that excessive consumption of technology takes away time which could be invested in the relationship, which can lead to the non-gaming partner feeling neglected. Henline (2006) further illustrates how technology has a unique and significant influence on present-day relationships, through quoting the late contemporary artist Andy Warhol “When I first got my first television set, I stopped caring so much about having close relationships”. Naturally, for those who have developed a dependence on certain technologies such as video games, the influence on relationships may be more severe.

Henline (2006) recruited 327 individuals in serious romantic relationships to participate in an online open-ended questionnaire, to understand the influence of technology on romantic relationships and intimacy. Couples reported computer and video games specifically to be harmful to the relationship due to the risk for addiction, more fatigue and irritability due to late nights gaming, risk of in-game infidelity, non-gaming partners becoming controlling, potentially forbidding gaming and facilitating distrust, and being ignored by the gaming partner. However, no benefits were reported. A significant amount of participants also reported that not only did they feel neglected due to their partner's gaming, but they felt that their gaming partner also neglected their shared children.

Northup and Shumway's (2014) qualitative study further explored this hypothesis. The phenomenological study included 10 participants who subjectively identified their spouses as online video game addicts. The sample included married women (between 24 and 50) who perceived their spouses to be addicted to MMORPGs (playing between 30 and 60 hours weekly) and were recruited via an online "gamer widow" forum. The participants completed an online open-ended survey inquiring about their experience of being married to a perceived gaming addict and, upon completing the survey, were asked several quantitative items alike to the qualitative questions for purposes of triangulation. Most participants observed that their gaming partner frequently failed to be active as a husband or father - "He would not get off even if I really needed help with the baby", "Our son has had an emotional breakdown because he has been rejected by his dad" (Northup & Shumway, 2014, p. 275). This neglect can result in a range of emotional consequences in the non-gaming partners, and potentially be detrimental to their overall wellbeing (Northup & Shumway, 2014).

Conflict

Northup and Shumway (2014) also demonstrated a recurring theme of conflict in marital relationships associated with gaming. The participants' descriptions of their experiences of being a 'gamer widow' were almost uncanny, with one participant stating - "The differences in you and your husband mean that the marital relationship looks different too. Suddenly the roles shift as you are the one taking care of the house and the kids. You grow more distant from each other, partly because his time is consumed by the game, but also because you cannot stand what he is doing. You stop talking to each other, sharing your emotions, and even having sex. In many ways, this is no longer a marriage" (p. 273).

The participants all reported an increasing level of conflict due to their partner's excessive gaming, stating that gaming itself was the subject of the majority of their arguments, as well as the effects of the excessive gaming "We argue a lot... most of the time" (p. 276). Additionally, conflict was also reported to occur due to concerns over the effects of the perceived addiction, such as unequal marital or parental roles and feelings of neglect. Moreover, participants reported how their spouses became defensive about their gaming habit, especially when interrupted during game play or when the topic of problematic gaming is brought up. These findings complement Ahlstrom et al's, (2012), findings and further demonstrate the detrimental effects excessive use of MMORPGs has on marital conflict and marital satisfaction.

Therefore, excessive or problematic gaming, or an unwillingness to stop playing can pose a great threat to romantic relationships and the couple's wellbeing. Coyne et al., (2012), conducted a study on 1,333 romantic couples of varying

commitment levels, with 60% of the males being gamers and 34% of the females being gamers. Video and computer game use continues to be male-dominated worldwide (Anand, 2007; Olson et al., 2007). However, Coyne et al., (2012), speculate that a large quantity of female gamers adopted the hobby on behalf of their male companions. Coyne et al's., (2012), study first evaluated the couple's strengths and weaknesses using the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE). The RELATE is a 300-item online questionnaire intended to evaluate individual's relationships. Secondly, the study evaluated game use and game related conflict. Their findings demonstrated a positive correlation between the time the gamer (both male and female) spent playing video games, and issues related to the time spent gaming. Moreover, conflict regarding time spent using video games and their content were positively correlated with relational aggression in men and women.

“My wife started playing [World of Warcraft] in about December of 2007. Two weeks before our 38th wedding anniversary she came into my room and told me she was leaving me. She wanted to find ‘something different’. That something different turn[ed] out to be WOW... I am destroyed by a video game and have no idea how to proceed (Anonymous post from gamerwidow.com)” (Coyne et al., 2012, p. 388).

“My fiancé and I have been living together for 2½ years... Today I asked him to get off the computer because his grandmother made arrangements days ago to come this afternoon for a visit to bring by baby gifts... I told him to get off the computer and he got really mean with me. I was so upset I left... I came home after a few hours and gave him the Great Ultimatum - me or Wow [World of Warcraft]. I wasn't too surprised when he walked out”. (Coyne et al., 2012, p. 389).

Media dependence such as problematic gaming can be destructive in a romantic relationship. However, the maintenance of shared tasks and conflict

management may influence how conflict over gaming is handled (Chory & Banfield, 2009). On the other hand, Chory and Banfield (2009) discuss that media dependence such as problematic gaming may indirectly impact a couple's positivity and shared tasks which, in turn, disrupts a couple's conflict management, which may itself negatively impact their level of commitment, liking, and relational satisfaction (Chory & Banfield, 2009). Furthermore, dependence on media is likely to increase as a coping strategy in response to problematic interpersonal relationships, which can lead to additional relational problems (Young, 2004, as cited in Chory & Banfield, 2009). Therefore, media dependence as a coping response can set off a corrosive process whereby "relational maintenance declines, perceptions of relational inequity increase, and relational partners ultimately pull away from the relationship" (Chory & Banfield, 2009, p. 50).

Effects of Excessive Video Game Use on the Romantic Partner

Northup and Shumway's (2014) phenomenological study discussed significant consequences of excessive gaming on the romantic partner. It was stated that as the gaming spouse fell deeper into his dependence greater emotional distance was observed, with many participants portraying their spouses as physically present but mentally and emotionally absent (Northup & Shumway, 2014). Furthermore, nurturing the emotional and physical intimacy of the relationship was rarely possible due to gaming consuming most of their partner's time. One participant described the cycle which led to the eventual demise of their intimacy. She would 'stonewall' when feeling alienated due to her spouse's gaming, consequentially prompting her spouse to happily retreat further into his game (Northup & Shumway, 2014). This neglect led to

other negative affect including resentment in all participants. Prolonged resentment towards the spouse and towards gaming allowed the participants to become unresponsive, and unable to reciprocate to their partner's rare attempts to show affection. Participants also reported feeling invalidated and dismissed when their gaming spouses ignore requests to desist gaming, often leaving the room completely. Hostility and aggression were also reported as reactions to requests to pause or stop gaming.

“There can't be communication with him while he is at the computer or anger comes out.” (Northup & Shumway, 2014, p. 275).

When the non-gaming partner feels invalidated for months, or even years, they are discouraged to attempt to talk about the gaming and other feelings such as anger and frustration tend to build (Northup & Shumway, 2014). Anger was observed in all participants of the study. Simply looking at a game on the spouse's computer screen triggered feelings of anger, rage, and resentment. Frustration was also a common theme across participants due to the time consumption of the hobby, and constantly feeling neglected.

The Current Research Question

The present study, therefore, proposes to understand the effects of an excessive gaming habit on romantic relationships in the New Zealand context. This study has not endeavoured to prove or disprove hypotheses or test a theory, instead the researcher strived to obtain high quality data from which phenomena may be

understood (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). This study is the first of its kind in New Zealand, which addresses a gap in research. New Zealand research on this phenomenon is lacking and verging on non-existent. Perhaps this is because the concept of problematic gaming is relatively young, and the majority of psychiatrists in New Zealand will not have been educated about problematic gaming and therefore lack understanding of the phenomenon and may not feel confident in managing it (Dallur & Hay, 2017). Therefore, this study wishes to add depth and context to the vast amount of international quantitative studies, whose findings have propelled many to obtain a cautious view of excessive and problematic gaming, and the effects it has on relationships. Additionally, this study will loosely replicate the methodology of Northup and Shumway's (2014) qualitative study with some adjustments as appropriate.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Qualitative Research

All research approaches share the same goal - to investigate reasons behind experiences or phenomena through observation (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Social sciences in particular, aim to understand or reveal ways of interpreting dynamic social realities (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Qualitative research differentiates itself from quantitative studies, as they are primarily concerned with understanding individual experiences from a humanistic perspective, rich description of data, and interpretive method (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Additionally, qualitative studies are characterised by the flexibility of analysis often occurring in the process of data collection, whereby the two processes are moulded by each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The qualitative approach is scrutinised for its fundamentally contrasting methods of data collection, analysis, and assessment of research, as opposed to quantitative research (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). However, researchers argue that qualitative methodologies obtain unique strengths, such as the researchers being able to improve their interpersonal and subjectivity skills (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007), the opportunity to closely examine issues, which permits researchers to understand the complexities of the phenomena in question often elucidated by the positivist approach (Atieno, 2009), and the use of open-ended

questions which are non-restrictive, allowing participants to discuss their subjectively most prevalent issues (Choy, 2014). Therefore, with objectivity, ethical diligence, and rigour, qualitative research methods can be uniquely advantageous in understanding human experience and phenomena (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). The current study used a qualitative descriptive method.

Recruitment

Upon approval from AUTECH (AUT Ethics Committee) (Appendix a), 6 participants were recruited through advertisements placed on reddit.com and Facebook.com (Appendix e). Additionally, it was asked that viewers shared the advertisement so that recruitment may also occur via word of mouth. Participants were not incentivised to participate. Most participants were recruited via advertisements on Facebook.com (4 out of 6). Two participants were recruited via word of mouth.

The only criteria used to exclude pending participants was a lack of perception of excessive gaming in their romantic partner (or ex-partner) at some point in the relationship. However, no pending participants were excluded. Participants were all female and ranged between 19 and 42 years old ($M_{age} = 27$). The study included a diverse range of New Zealanders - Bulgarian (1), NZ European (2), Chinese (1), British European (1), Indonesian (1), NZ Maori (1).

A summary of the participants' demographics and romantic relationships is provided in *Table 1*, although some details are not specific in order to preserve anonymity. Additionally, half of the participants reported living with their partners. Two out of 6 participants discussed their experience being of a previous relationship.

Three out of 6 participants reported their partner's gaming reducing over the duration of their relationship.

TABLE 1

Table 1

Basic Profile of Participants

Participant	Age Range	Ethnicity	Highest Education	Relationship Status	Age of Relationship
Violet	20-30	Bulgarian	Tertiary Degree	De-facto	8
Tracy	20-30	New Zealander	Tertiary Degree	De-facto	7
Lorraine	20-30	Chinese	Tertiary Degree	Dating Exclusively	4
Anna	20-30	British European	Tertiary Degree	Dating Exclusively	1.5
Winona	40-50	Indonesian	Tertiary Degree	Married	18
		Maori New			
Rose	20-30	Zealander	Tertiary Degree	Dating Exclusively	2

Procedure

As the present study loosely replicated Northup and Shumway's (2014) methodology, a semi-structured interview schedule typical of qualitative descriptive studies (Appendix b) was used to guide data collection (Sandelowski, 2000). Participants were interviewed one-on-one, either in person at the AUT Akoranga campus (4) or via Skype (2). As Sandelowski (2000), advises for qualitative descriptive studies, the interviews followed a moderately structured open-ended format. The interviews were between 45 and 60 minutes long.

The interview (Appendix b) contained three themes - questions about the gaming partner (circumstances surrounding first gaming activity, social activity, motivation for continuation and current gaming activity, frequency of game play, psychological and physiological symptoms after prolonged gaming or not gaming, any aggression or stress associated with gaming, and if, and how gaming has reduced over time), questions about the participant's feelings and experience of their partner's gaming (potential emotional consequences the participant experiences due to their partner's gaming - if yes, why, when, how often?, whether the participant has a concept of problematic gaming, whether the participant's feelings about video games have changed over time, how the participant copes, or cannot cope with the excessive gaming), and questions about the relationship (focusing on conflict, emotional intimacy, communication, and shared activities).

Participants still in relationships with their gaming partners were asked why they continue the relationship. Participants who were no longer in a relationship with the gaming partner were asked what prompted the break up, and if gaming was a contributing factor. Finally, the participants were asked how they felt after participating in the interview, how they feel about the future with their partners, and if

there was anything they would like to change. Some examples of the questions include - “what do you think about his gaming habit?”, “how do you think he would describe his gaming?”, “what do you feel when he goes to play a game?”, “how have you been impacted by your ex’s gaming habit?”, “can you describe a typical day with your partner?”, “how do you handle conflict in your relationship?”, and “what would be the ideal level of his gaming hobby for you?”. The participants were then provided with information about help and information services, and given a koha (petrol voucher) to thank them for their time and participation.

Analysis

Descriptive and Thematic Analysis

The analysis primarily adopted is a qualitative content analysis which entails a dynamic evaluation of data aimed to recapitulate the data (Sandelowski, 2000). A qualitative descriptive method was oriented towards discovering the who, what, and where of events, and description of the phenomena (Sandelowski, 2000). However, a thematic approach was used in conjunction with a descriptive approach to gain a deeper, slightly interpretative analysis in which existing literature could be included for contextual information or validating the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A realist thematic approach was chosen to report the meaning of participants subjective realities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was considered an appropriate guide for conducting a thorough analysis as it is recommended for students and those who do not possess a high level of skill or experience with qualitative research, it can be particularly effective for investigating under-researched phenomena, and it serves as

an educational tool for developing a more thorough understanding of qualitative techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The preliminary analyses included data transcription, preparation, and extraction, as typical of both the qualitative descriptive approach and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sandelowski, 1995; Sandelowski, 2000). More specifically, Braun and Clarke (2006), refer to this phase of data analysis as ‘familiarization of data’ in which the transcribed data are read, re-read, and initial ideas are constructed. A descriptive analysis was continued throughout the analysis. However, the following steps used were specific to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) guide to thematic analysis.

Phase two included generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Contrary to quantitative research, in which codes may pre-exist collection of data, data codes are typically generated from within the data in qualitative analysis (Sandelowski, 2000). Phase three is where potential themes are coded, and data are collated under each potential theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase four is theme review. This phase involves careful examination of the themes, determination of whether the themes form a cohesive structure accurately reflecting the significance of the entire data set, and considering the validity of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, this phase includes creating a ‘thematic map’ of analysis.

Phase five refers to the naming of themes and further scrutinising of the details in each theme in order to gain a clear understanding of what story the analysis tells (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Further, theme names must be meticulously reviewed to ensure clear definitions can be produced. Finally, phase six consists of the production of the report - the last opportunity for analysis. This involves choosing the most prominent data extracts to present and the analysis of chosen extracts, ensuring that

the overall research question maintains significant and relevant (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

As the interviewer was a student with no professional experience, the most prominent ethical concerns regarded the participants. Referring to AUTECH Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) (2014), guidelines for research ethics, principles for research involving human participants include ‘informed consent’, for which the researcher developed consent forms, given to participants prior to interviews (Appendix c); ‘scientific design and conduct of the study’, for which an application research proposal was written and approved (Appendix d); ‘risks and potential benefits’ which were also clarified in the approved research proposal (PGR1) (Appendix d) and the ethics application (EA1) approved by AUTECH (Appendix A); ‘selection of study population and recruitment of research participants’, no participants were expected more of, or deprived from any aspects of the study; ‘payments for participation in research’ was clarified in the ethics application, a koha was given to participants post-interview to thank them for their time, and travel costs; ‘protection of research participants’ privacy and confidentiality’ which may be the most important ethical consideration of this study as anonymity had to be protected (HRC, 2014). All precautions were examined and participants’ rights to privacy were clarified in the consent form and prior to the interview. Finally, ‘cultural responsiveness’ was upheld throughout the study, especially during interviewing. The principles of the Treaty of Waitangi were also respected, particularly when interviewing the single Maori participant in the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Results

After following a meticulous analysis process, seven major themes were found. However, after refining the thematic map, four major themes were left, the rest either discarded or incorporated into bigger themes, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Several subthemes were also identified under all major themes. The major themes identified include: *The Gamer's Gaming*, *The Relationship*, *The Gamer Widow*, and *Tolerance*. These themes and their associated sub themes will be described.

Theme: The Gamer's Gaming

This theme illustrates participants' experiences of their partners, and perception of their partner's gaming habits. More specifically, it describes how the gaming partner's are perceived to be affected by their own excessive gaming, what motivates them to game, and how other relationships affect their gaming habit. Before the subthemes are described, the partners' gaming history, occupations and qualifications, games they play, and time spent gaming will be briefly introduced for context. Pseudonyms will be used for both the participants, their partners, and other identities mentioned. All participants' partners were employed, with three having completed tertiary degrees.

All of the participants reported that their partners were gamers prior to beginning the romantic relationship. One participant did not know exactly when their partner began gaming. One participant stated her partner began gaming while he was in university in his early 20's. Three out of 5 participants reported their partners commencing the habit in childhood, with one participant saying "his whole life, there are literally pictures of him when he's like 11 years old sitting on the computer gaming and stuff, so yeah he's been doing it his entire life" - Tracy.

The gamers were reported to play a wide variety of games. Violet's ex-partner Tony was reported to play any and all games, but preferred storyline role playing games which would take weeks to months to finish (playing daily for several hours). Tony used many platforms to game - Xbox, Nintendo Wii, and PC. Tracy's partner Sam had a PlayStation and enjoyed playing old PlayStation games. He also played some modern games more religiously, including *Rocket League* and an MMORPG which Tracy could not name. Sam's life revolved around gaming. His profession involves gaming, he enjoys gaming on a daily basis, and he is also quite passionate about board and card games. Lorraine reported that her partner Stephen mostly plays PC games including first person shooter *Battlegrounds* and MOBA (multiplayer online battle arena) *Dota*. Anna observed her ex-partner John religiously playing *Counterstrike*, and frequently playing action and combat games on different mediums. Winona reported that her partner Nicholas played the newest and latest games but favoured MMORPGS. Rose could not name any specific game, genre, or platform as her partner Jake switches games frequently.

Because 5 out of 6 participants live or lived with their partners, it seems that their observations of the frequency that their partners engage in gaming would be accurate. Time spent gaming is summarised in *Table 2* below. Only one couple is

excluded from *Table 2* as Rose was unsure of the frequency of her partner's gaming habit due to not living together.

TABLE 2

Table 2

Gaming Time

Participant	Partner	Daily (hrs)	Weekly
			(max)
Violet	Tony	6	> 40
Tracy	Sam	6	30
Lorraine	Stephen	4	30
Anna	John	>6	>40
Winona	Nicholas	>4	30

All participants reported their partner's gaming to be somewhat excessive at some point in the relationship. Five out of 6 participants reported their partner's playing games between 20 and 30 hours per week, playing most nights of the week. Four participants reported that their partners have reduced gaming (Tracy, Lorraine, Winona, and Rose). However, only one participant reported that the change was so significant that their relationship no longer suffers as a consequence of the gaming (Winona). The remaining three participants maintained goals they wished to achieve in terms of reducing gaming activity or gaming related interests in order to reconnect as a couple. Rose's situation was quite unique. Due to not living with her partner, she did not express concern over her partner's gaming so much as his preoccupation with gaming related interests, such as browsing gaming forums on *Reddit*, or watching

gaming content on *YouTube*. Rose stated that his gaming related activity is what intrudes most in the time they spend together.

In terms of what ‘excessive’ meant to the participants, the gaming partners were reported to possess several IGD symptoms. Lorraine’s partner was observed to possess the following symptoms: preoccupation with gaming, stress, a dependence on the activity, a lack of control with the activity, and sacrificing a significant aspect of his life due to gaming. *Table 3* presents the participants observations of their partners in lieu of IGD symptoms.

TABLE 3

Table 3

IGD Symptoms

Partner	Preoccu		Lack of			Psychosocial		Sacrifice
	-pation	Withdrawals	Dependence	control	issues	Deception		
Tony	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	
Sam	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	
Stephen	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
John	Y	N	Y	N	n/a	N	Y	
Nicholas	Y	n/a	Y	Y	N	N	Y	
Jake	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	

NB: where n/a is applied, there was insufficient information

Subtheme: Outcomes of Gaming on the Gamer

Sacrifices

Five out of 6 participants reported that they felt their partners were lacking in their roles in the relationship, or sacrificed their relationships for gaming to an extent. Specifically, in not being a supportive partner in times of emotional duress, or not being present on a day-to-day basis. Winona, the only married participant, stated, “I believe that by doing all of those games with people, he feels like his time was fulfilled already. He doesn’t need a woman”. Similarly, Violet said, “He would neglect me and just game and act like I wasn’t in the room at some points. And he only made me feel like I was in the room when I would walk past the TV screen. And at that point he would just get upset at me for doing that, but that was the only time”. In regard to not getting emotional support, Anna said, “He just didn’t acknowledge how I was feeling, I was going to have to put my dog down the next day. I was needing support but gaming was one of the things that took his support away from me. Because he was so wrapped up in it I don’t think he really noticed how I was feeling”.

Three out of 6 participants described their partners being less ambitious due to gaming taking up their lives. Violet felt that her ex-partner had goals but did not strive to achieve them because his life revolved around gaming, “He had goals he wanted to achieve in life, and instead of looking at ways to achieve them; Instead he chose to game just to vent because he wasn’t achieving what he wanted to achieve, and instead of trying to change that he just would game”.

All participants described their partners deferring their chores or other responsibilities for weeks at a time to game, often culminating in an argument before the chores were ultimately done. Tracy said she would often ask Sam to do a chore

once he's finished a game, but would regularly have to ask him again and again for weeks before eventually getting into an argument, "I'll say 'I want you to do this thing right now and I've been asking for 4 weeks and it's just ridiculous'. And he'll be like 'oh nah nah, you need to give me 5 minutes'. And I'll be like 'f**k I've given you so much time to do it, you just need to get off right now and get it done'". In regards to greater responsibilities, Violet stated "he neglected all of his other life responsibilities to game. And due to that, he did not progress in life". Whereas, Rose reported that her partner sacrificed his high school education for gaming when it was excessive, reporting that he did not care about school and would regularly show up late.

Physiological Consequences

All 6 participants stated that their partner's sleep has suffered somewhat due to staying up late at night gaming. Lorraine stated "I just personally think it affects quality of sleep. Especially if you game till almost 2am, or even past 2am and have to wake up at like 6 or 7am to go to work". She further explained that Stephen's lack of sleep due to gaming subsequently affects his mood with her: "I think it affects his mood with me. I think he tends to get a bit more moody if he doesn't get enough sleep". Rose believes that Jake's sleep and eating patterns were affected by his excessive gaming in high school, saying he would sleep after midnight and be late to school the following morning. However, she noted that both have improved due to having a full-time job. Tracy also stated that although she perceives Sam to overall be a healthy person, his gaming does occasionally impact his eating, "sometimes he forgets to eat when he's on the game because he gets so focused and involved in it".

Four out of 6 participants discussed stress being a factor involved in their partner's gaming. The participants' partners were reported to turn to gaming as a

coping mechanism to deal with stress. When asked what changes Violet noticed over the years in regards to Tony's gaming she said, "Um, I noticed that he got, like the angry feelings that were expressed. He spent more time with the gaming. When he got stressed with his job he would turn to gaming. Um to express those frustrations". However, participants were unsure as to whether gaming was effective at relieving their partner's stress, or whether it actually contributed to their levels of stress and further inhibited their coping skills. Rose stated, "I think when he gets majorly stressed he goes to game and that relaxes him. But I could be wrong and it could be why he gets stressed out so much". Lorraine also said her partner tended to get quite stressed and angry, and would turn to gaming to cope or relieve unpleasant feelings. However, she believes that not permitting Stephen to game tends to increase his stress, "He thinks it's a way to de-stress, so me telling him not to game stresses him out even more and he just wants me to understand that he games because he's stressed, and that that's his hobby". Perhaps stress is a withdrawal symptom that some of the gamers experience.

Preoccupation with Gaming

Four participants reported their partners being preoccupied with gaming to the extent that gaming was the most dominant use of their free time on a daily basis. These participants reported their partners going to work or university during the day and then using all of their evening time gaming. Additionally, two participants who stated that their partners had progressively reduced their gaming nonetheless felt that their partners remained significantly preoccupied with their habit on a daily basis through either anticipating or partaking in the activity. For instance, Tracy stated that Sam recently bought a controller for his Android so that now "he can sit there and play the game when he's like on the bus or whatever else, and then he's got games on

his phone that he would play without a controller so it's sort of like, wherever he goes, he's got a game with him". Tracy seems concerned with this ongoing preoccupation, stating, "it gets to this point after like every few months or so when I'm literally like ok, so, you know, I'm getting really tired of this and you need to maybe sometimes you know, not be on the game and you know pay more attention to me and like, just be more sort of present with me as opposed to the gaming or thinking about it or getting frustrated because you can't be on it". She later expanded that "it's such a big part of his life, so important to him and he's always either wanting to do it or thinking about it". Similarly, Rose stated how she felt after hearing Jake describe his need to game, "it sounds like a requirement that he needs to game coz he hasn't in this amount of time, so he needs to now, coz then he won't get to later". Though Sam and Jake respectively managed to somewhat reduce their gaming, their preoccupation with it still seems to affect them both on a daily basis.

Aggression/Anger

Because there is a vast amount of literature dictating that aggressive affect increases with gaming or violent video gaming, participants were asked if they thought their partner's aggression was impacted by gaming. Two out of 6 participants described their partner's aggression increasing due to gaming. However, four participants described their partners having aggressive personalities. Violet mentioned that Tony would become angry with her if she walked past the television screen without ducking when he was gaming "if I didn't he'd get angry. Because he'd lost part of the game". She stated that he had quite an aggressive personality, and it would become most apparent when gaming or driving. Lorraine stated that either gaming excessively or having had less sleep would make Stephen angry. Anna and Rose described that their partners had aggressive personalities. However, Anna and Rose

reported that their partners' gaming did not impact their level of aggression or aggressive affect at all. Therefore, gaming may not a reliable determinant of aggression. Having an aggressive personality also does not determine the effect of gaming on displaced aggression or hostility.

Rude Behaviour

Five out of 6 participants described their partner's behaviour as rude or inconsiderate when gaming with either occasional or regular frequency. Violet and Anna found their partners' actions very inconsiderate when they would game late at night, disrupting their sleep. Violet stated "Um I felt that you know um... he was being extremely inconsiderate towards me in his actions. Particularly when I couldn't get to sleep at night". Tracy, Rose, and Lorraine perceived their partners to be rude when they attempted communication and reported being ignored due to their partner's attention being glued to the game. Tracy said, "Sometimes we'll be having a conversation and he'll be on his phone playing a game, and I'm like 'can you engage and not do the game while we're having a conversation because that's pretty rude'. So usually he'll get off it. But I feel like I shouldn't have to say it, you should just get off it, because that's what a normal person does". Lorraine similarly stated, "Well say when we're arguing I usually sit next to him. He just looks at his screen and replying to me while he's looking at the screen. Which I find quite rude. A lot of times. But he just doesn't get that. He doesn't think it's rude. Because he's busy gaming, I'm rude for intruding him". It seems these participants found their partners' behaviour quite abnormal.

Subtheme: Motivation to Game

Besides stress, participants described 'winning' as a motivation to game. Violet stated, "I think um, the gaming gave him like, positive affirmation about himself when he won. He liked winning. So, that's why he played. He played to win". Tracy similarly stated, "He's really competitive so I think that's part of the reason he enjoys it. Also the gaming gives him a goal to work towards and you can track your progress throughout the game or games and see how you're doing. So it's a good way to get little rewards from a hobby". Lorraine, Anna, and Winona mentioned 'having time' being a reason to game. Lorraine stated, "He games at the times he has nothing to do so he is doing it as just a hobby, and filling in the time". Overall, participants seemed most unsettled by their partners using gaming as a coping mechanism. Returning to Chory and Banfield (2009), it is explicable that participants would feel unsettled, if they have observed media dependence as a coping mechanism which, in turn, has led their partners to pull away from the relationship.

Subtheme: Other Relationships

Two out of 6 participants believed that their partner's excessive gaming affected them more than it affected their partner or other friends/family. When inquiring about other relationships, 5 out of 6 participants stated that their partners often gamed with friends either online or in person. Two participants (Tracy and Winona) said their partners would sometimes have a LAN party (where several gamers get together, bring their computers and game online overnight). None of the participants were significantly concerned with their partners becoming isolated. However, the participants did seem concerned with the normality of their partner's socialisation, with most of it taking place online, "could he be getting isolated through the amount of time he spends on games? Um, but he reckons that it's fine because he's

playing with all his friends. So, which makes sense to me. But at the same time it's not the same as like social sort of interaction” - Tracy. Similarly, after asking Rose if she considered Jake a social person, she replied “Uh, not to the extent like some people would think is healthy, but he goes out and sees his friends, and he lives with one of his friends and they game together”. It is apparent that gaming relationships tend to validate and normalise gaming behaviour.

Subtheme: Denial

The participants seemed quite concerned with defining what ‘normal’ gaming was and what they should therefore accept about their partner’s gaming. All 6 participants were quite certain that their partners would perceive their level of gaming to be completely normal. Factors that normalised partners’ gaming in the eyes of the participants included their partner’s age, gender, gamer friends, use of gaming as a coping mechanism, and having been a gamer for some time. Tracy said, “I think he thinks that it's normal, nothing to worry about. I think it's a hobby to him. A hobby that he spends a lot of time doing”. Anna mentioned that gamer friends normalised John’s gaming, “I think he probably thought it was normal because as far as I can tell he was playing games for years, and most of his friends were also gamers, so he had that whole community”. Equally, Winona stated that both the length of time her partner had been gaming and his having gamer friends impacted the normality of his gaming, “He didn't think about it being excessive. To him it was a norm. Because he's been doing it for many many years, I guess before he met me; But because he's surrounded by people who plays exactly like him he thinks it's a norm”. Rose also mentioned friends normalising Jake’s gaming, “He probably thinks it's very normal. Coz it's something that him and all his friends do and it's very normal for them”.

Violet also believed that Tony felt his gaming was normal despite how it adversely affected her, “He didn’t see it as neglectful to me. He thought he was completely justified in his actions”.

The gaming partners’ limited apprehension of the repercussions of their excessive gaming on themselves and on their partners and other relationships indicates that they are typically in some level of denial about their gaming behaviour. For this reason, researchers have been advised to interview partners of excessive gamers or others close to gamers to get a more accurate description (Young, 2009b).

Theme: The Relationship

This theme illustrates how the participants’ romantic relationships were affected by their partner’s excessive gaming. One out of 6 participants stated that she believed her partner’s gaming has had a positive effect on their relationship, “Sometimes we really bond through the game and that. The game with the girl and the dinosaurs... I really enjoy watching it, and he really enjoys playing it” - Tracy. The remaining participants (for differing reasons) did not express that excessive gaming had any positive effects on their relationship. After being asked if there was anything good about the gaming, Violet said, “I can’t say there was anything at all good about it. One because of the neglect. Two he’d get very angry when he gamed, at me, and in general and to the point where sometimes I would be scared to be in the room because he would get so angry and would throw things, controllers”. The subthemes will describe the specific areas of the relationships most affected by excessive gaming, namely the couple’s sleep rituals, questioning of/ending of the relationship, conflict, and good and bad days.

Subtheme: Consequences on The Relationship

Shared Time

The couples' shared time was one of the most prominent aspects of the relationship affected by excessive gaming. All 6 participants expressed some sort of disappointment or despair with the lack of shared time in their relationship due to their partner's excessive gaming. Even though several of the participants enjoyed occasional gaming themselves (either starting because of their partner's influence or not), most found that it did not become a shared leisure activity. When asked if gaming brought the couple closer, Violet said, "It never did that... It never did that". She then followed with "I thought it was something we could do together and have a fun time doing together. Um, but because he was so you know, he did it all the time, and all those angry emotions that he suppressed while he was doing it, and neglect towards me, it kind of had the opposite effect". Tracy, on the other hand, expressed that her partner Sam often tries to share gaming with her, "I think he wants to share it with me, I think he's so passionate and into it, and feels excited about it that he really, really wants me to be involved in that". She stated that she enjoys a couple of games, but throughout the interview she repetitively emphasised that she felt overwhelmed, describing the whole experience as "too much", "sometimes I get a bit tired of it, it's a little bit too much for me sometimes", "'nah sorry I can't hear about another game, it's too much'".

Lorraine expressed some sadness due to a lack of shared time, particularly with Stephen's lack of enthusiasm or initiative in planning shared activities. After sharing that Stephen often expects her to make all the plans she said, "Like I feel like we're not really in the same boat, and we're not really doing something together. He's

just doing it because I want to do it. He's probably just dragged out to do it for me not with me, with the things that I want to do".

Four out of 6 participants described having routine schedules in which the couple's only opportunity for shared time was on weekday evenings (excluding weekends) and nonetheless having their partner spend much, if not most of that time gaming. Lorraine said, "The only together time we have is like dinner. And me checking on him, being in the same room as him. Sometimes he comes to my room and checks on me. But that is probably less than a minute. And if I do check on him I'll be there for 3 or 4 minutes. And then keep doing our own thing, and then it would be like bed-time". Anna mentioned a similar experience, "the times where we were together was like I was cooking and give him his dinner as I've said and I'd be left spending time by myself. Because he would already have his laptop set up. So we didn't really have a lot of time to talk about stuff".

The only married participant (Winona) said her relationship suffered tremendously due to the time that gaming took away from their relationship, "we almost got divorced several times. And so basically I believe it's really contributed by not spending time together".

Consumption of Other Media

Couples' shared consumption of other media has been shown as a potential relational maintenance strategy in a recent study (Ledbetter, 2017). Five participants expressed that they personally enjoyed watching TV and movies. However, participants' satisfaction in sharing the activity with their partners varied. Violet seemed fairly content with staying in and watching TV with her partner on weekends. Tracy said that watching TV together was a daily ritual which she and Sam would do during or after dinner, which she was also quite content with.

Lorraine, on the other hand, stated that her partner did not enjoy watching TV or movies which she was very unsatisfied with, “I do like to have together time, just watch TV together, and watch a movie together and stuff like that. But for him, it’s kind of like he doesn’t like to watch TV together, he doesn’t like to watch movies together at night; So I thought that was quite bad”. Anna stated that her and John would watch a lot of TV together at the start of their relationship, but this shared time progressively deteriorated, “it got to a point where I was doing my own thing and he would do his own thing. Whereas in the past we would like sit together and watch a movie on TV”.

Rose said that her and Jake spent a lot of time watching TV or movies in the weekends, which she would get bored or tired of. Additionally, she explained that when watching something together Jake would often be consuming gaming related media on his phone, “So we don’t actually go out, it’s more at home watching movies and stuff like that. And it’s usually a movie I wanna watch and he won’t pay attention; He’ll go on his phone and read stuff instead of watching the movie and I’ll be like ‘did you see that’ and he’ll say no because he wasn’t paying attention”. If shared media consumption is in fact a strategy of relational maintenance, then excessive gaming may impact a gamer’s willingness or desire to engage in this strategy which, after a prolonged period, may contribute to the deterioration of the relationship.

Communication

Two out of 6 participants seemed to communicate effectively in their relationships, though not to the extent that they have achieved their goals regarding their partner’s frequency or preoccupation with gaming. The married couple, as Winona stated, has achieved effective communication over many years and with a

great reduction in Nicholas' gaming. Nonetheless, all 6 participants described disappointment with communication in their relationships due to excessive gaming.

Violet stated that communication was overall lacking in her relationship with Tony. Moreover, trying to communicate to him about his excessive gaming was never effective, "Well I did try and talk to him about it. But he didn't change, like, words didn't make a difference". Tracy on the other hand expressed that Sam sometimes responds well to her concerns about his gaming, "if I ask him to change something or say to him 'sometimes it would be good if I come home and said hey I'm here, and you just get off straight away and then we just like talk'. Sometimes I'll ask him to do that and he'll say 'yeah, I can do that sometimes'"; and overall they seemed to communicate well. However, she reported communication being occasionally disrupted by Sam's gaming. Nonetheless, Tracy seemed positive that they can always work things out by communicating, "It does affect the relationship. Yeah and sometimes I do feel second best. But it's not anything I feel like we can't work with just by communicating with each other".

Lorraine expressed having quite a hard time trying to communicate with her partner. From early in their relationship when the two were living apart, she reported Stephen's gaming being a barrier in their communication, "Like he would say 'I'll call you after I shower' or something like that but he actually wouldn't do it until midnight or after midnight because he was busy gaming and he didn't even notice that and then when I'd ask him he'd say 'oh I told you I'd call in a minute' you know I was like that's 5 hours is not a minute. But he's so into that, that it doesn't seem like a problem". Since living together, communication remains problematic due to Stephen's excessive gaming, "when I'm trying to talk to him about things I think are

important he would probably just be like with half of his headphones on like not even looking at me. That's one of the problems".

Alongside lack of shared time, Winona reported lack of communication as another reason why she and Nicholas almost divorced on several occasions. However, since the birth and raising of their child, Nicholas' gaming has reduced significantly. He games quite rarely and she states that they have been able to improve their communication skills and shared time as a result of this.

Rose states that she and Jake often communicate to problem-solve in their relationship, with the exception of his gaming. She reported that gaming still intrudes in their communication, "I'll be like 'hey, do you wanna talk about your day' and he'll ignore me for like half an hour, and I'll be like 'hey did you hear what I just said', and that'll go on for a while, and then I'll have this big outburst, and he'll be like what nothing happened. And I'll have to sit him down and be like 'this is what happened, this is why I'm upset' Then he'll be like 'oh, I'm sorry'. Then it'll happen again, so... It's one of those things that you try to work through but then they keep doing it". Notwithstanding, Rose believes they can effectively communicate about most of their issues, "if I bring it up with him it shouldn't be a huge thing. So we probably could work towards most of those things".

Though some couples can effectively communicate about most problems, all 6 participants reported struggling with communication due to their partner's gaming, or gaming related activity.

Subtheme: Couples Sleep Ritual

The five participants who lived with their partner's reported gaming affecting the couples sleep ritual. In fact, it seems that most of the couples rarely went to sleep

together. Tracy stated that she often has to ask her partner to come to bed with her and that he will often continue gaming regardless, “I would either tell him ‘it’s time we’ve gotta to go to bed’, or he would come get me, or I would just go to bed and be like ‘I’m going to bed, goodnight, come when you’re ready’. Because sometimes I can’t be bothered fighting with it. But sometimes I do fight with it. And then I would go to bed, usually the first one, then he would come to bed later or soon after or whatever”. Likewise, Lorraine said, “Sometimes I would manage to drag him into bed. But a lot of times I would just be in bed waiting for him”. Anna, Violet and Winona also described that they would often go to sleep without their partners, who would continue playing games, sometimes past midnight.

These desynchronised sleep rituals have undoubtedly led to an absence of reconnection, bonding, or intimacy during the couple's sleep ritual. It has had a significant impact on the participants. This will be further elaborated upon in the respective theme.

Subtheme: Questioning of/Ending the Relationship

Two of the participants were no longer in relationships with their gamer partners, both stating that their partner’s excessive gaming was one of the major factors in the breakup. However, two participants still in relationships with gamers expressed that their partner’s excessive gaming is a reason why they have previously attempted a break up, or questioned the relationship profusely. After being asked how Violet felt about Tony’s excessive gaming, she replied, “It got worse over the years and our relationship matured, and um, I could see that nothing was progressing in terms of our life together. Um, and in our relationship that I began to question it a lot more and notice that yes, his behaviour was obsessive, it was angry, it was

neglectful”. Lorraine who is still in a relationship with Stephen, described a similar experience “I definitely... I definitely feel like it has affected me in a way that has kind of pulled our relationship apart; And that makes me question whether or not the relationship is right for both of us”. She emphasised, “I don’t feel like we’re in a healthy relationship”. To reiterate, as Winona repetitively stated, they almost separated multiple times due to his excessive gaming, “during the first year and second year of marriage to the 5th and 6th year of marriage we almost got divorced several times”.

Subtheme: Conflict

Participants reported many different reasons for conflict in their relationships. However, many topics of conflict revolved around their partner’s gaming. Four out of 6 participants reported having conflict due to their partner not contributing to house responsibilities, sometimes due to gaming. Lorraine stated, “I don’t know like subconsciously I would think like ‘you game, so you don’t care about the surroundings...it’s such a trashy life’. Like ‘how can you not be tidy’ and stuff like that”. She later explained, “when you tell him to do it he’ll say ‘ok I’ll do it’. But then when he says ‘ok I’ll do it’ that means not now, it could be tonight, it could be tomorrow, it could be like, later... he will eventually do it but he’ll drag it out, even to like... weeks”. Winona described a similar experience, after asking how often she and her partner had conflict when his gaming was excessive, she answered “Every single week when he spends 12 hours. After he spends 12 hours. Because I will have to clean the mess”. Specifically, she was referring to when her partner hosted a LAN party with 7 to 8 men gaming in her house for 12 hours straight.

The amount and frequency of gaming was a common topic of conflict. When referring to Stephen's gaming, Lorraine said, "it was still a problem. It's always a problem". Four out of 6 participants described conflict over gaming. The other two participants reported having barely any conflict with their partners due to being typically quite passive. Tracy described several scenarios of discussion with Sam over the frequency or amount of his gaming, sometimes he would react well and listen, sometimes he would become defensive. Lorraine on the other hand reported that the very mention of gaming became a trigger for both of them, "trying to make a point makes it really difficult to make a statement out of 'oh you game too much'. It instantly becomes an offensive topic".

"Whenever I start off talking about something I'm pretty sure he probably gets a bit of anxiety effect as well. He'll feel like 'oh gosh it's coming'. And you get a kind of butterfly you know, sort of feeling. Like oh crap, we're going to have this talk again... It's again and again and like never a solution, always just fights, but nobody's gonna make up for anything. And if we do it's just like 'I'm sorry, I'm done being angry' like that and then that's it... And then you have some happy times, and then pretty much just waiting for an argument to come up again because it will come up soon, soon enough. Quite regularly". - Lorraine

Winona believed that all the conflict that she and Nicholas ever had while he was an excessive gamer revolved around his gaming habit, "of course if we fight, it means I've basically seen him playing games once a week. Sometimes I choose to ignore it because I get tired. Sometimes I get bottled up until I blow up from time to time". Now that Nicholas is no longer a gamer, Winona says any conflict they have is over 'little things' like domestic complaints, "Yeah, so we don't have the conflict we

used to have. So, we believe all that conflict was because of spending too much time in gaming and not with partner”.

Rose similarly described that the conflict she has with Jake is usually about his preoccupation with gaming, “It's one of those things that people will think isn't a major thing but then I'll have a massive breakdown and be like ‘what happened, did a bomb go off’”. Likewise, Tracy said, “We've never had any huge issues. The only issues we've had are around the gaming, and how much gaming he does”.

Perception of conflict was quite different between participants. Tracy stated that her and Sam would have conflict “at least twice a week” over gaming which she described as not a lot of conflict. Whereas, Lorraine described having conflict once a week which to her was too much, “A lot. Very frequently actually. It's not healthy. It's either really really really bad to the point where we're just like we're just going to call it off... to the next day when nothing happens and... so say every 2 to 3 weeks we fight, or every week we fight at least once”. Rose's perception of conflict frequency was similar, but she did not feel as negatively about it, “it's not every week but it's very frequent in that it makes me feel like you know we need to talk about it and sort it out”.

Three out of four participants who described having conflict in their relationships often had conflict due to feeling like less of a priority compared to their partner's gaming. For example, Lorraine said, “the arguments are always the same, like gaming, or like ‘oh you don't care about me’, ‘can you at least listen to me once’ blah blah blah...”. Winona described prioritisation as a huge source of conflict in their relationship, especially after they got married 18 years ago. However, she described that since 4 or 5 years ago, when Nicholas reduced his gaming almost completely, he has since prioritised her and their child which has changed the dynamics in their

relationship in a very positive way, “So that has changed probably the mechanics of our relationship and how we communicate changed maybe 5 or 4 years ago. And of course that's the same time that he reduced so much of his gaming. The gaming is no longer his life. It's not a necessity, just something that he can do if he has spare time. Even if he has spare time he will prioritize me and our child”.

Other reasons for conflict included being tired of their partner's gaming, losing sleep due to the disruption of their partner's gaming; “we'd have some sort of argument about it. And then I would just storm off and I'd go to bed and he would just stay on the game until like 1oclock. And then he would come in and wake me, when he goes to bed” - Tracy; planning shared leisure time; “when I don't plan, sometimes, not all the time, it would become like an argument because it would become like it was me who wanted to go to somewhere, I should be planning it. He shouldn't be doing anything, I should plan” - Lorraine; the gaming partner not being able to game, and lack of support “if he doesn't show me his full support in this marriage, I would be long gone” - Winona.

Subtheme: Good and Bad Days

Participants were asked to describe what a typical day in their relationship looked like, and what differentiated good and bad days. Violet and Rose chose to describe a typical weekend day and both described staying in and watching TV. Additionally, Rose said they would occasionally go for walks. For the rest of the participants, a typical day entailed going to work or University, and coming back home at the end of the day. Two participants described coming back home, preparing dinner, and going off to do their own activities for the rest of the evening until the participants would go to bed on their own and their partner would continue gaming

for a while before going to sleep also. Tracy described a similar day (albeit with more interaction with her partner), coming home at the end of the day, catching up with Sam, preparing dinner either on her own or with Sam, watching TV together, then they would both do their own activities with him often gaming. Sometimes they would go to bed together, sometimes she would go to bed on her own and he would stay up gaming. Winona did not describe evening activities after both coming home from work or university. However, she did say, “he will be busy doing uni work and meet up and his friends or playing games online, or meeting up with his friends at our house. Yeah all those things you think you shouldn't do, that you are doing while you're single but still doing while married”. It seems there was not much interaction between the two on a typical day, nor two of the other couples.

For all five participants who lived with their partners, a good day had one thing in common - less or no gaming. Additionally, four participants said that going outside would signify a good day. For example, Lorraine said, “probably a weekend where we decide we could do something else other than staying at home. Or just doesn't involve gaming. Anything that doesn't involve gaming is good”. Anna equally stated, “I guess it would just be when we had the chance to go out and do something during the day and that would be like at least we've done something together instead of just being at home playing games all day. But I wouldn't say that it would happen a whole lot”. Tracy said a typical day was quite good, but less gaming would be an improvement, “I think that's a pretty good day just minus, pretty much exactly that, except for when it's time to go to bed and I have to argue with him or I just go to bed by myself because I can't be bothered. Ideal would be, he comes out and gets me, and then we go to bed and he puts his phone down. And I put my phone down, and then we go to sleep... Yeah”.

A bad day for all the participants entailed having to pull their partner's attention away from gaming or gaming related activities in some way, and/or not doing anything together Violet stated, "A bad day would be one where he would game. He wouldn't give me attention he would be angry gaming. He would expect food to be cooked for him. While living in my house and gets upset if the food wasn't cooked perfectly. And yeah... that would be a bad day". Similarly, Tracy said, "I think the bad day would be when we'd get home and he'd wanna go straight on the game. And then I'd be like 'well who's going to cook dinner? Am I going to have to do it or are we gonna do it together, or do you want to order some food?' or something like that. So it would be bad if he went straight on the game and then we ordered dinner, and then ate dinner separately, and then I just sort of screwed around doing whatever, and then he was on the game, and then, and then he would say... I'd go and I'd say 'let's go to bed', and he would say 'I want to stay up late tonight, playing the game. That would usually be on a Friday when he would say something like that, and I would just be like, 'no, come on, let's just go to bed, like, you'll be tired tomorrow', blah blah blah. So yeah, that's a pretty shit day". For Lorraine, a bad day was described as a day when they were not able to spend time together, and Stephen continued gaming. Rose described staying inside and not doing anything being a bad day. Winona said that a bad day would be when she felt she had to justify not allowing him to play, leading them to have conflict over his gaming.

Due to Winona reporting that Nicholas does not really game anymore, she was asked to describe the present good and bad days. She replied, "There is no good day and bad day. Every day is a good day for us, like I come home, he comes home on time, we have delivery of my food bags so sometimes he cooks, sometimes I cook. If I have to cook then he will sit down and drink wine and talk to me about his days and

talk to J (their child). So basically everyday is like that with us. And then on the weekend we would spend time together. So it's not many bad days and good days, kind of thing right now. It's just all good days”.

Theme: The Gamer Widow

A gamer widow or widower is a partner of a game addict, or excessive user. The term is flexible in that the couple does not have to be married, and there is no restriction on the type of game the gamer uses excessively. The term may seem judgmental or hyperbolic. However, it is simply a term used to describe the partners of gamers who prioritize their gaming activity over their partner and romantic relationship. All participants in this study complained about feeling like less of a priority in their relationships either sometimes or frequently due to their partner's gaming or preoccupation with other gaming related activity. Therefore, this theme describes 3 subthemes exploring the participants' experiences of feeling second best, affective consequences of their partner's gaming, and sleep disturbance.

Subtheme: Second Best

All 6 participants described feeling second best in some way, in either having to pull their partner's attention from a game or feeling somewhat invisible because of their partner's gaming. Violet regularly spoke of feeling invisible or unimportant, “It just made me feel like I wasn't there to be honest. Like I didn't matter. That I wasn't important enough”. Anna also felt somewhat invisible, “he was just expecting me to be around, doing my own thing, making him dinner. So I was feeling a bit of... I wouldn't say a servant but you know I was just... there”. Tracy did not feel invisible,

but was expressive about her experience of feeling second best, “I feel like I’m second best. There’s the hierarchy and gaming is here (gestures) and I’m like here (gestures lower) so I’m like second to the gaming”. Earlier she also stated, “It’s like, sometimes I say to him, it’s like, sometimes I say to him it feels like it’s like me, him, and the gaming, it’s like three people in the relationship instead of just two”. Lorraine described a similar feeling, “obviously I think that gaming has become his priority which in turn makes me less of a priority”.

Naturally, feeling of lower rank or unimportant in the relationship can have significant effects on gaming partners’ affect and coping ability, which after a prolonged period can deteriorate their sense of self-worth and potentially their overall health.

Subtheme: Affective Consequences

Loneliness

Three participants talked about feeling lonely in their relationships because gaming took away so much of their partner’s time and attention. Lorraine, Anna, and Violet described their experiences as being in the same house as the person, but alienated in their relationships. Lorraine said, “Well obviously I would feel quite frustrated. It’s quite hopeless... Hopeless, frustrated, I feel like I’m talking to a wall. Especially when I’m trying to express to him how unhappy I am with the situation, and there’s no response which makes me more unhappy and angry. Because there’s no, you know I’m just expressing myself but for him it’s just annoying. So that’s pretty much how I feel. Just all the negative terms I suppose. Quite lonely sometimes”. Similarly, Anna said, “I would come give him dinner or call him for dinner and he would be so involved that he wouldn’t hear me”. She later emphasised, “I guess it was

kind of depressing. Mildly depressing and quite lonely”. For four of the participants, the prolonged experience of being in a relationship with an excessive gamer who does not receive any kind of professional help or guidance seems to progressively cause feelings of loneliness.

Neglect

The two participants who were no longer in relationships with their partners expressed having felt very neglected in their relationships. Violet stated, “I was feeling hurt, I was feeling neglected. Obviously angry at him, and I just wanted it to end”. Anna also felt neglected in that her partner did not notice when she was feeling badly, and needing support or comfort, “There was a total absence of comfort from him when I needed it. And I wasn't getting it from anywhere else. So it was kind of, I don't know, it was hard because I was going lower and it didn't seem like he was really noticing that there was anything wrong”.

Unappreciation

Violet and Anna also reported feeling unappreciated in their relationships. After asking Violet what other factors besides gaming prompted the breakup, she stated, “I thought I couldn't rely on him I couldn't trust him. Um and lack of communication. The fact that he didn't appreciate any of the effort I put in the relationship”. Anna felt unappreciated particularly with her cooking. She would cook for him most nights and he would game while eating instead of eating dinner with her, “I think that was one of the major things as well, because it was like some of the stuff I was doing to show my appreciation and love for him was not really respected or, it wasn't appreciated in the way that I liked, I always liked for them to enjoy it and just say thank you, be grateful”. She elaborated, “if it was basically ignoring my efforts to

keep the communication and doing stuff for him, if I felt that, that I was being ignored or not really appreciated then I would feel a little bit irritated”.

Fear

Four participants described feeling fear of some kind in relation to their partner’s gaming. For Violet, she felt fear for her physical safety at times when Tony would ‘angry game’ and throw things around the room. Lorraine felt fearful about her future with Stephen, “Well... not so bright (laughter). To be quite honest. Yeah he ticks a lot of boxes. But the boxes that he doesn’t tick, those are big ones”. However, she said her biggest fear was living with a stereotypically unclean and untidy gamer which she worried Stephen could become, “And it's like, my biggest fear, if I were to continue the relationship, permanently, leading to like, say, a marriage or something”. Winona described fear of Nicholas passing down an unhealthy gaming dependence to their daughter, “Oh I guess at the back of my mind because he used to play excessively, I'm a bit scared for him to pass that down to her; I can see that she's very interested in the board games and one online game Nicholas plays once a month, J is always asking oh this looks interesting. So I'm always very wary and every time I always say to him ‘you make sure you don't turn your child into a gamer like you were 20 years ago’”. Rose’s experience was unique in that she has an older brother who she was certain was a complete game addict. Therefore, she feared her partner becoming equally as dependent, “because of my older brother's shape, I don't want him to get in the same way; And I don't want him to get there because then I'm not gonna want to be around him for very much longer. Coz it's kinda terrifying sometimes, coz he yells and screams and throws shit”.

Anger/Frustration

All 6 participants described feeling anger or frustration about their partner's gaming. Tracy repeatedly emphasised feeling frustrated, "it's frustrating for me, and then it's frustrating for him for me to be frustrated by it. And I think frustration just sums up the feelings that I have about it". Lorraine was also quite emphatic about her frustration, "I'm angry, for the situation, and I just kind of let it out on people, or let it out on him, and it would just turn into another argument. Which is not great. So I have been quite frustrated about it, and I feel quite upset, but at the same time helpless, because I feel like no one can help me, or help him". Sleep disturbance was a common source of frustration in the participants and was particularly conveyed in their vocal tonality. Anna stated, "It started to get to... where he would be playing at night while I was trying to sleep. And I would get pissed off because of the light would be distracting when I was trying to sleep, and he would be in the room or next to me while I was trying to sleep... yeah". Violet equally stated, "frustrated as well because I was being kept awake at nights".

Winona said she did not allow herself to become angry or frustrated about Nicholas' gaming for years, "I didn't want to pursue the hate feelings that I had towards gamers. And probably around the third year of our marriage that's when I showed my true colours and said 'I really hate any gamers'. And that's when I started saying, 'I'm out of this relationship, I'm sick of it, I don't want to do it anymore'".

Anxiety

Two participants reported experiencing severe anxiety about gaming. Violet stated that when getting into a new relationship after Tony, and finding that her new partner enjoyed games, she stated, "every time my new partner games, I just like, I've gotten better with it and more used to it now, but initially it was just a bit unsettling to see him game. Um, and yeah particularly... it would just bring back you know, old

feelings of how I felt when I was neglected and how I felt when someone was tapping on a phone um, or on a controller when I was trying to sleep”. Additionally, because her partner negatively conditioned her into ducking whenever walking past a screen, she shared, “I’ve had a couple of instances when I walk in front of a TV and there’s other people gaming right like flatmates, and I just... I duck every time; I duck because I was so used to doing that, of being expected to do that when walking in front of a television; And then I see that they don’t actually care”.

Lorraine felt strongly about her anxiety but initially could not seem to find the word and was prompted, “Well it’s, um... sometimes, usually the first thing I’m going to say is ‘are you going to play games again?!’ That’s the first phrase I would say like 60 or 70 percent of the time when he goes to play games. So yeah just feeling really unwilling I suppose... and just like ugh... I don’t know how to describe the feeling, just don’t want him to play games, that’s it. So, I feel quite... struggling. It’s like a feeling of frustrating... frustrated...”; (researcher) “anxiety?”; (Lorraine) “Yeah! Ok yeah! That too. That gave me a lot of anxiety. No that’s definitely...”. She further elaborated that she feels highly anxious and paranoid when Stephen goes to play a game, “Yeah like you know that it’s going to happen, but also you don’t want to predict it. You get really paranoid like ‘is he going to game again or is he not?’. And if he isn’t I would go like ‘phew’ he’s not playing. But if he is then I’m like ‘Oh, yup I’m right, what I predicted was right’”.

Subtheme: Sleep Disturbance

Although the results have already touched on why and how the participants’ sleep is affected by their partners’ gaming, a specific subtheme was necessary due to the significant effects of sleep disturbance/disruption on various aspects of the

relationship, and its affective consequences on the participants themselves. Four participants who lived with their partners spoke of how their partners would disrupt their sleep with their late-night gaming and how that disruption affected them. Participants described having to convince or drag their partners to join them in bed. Occasionally this would induce an argument or conflict.

Further, not only did the participants report having to convince their partners to join them in bed but, if their attempts were unsuccessful, they reported often waking up or being kept up due to the noise or light pertaining to the game their partners would bring into bed. Alternatively, if unsuccessful, participants struggle to fall asleep while awaiting their partners, “I’d be way more sensitive to noise because he’ll be in the other room playing games. So whenever he... say... gets off the chair, I think ‘is he coming back?’ but he’s not he’s just adjusting, re-adjusting and then so I would just get very aware of the tiniest noise” -Lorraine. Lorraine stated that not getting enough sleep impacts her mood not only with him, but with friends or others she might interact with the next day. After a prolonged period of time, the effects of sleep disruption would naturally affect overall health and optimal daily functioning.

Theme: Tolerance

From the first interview it became apparent that although the impact of the partner’s gaming was significant in many ways, both on the relationship and the participant, there were many factors which influenced the participants level of tolerance of the gaming. The analysis revealed 4 subthemes that may explain the participant's tolerance to gaming. These include ‘chill girlfriend’ expectations, having a gamer older brother, hope, and lack of awareness of IGD. Additionally, this theme

will describe the ideal changes the participants would like to make in terms of their partner's gaming.

Subtheme: 'Chill Girlfriend'

Four participants spoke of perceived social expectations to accept their partner's excessive game play, especially early on in their relationships. When asked how Violet felt about Tony's excessive gaming 2 years into the relationship, she said, "At first I was like, I've got to be the cool supportive girlfriend and do it as well. And not like kick up a huge fuss about it". Lorraine also questioned her behaviour saying, "Yeah like say if that day I would let him play a little more games and not nag him to stop playing games, then maybe he would be in a bit better mood and more loving as well". Winona mentioned completely suppressing her emotions about Nicholas' gaming to preserve their developing relationship, "I couldn't say anything because I was his girlfriend and I wanted to strap him to be my husband *laughs* so I just say nothing". She additionally stated, "Before we got married, I tried not to let it affect me so much. Because I wanted to be perceived to be the perfect girlfriend who accepts what he is. You know. Because I just want him to be mine if you know what I mean *laughs*. So I didn't want to show my true feelings. So I just lied basically. I lied that I accepted his bad habit. Even though inside me, I hated the fact". It is entirely speculative to ask whether the relationships might have been better off if the participants had vocalised their feelings or concerns about their partner's gaming earlier in the relationship, rather than feeling compelled to continue tolerating an excessive habit due to accreted expectations. Nonetheless, it is plausible that the partners would have been more receptive to expressions of concern had they occurred

earlier in the relationship, rather than after their gaming had become an established norm within their relationships.

Subtheme: Big Brother

Three participants mentioned having an older brother who enjoyed video games. They spoke of gaming being an activity used to bond with their older brothers, which in turn seems to have impacted their enjoyment and/or tolerance of gaming in their romantic relationships. Tracy said about her partner, “often I do enjoy watching him do his thing and that”, she later said “My brother played lots of games and I would play games while I was younger around 10. I’d be doing that and watching my brother do it as well”. Similarly, Lorraine said, “I grew up with my brother playing games as well and always watched it. So I always liked watching people playing games anyway”. She further stated about her partner, “he does play one of those survival games sometimes with his friends and they would have conversations and I would sit there with him and laugh because it’s funny and that’s because I grew up watching my brother game so I like to watch people play games if there is a bit of story involved or if it’s him and his friends playing it’s more like group activities”.

However, Lorraine was very firm in that, she did not enjoy watching Stephen game in an ‘isolated’ type of game, only social. Likewise, about her brother, Rose said, “I wanted to have a relationship with my older brother so I’d ask him questions about games and stuff like that”. Additionally, she stated (about starting to play games), “I would say it’s quite a big influencer because that was all he did for so long, so I was like ‘I’m gonna go and hang out with my brother’ even though it was pretty boring. I was just sitting there watching”.

Because Rose and her family believe her brother fits the criteria for IGD, she says his gaming has relativised her feelings about other people's gaming, including her partner's, "Yeah, so coz I've seen such an aggressive response from my older brother, it's definitely toned down how I feel about other people doing it. Coz no one I've met or hung out with has gone to that severity that he has. So I think that's why I find it easier to put up with than a lot of other people. Coz I had a friend who would smack the controller out of her boyfriend's hand and that kind of stuff. Whereas I kind of sit there, and you know give him about an hour, an hour and a half then I'll be like, 'hey I'm here for a reason, do you wanna do something?'. So I think that probably helped me deal with it a lot easier than some other people do I think". It seems that having an older brother who is a gamer reinforces the normality of gaming, and allows some individuals to develop a tolerance for excessive gaming. Additionally, the three participants who reported enjoying watching their partners game were exclusively those who had enjoyed watching their older brothers game while growing up.

Subtheme: Hope

Five out of six participants expressed hope as a reason for staying in the relationship and/or tolerating their partner's excessive gaming. Violet, for example, hoped Tony would grow out of gaming, "I loved him and I thought that things could potentially get better and um, that he might grow out of it; That he might like, change his behaviour". Tracy, Rose and Lorraine expressed feeling hope due to their partners having already reduced their gaming to an extent, though they were still waiting for a more significant behavioural change. However, they later expressed that if their

situations were to become 'worse'; in that their partner adopts a more destructive gaming habit; things would change.

Rose, however, spoke of feeling hopeful that her partner will not develop IGD like her older brother. Additionally, she explained why she tolerates his gaming habits, "it's not to the extent that we don't, that we aren't happy. Coz I'm not upset about it at all, it could be a lot worse. And I think I'm in slight denial coz I keep telling myself that 'it's not as bad as other people'. And I still love him obviously". Both Rose and Tracy reported being able to cope with their partners gaming habits because they listen and communicate sometimes.

Subtheme: IGD Awareness

Another factor which may have impacted participants' tolerance of their partner's excessive gaming is a lack of awareness of problematic gaming or IGD. Participants were asked what they knew about problematic gaming or IGD. Violet said, "I didn't think it was possible for people to get addicted to something like that", followed by, "Most people wouldn't think there was a negative side of it. Children start playing games from such an early age and I guess parents don't think about it. Until it's too late". Similarly, Anna said, "You wouldn't know who is a problematic gamer. I think it's also accepted in a way by society because no one is really saying you can't do it". Lorraine's idea of a video game addiction was, "you don't even shower 2 days 3 days, just sit there, without sleeping. That's my understanding to it. So even if he does have a bit of that, I would probably say he's a bit addicted to it but not enough to be a disorder". It seems Lorraine's assumed model of IGD only encompasses the more severe end of the spectrum.

Winona was completely unaware of IGD, saying she was surprised when she heard of the study, and its purpose, “I never thought it was an addiction. I thought it was a bad boy habit”. Tracy said she had read articles about IGD, and had talked about it with Sam. She was concerned both with problematic gaming, and stigma around gaming. Rose seemed to have the clearest understanding of IGD as her older brother has many of the symptoms. However, she reiterated the notion of a gaming addiction being unbelievable to others, particularly her brother.

Subtheme: Ideal Changes

The three participants still in relationships with partners who they perceive to game excessively, or else who are excessively preoccupied with other gaming related activities, spoke of what they would change about their partners’ gaming to reach an ideal and healthy level for their hobby. Tracy’s main problems surrounded having Sam’s undivided attention when having a conversation. She said, “So yeah, I think I would tweak little bits like that. But in terms of the overall amount I think it’s pretty good and I think it’s pretty normal”. Additionally, she hoped that Sam would have more variety in his hobbies, rather than ‘always playing the game’. Lorraine expressed that she wished Stephen would have more self-control over his gaming, and be more engaged in their relationship, “I think that is ok as long as he doesn’t play that much and knows when to stop; Yeah. So definitely impacts me in a bad way. Coz obviously a bit of anxiety and paranoid and just not a positive thing to add in our relationship”. Like Tracy, Rose also wished Jake would do other activities and not stay inside all the time. Additionally, she said, “I would like him to pay less attention to what's happening on his phone. That would be nice; I'd like for him not to spiral into reading stuff about gaming and leaving me sitting there like... ‘what am I going to

do? Just gonna sit here or...?’ And just to the point that it's not in the way of doing stuff. If it's like he has time after work he can game for an hour. And then go to bed without being tired in the morning. That would be choice”.

Winona did not describe wanting any changes pertaining to her partner’s gaming as he has significantly reduced his hobby and now only plays once a month. She said that both her and Nicholas attribute all of their past conflict and lack of shared time as a couple due his excessive gaming, and now described her relationship as “It's just what we call a perfect relationship *laughs*”.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the problems associated with excessive/problematic gaming through describing the first-hand experiences of so-called ‘gamer widows’. The hopes of this study were to foster awareness of the existence of gaming addiction in New Zealand and to display the scope of problematic gaming. Additionally, it was the hope of the researcher that more studies on this phenomenon will be conducted in New Zealand, that appropriate treatments are developed for those with gaming dependencies and addictions, and that support systems are developed specifically for gamer widows in New Zealand. This study has demonstrated the daily life of a gamer widow and detailed how their partner’s excessive gaming habit significantly impacts them personally as well as their romantic relationships. This study also demonstrated the desperation and despair of some gamer widows who lack tailored support structures for people in their position.

This study was inspired by, and loosely replicated Northup and Shumway’s (2014) phenomenological study. The researcher’s literature review described current opinions on video game addiction and how these opinions have developed, the dangers of excessive gaming on romantic relationships, the controversial literature on effects on the gamer, and the effects on the romantic partner. The present study was

therefore strongly guided by the findings described in the literature review, particularly Northup and Shumway's (2014) study.

Four main themes and 16 sub-themes were found. These themes describe the scale of gaming addiction, the effects it has on romantic relationships, and both the preliminary and the prolonged experiences of being a gamer widow. This final chapter will discuss the significance of these findings and relate them to the overall research question and the current body of literature. Specifically, the participants' experiences of their partner's gaming habits will be discussed in terms of relevance to existing research. Secondly, research implications will be considered. Finally, the limitations of this research and guidelines for future research will be reviewed.

Relating Experiences to the Literature

Gaming addiction is a growing phenomenon, fuelled by the ongoing expansion of the gaming industry into mass media and on mobile platforms. Although only a small fraction of all individuals who do game are affected by this disorder, its consequences for these individuals are significant. Moreover, the romantic partners of confirmed addicts and even excessive or dependent gamers are also severely implicated. The prolonged experience of relationship partners, if the situation is not effectively managed, is routinely one of progressive debilitation, ultimately culminating in the lived experience of a 'gamer widow'.

The Problematic Gamer

IGD

IGD is characterised by persistent or recurrent use of internet games (however, it is not necessarily restricted to internet games), regular gaming with other players, and clinically significant impairment and/or distress. Though diagnoses cannot and should not be made (due to lack of qualification and appropriate testing) with the gaming partners in this study, those who are continually playing excessively despite its adverse consequences can be placed on a scale of excessive gaming where external support is likely warranted. The DSM-5 does not specify what frequency of gaming is significant. However, the studies presented in the literature review provide some guidance. Ward (2010) found that significant consequences occurred in the participants playing over 4 hours a day. Five out of 6 gaming partners in this study were reported to play at least four hours a day during excessive game play (excluding Jake due to ambiguity), and for one gaming partner (John), over 6 hours a day. Moreover, on a weekly basis these gaming partners were reported to play between 30 to 40 (or over 40) hours a week.

The effects of this level of excessive gaming on their romantic relationships are threefold. As Chory and Banfield (2009) describe, such a dependence detracts the relationship. Two participants who are no longer in their gaming relationships specifically used the word ‘detract’ to describe how their partner’s gaming affected their relationships. Other participants used similar words. Secondly, the dependence can become a considerable preoccupation. As the results display, all 6 gaming partners were reported to be preoccupied with gaming or gaming related activity to the point that the relationship would suffer as a consequence. Thirdly, unpleasant behaviour may occur due to exposure to violent or aggressive content, disrupting relational maintenance. Though only one participant was reported to become quite aggressive due to gaming, other gaming partners were also reported to become

unpleasant due to gaming, either becoming frustrated when they were restricted to game, being ‘moody’ if they have not gamed for some time, or being defensive about their gaming. Therefore, the effects of excessive gaming on the gamer directly affect the romantic relationship.

Violence, Aggression and Mood

The literature is quite divided about the effects of gaming on violence and aggressive affect. Many studies argue that violent video games increase aggression in the real world (Anderson, 2004; Anderson et al., 2008; Gentile et al., 2004; Gentile, Bender, & Anderson, 2017; Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2017; Teng, Nie, Pan, Liu, & Guo, 2017). In the present study, one participant (Violet) described her partner becoming highly aggressive when gaming to the point that she was afraid for her physical safety. For this reason, Violet expressed particular distress and concern over Tony’s aggression. It is clear that Tony did not have control over his aggression. Therefore, at least for this particular gamer, the activity did increase aggressive affect and behaviour. However, other gaming partners who were reported to be easily aggravated or to have aggressive personalities apparently did not respond to games in the same way as Tony. Therefore, this study cannot conclude that individuals with aggressive personality types will be equally affected by gaming.

Historically, it was thought that excessive gamers may not reap the mood repairing benefits of games as much as casual gamers. Dong, Li, Wang, and Potenza’s (2017) findings indicated higher levels of depression, anger, tension, fatigue and confusion in the IGD participants. Additionally, Barger and Hormes (2017) found higher anxiety and stress in their IGD group. The results of the present study found that four gaming partners used gaming as a coping mechanism to deal with stress or anger. The 4 gaming partners’ use of gaming as a coping mechanism does not seem to

be effective, as the stress or anger reportedly returns within a day of not playing a game. The gaming partners seemed to become easily stressed about different aspects of their lives such as their work and relationships. Additionally, not being able to game due to their (participant) partner's wishes or requests was reported to make some gaming partners more stressed. Therefore, temporary abstinence from gaming appears to increase stress irrespective of whether the gamer purports to use gaming as a way to relieve stress. Collectively, the reportedly frequent and high levels of stress the gamers in this study experience when unable to game for a period of a day or less are suggestive of classic withdrawal symptoms. Therefore, rather than repairing negative mood states, this research shows that excessive game use tends to reduce the gamer's coping skills of negative mood states continually and potentially increases stress after a period of no gaming due to withdrawal-like symptoms.

Preoccupation and Procrastination

Individuals with IGD have been found to have significantly lower impulse control. Excessive gamers tend to have a lack of control over their gaming and prioritise gaming over other aspects of their lives (Yeh, Wang, Huang, Lin, Chen, & Ko 2017). All participants in this study reported their partner's preoccupation with gaming, either in anticipating future activity, or, in gaming being the most prominent use of their time. In fact, the gamers' preoccupation with gaming and their prioritisation of gaming over their responsibilities or relationships were significant reasons for complaint. The concept of *flow* was described in the literature review, and it was hypothesised that excessive gamers experience a higher sense of flow, thus enabling them to increase procrastination and ignore responsibilities (Chory & Banfield, 2009). In turn, this has a detrimental effect on relational maintenance. Participants described their partners 'being so into it', 'being so focused on it', or 'so

involved' that the real world (and they) would disappear. Four participants appeared quite distressed about feeling like less of a priority than a video game, particularly when trying to engage in conversation and being neither responded to nor looked at for a considerable amount of time as their partners would be glued to their screens. Some participants questioned their own negative feelings as a result, claiming they were just being 'needy' or a nag. However, their reactions were understandable, and are common in the gamer widow community (Northup & Shumway, 2014). It is assumed that many individuals in a dedicated romantic relationship would feel distressed if they felt of less priority to their partner than a video game. These individuals would benefit from professional support.

Procrastination with housekeeping also affected the romantic relationship. All 5 participants who lived with their partners reported doing most of the cleaning of the house and, either sometimes or daily, having to be responsible for preparing dinner because their partners were busy gaming. This made participants feel taken for granted, unappreciated, and sometimes frustrated, which after a prolonged period led to more detrimental feelings. In line with Coyne et al., (2012) this further detracted the gamer from the relationship, isolating them both.

Denial

All of the participants believed their partners would consider their gaming to be completely normal despite the clearly detrimental psychosocial effects it was having on themselves and their gaming partners. Due to this, some participants spoke of having to justify their feelings about gaming, to help their partners understand the effects that their gaming was having on them and on their relationships. However, their feelings would continually be disregarded. As Young (2009b) dictates, problematic gamers tend to be in denial about the excess of their habit, and the

negative effects it may be having. Consequently, Northup and Shumway (2014) reported that non-gaming partners may become discouraged to talk about gaming if their feelings have been continually invalidated, with feelings of anger and frustration building. Three participants were lucky in that they did not report having to justify their feelings. However, they did repetitively have to explain how their partner's gaming affected them and felt more anger and frustration building over time as with the other participants. It is worrisome to consider how these feelings may affect the participants in the long-term if the excessive gaming is not addressed in the near future.

Direct Effects on the Relationship

Separate Time and Separate Sleeping

The importance of shared leisure time and shared sleep rituals to relational satisfaction were discussed earlier. Shared leisure time enhances companionship, connection, intimacy, and satisfaction (Ahlstrom et al., 2012). Excessive gaming can easily diminish a couple's shared time. According to Campbell and Murray (2015) the relationship is in danger when a problematic gamer regularly prioritises their own pleasure of game-play over spending time with their partner in a shared leisure activity. The findings of the present study support this statement. Lack of shared time was a major reason for several of the participants to deeply question their relationships, and for one couple to almost divorce. However, according to the findings of Ahlstrom et al's (2014) study, when gaming is excessive and the non-gaming partner is not supportive of the gaming, said relationship is likely to suffer more, and have less relational satisfaction and relationship quality. The present study found similar results in that the two happiest participants (Rose and Tracy) who were

still in relationships with their gamer partners and were the most supportive of their partner's gaming habit and/or lifestyle out of all the participants. However, despite two of the other participants (Violet and Anna) being fairly supportive of their former partners' gaming, those relationships nonetheless deteriorated and ended. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that a supportive attitude towards gaming can independently preserve satisfaction and quality in an independent gaming relationship.

Excessive gaming is likely to disrupt a couple's sleep ritual due to the gaming partner preferring to stay up late gaming rather than retire with their partner, even when asked to (Ahlstrom et al., 2012). The themes in this study support those findings. The women in the current study were very frustrated with gaming disrupting their own sleep and not being able to retire with their partner. Naturally, when these women feel that they have to convince their partners to go to bed with them most nights and regularly have to ask for their partners to spend time with them, they feel less prioritised. Partially as a consequence of not being able to reconnect or be intimate before sleep, some of the couples began drifting apart, and may continue drifting apart unless gaming is reduced substantially. Though three of the participants who were still in relationships with excessive gamers continued in their relationships for different reasons, dissatisfaction was frequently and emphatically expressed with separated sleep times and insufficient shared time.

Relational Maintenance

According to Pauley, Hesse and Mikkelsen (2014), the five primary relational maintenance categories include positivity (interacting in a cheerful and uncritical tone), openness (being able to discuss the relationship and share relationship goals), assurance (behaviour that reminds the partner of one's commitment), networks (communicating with common relationships and relatives), and tasks (behaviour that

nurture the relationship) (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Additionally, Ledbetter (2017) describes that shared media consumption may be an additional relational maintenance strategy. Relational maintenance strategies have been positively associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment (Pauley, Hesse & Mikkelsen, 2014). Chory and Banfield (2009), found that media dependence, in particular video game dependence, was associated with less use of relational maintenance strategies. Specifically, the strategies most strongly impacted by the dependence were conflict management and tasks (Chory & Banfield, 2009). Chory and Banfield (2009) describe that the effects of this continual process may eventually pull the romantic partners away from the relationship.

In many ways, the participants in the current study seemed to nurture their relationships more than their partners did. Additionally, all the participants expressed disappointment over being ignored, sometimes or regularly, when attempting to nurture the relationship. In line with Chory and Banfield (2009), gaming dependences pulled apart four of the relationships in the current study, with two of the couples permanently separating. Therefore, it is unsurprising that some participants felt helpless and overwhelmed with how to proceed in the relationship. However, two participants were quite content with their relationships. Their partners seemed to use more relational maintenance strategies than the other gaming partners. For example, Sam and Jake were found to have better conflict management than the other gaming partners. Additionally, they were reported to use openness in discussing the relationship and be better listeners overall. These results support Toale and McCroskey's (2001) study, as they dictated that individuals who avoid communication also engage less in relational maintenance strategies. It is possible that their partner's openness helps participants to better cope with the negative effects of

excessive gaming on their other strategies of relational maintenance (Chory & Banfield, 2009).

Consumption of media, as Ledbetter (2017) described, may serve as a strategy for relational maintenance. The present study found that shared media consumption was a regular strategy used by four couples. Of the four couples, only two participants (Tracy and Violet) were content with using shared media. The other two were dissatisfied, as one gaming partner would regularly engage in gaming related activity during shared media consumption, and the other couple's shared media consumption deteriorated over time, with the gaming partner less willing to engage in this strategy due to a preference for gaming. Moreover, one participant was very disappointed that her partner rarely enjoyed shared media consumption with her and preferred to game most of the time. Therefore, the findings of this study sustain that shared media consumption may be a relational maintenance strategy that may increase or maintain relational satisfaction.

Communication

The current study found similar results to Northup and Shumway's (2014) study regarding communication. Northup and Shumway (2014) reported decreasing communication due to problematic gaming. In the present study, all participants reported disappointment with communication at some point due to excessive gaming. Two participants reported the lack of communication to be a reason to question the relationship. Two of the participants felt that gaming negatively impacted their partner's digital communication. Gaming presented itself as a direct barrier to communication, as four participants reported not being responded to at times because their partner's attention was fixed on the screen. This was very frustrating for the participants. In addition, when expressing concern over the amount or frequency of

gaming, four participants were often disregarded or ignored completely. Naturally, some participants now feel apprehensive to bring up the topic of gaming, as they may be rejected, or, the topic may become immediately conflictual. Future communication between some of the couples is therefore threatened due to fear of being rejected or having conflict.

Conflict

Like Northup and Shumway's (2014) study, the present study found increasing levels of conflict in the relationships due to one partner's excessive gaming. Additionally, conflict revolved around gaming in all couples who reported conflict; even the most seemingly functional of couples reported most conflict in their relationships surrounding gaming. For some couples, conflict was significantly and continuously debilitating as the issues would never be solved and the participants adopted an attitude of learned helplessness. Participants reported repetitive conflict over planning shared leisure time, retiring to bed together, cleaning, and feeling less prioritised, all due to the partner's gaming. According to Andreassen, Griffiths, Gjertsen, Krossbakken, Kvam, and Pallesen (2013), conscientiousness is negatively impacted by video game addiction. Additionally, internet addiction (or excessive use of internet games) was negatively associated with agreeableness, and positively associated with neuroticism. This may explain why conflict about gaming is repetitive and ineffective in the participants relationships. Additionally, it may explain the participants' accounts of rude behaviour from their partners. Therefore, the effects of excessive game use seem to mimic the effects of other behavioural addictions on romantic relationships.

One participant described a significant reduction in the frequency and amplitude of conflict due to the gaming partner markedly reducing his gaming. The

couple no longer has such debilitating conflict. Winona reported that her and Nicholas agree that the reason for so much conflict previously in their relationships was due to his excessive gaming instead of engaging in their relationship. It seems likely that other relationships from this study would also experience decreased conflict if the excessive partner's gaming was also significantly reduced.

The Establishment of Gamer Widows

The participants in the current study are referred to as gamer widows for several reasons. The most important of these is that each of them reported feeling less prioritised than gaming either sometimes or always in their relationships. When a hobby such as gaming has such prominence in an individual's life that their romantic relationships genuinely become second-string, the adverse affective consequences felt by gamer widows are completely justified.

Some participants felt that their partner's gaming affected themselves more than anyone else, including the gamer themselves. In the present study, participants suffered emotional consequences as a result of their partners excessive gaming. Equally, affective consequences were found in similar studies including frustration, resentment, anger, irritability, loneliness, neglect, and anxiety (Butt, 2016; Lianekhammy, 2015; Northup, 2008; Northup & Shumway, 2014). Although the degree to which individual participants experienced these feelings differed, all participants were not happy with how their partner's gaming affected the relationship or affected them in some way. The participants' coping skills seem to play an important role in how they handle their partner's gaming, and in how they allow it to affect them. Coping skills differed greatly among the participants. Whereas some participants were fairly content in accepting the permanence of their partner's gaming

habit, there was a strong sense of learned helplessness in other participants. Further, some participants reported their tolerance for gaming deteriorating over time as their partner's dependence progressed.

Once participants had reached an understanding that their partner's gaming would never reduce to their satisfaction and that they would always remain slightly or largely isolated in their relationships, participants either decided to accept their partner's dependence and continue trying to manage the effects on the relationship somewhat collaboratively, retaliate and have significant conflict, sometimes threatening to end the relationship, or be overly passive and 'suffer in silence'. Nevertheless, all participants' capacity to cope seemed to deteriorate over time, as their frustration and anger tended (and for some, continues) to build. Therefore, when a gaming dependence takes over a gamer's life, the implications on the gamer and the subsequent impacts on their romantic partner in turn take over the relationship. Hence, conflict in these couples is centred around the intrusion of the 'third person' in the relationship - the game.

Some participants had a high tolerance for gaming, whereas for others, tolerance also deteriorated over time along with their psychological wellbeing. Multiple factors were found to increase participants' tolerance of gaming including affection for their partner, expectations to be accepting of gaming, having an older brother gamer, hope, and lack of awareness of IGD. The results of this study indicate that having an older brother gamer may significantly increase an individual's tolerance for excessive gaming in a romantic relationship. However, the two participants who seemed to cope the most effectively also had the greatest awareness of problematic gaming and regularly negotiated gaming with their partners. Lorraine, who reported having a gamer older brother, has not been able to cope with the continual gaming

despite entering the relationship with a high tolerance for gaming. Negotiating gaming with her partner has proved quite impossible. Like other participants she has minimal awareness of problematic gaming. Therefore, awareness of problematic gaming and the viability of negotiating the parameters of a gaming dependence may predict better coping and ongoing tolerance for excessive gaming. It is possible that Tracy and Rose will achieve their goals in terms of reducing their partners' gaming to an appropriate frequency.

For the less fortunate participants who experienced significant sleep disturbance and affective consequences, the implications of these results may prove continually worse over time. Over a prolonged period, these effects may significantly impact the mental and overall health of the participants and those in similar situations. The results of this study warrant the provision of specific and appropriate support for gamer widows in New Zealand.

Research Implications

There is no real danger in casual gaming. However, problematic gaming is another habit entirely and it is time for New Zealand to appropriately treat those with excessive gaming habits and support the observants who suffer increasingly on a daily basis. IGD has been compared to other substance addictions like alcoholism due to similar symptoms - loss of control, escapism, craving, salience, affective consequences, and relapse (Beranuy & Carbonell, 2013). Therefore, dependent users are at serious risk psychologically and in successfully living full lives. Though treatments have been established for IGD, the advance of this field is impeded by the lack of consistency in defining IGD and establishing sound tools to measure IGD

(Beranuy & Carbonell, 2013). However, Cognitive-behavioural therapy has been proven more successful than other treatments (King et al., 2017). Nonetheless, additional research is needed to define IGD and develop empirically sound treatments.

In regard to gamer widows, it is clear that the experience of gamer widowhood is caused by prolonged, and often progressively worsening, excessive gaming of the gaming partner. Gamer widows experience a great deal of frustration and isolation in their relationships. The participants displayed two common coping mechanisms - avoidant and active (Hurcom et al., 2000). Avoidant participants do not engage or pursue their feelings about gaming in attempts to maintain their relationship, often ignoring their partner's gaming entirely despite its apparent harm. Whereas active participants pursue their feelings about gaming by either confronting the dependence or talking about the idea of problematic gaming. Hurcom et al., (2000) expand that there are three prompts for coping, including appraisal-focused, in which the significance of a dependence is considered; problem-focused, where gamer widows act in attempts to stop the dependence; and emotion-focused, in which the gamer widow tries to handle her emotions with the status-quo. It is imperative that struggling partners of gamers are provided with appropriate treatment in which they can learn longstanding, effective coping styles (Northup & Shumway, 2014). Additionally, it would be beneficial to educate non-gaming partners on what constitutes an addiction and what does not (Lianekhammy & De Venne, 2015). This is demonstrated by the way in which many participants were unsure as to how to label their partner's dependence, in turn impacting how they would approach the topic with their partners.

Literature and treatment in the current field are predominantly focused on the problematic gamer rather than involving those who are indirectly but nonetheless severely impacted. Much like alcoholism, gaming dependence and addiction can alter

the growth and balance in a relationship, leading to a pattern which secures the addiction (Northup, 2008). Moreover, other aspects of the participants' relationships, such as the problems with communication, may warrant professional intervention (Lianekhammy & De Venne, 2015). According to Northup (2008), when treating addiction it is important to attend to the entire system, rather than solely the individual gamer. By this Northup meant that romantic couples or families must be treated alongside the problematic gamer so that all parties may be effectively treated. This is supported across similar studies (Day, 2017; Lianekhammy & De Venne, 2015; Northup & Shumway, 2014; Steinglass et al, 1987). However, as suggested by Lianekhammy and De Venne (2015), it would be beneficial for therapists to evaluate the root cause of relational conflict prior to developing a treatment plan based around gaming issues, as gaming may not be the most prevalent issue in the relationship at the given time.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the current study which should be accounted for. Firstly, the generalisability of the study is limited. This is common in qualitative studies. Larger sample studies are necessary to improve the validity of the findings. Secondly, because the sample in the current study included only females, it may portray that gamer widows are mostly or only female, which may mislead readers to believe that men cannot be gamer widows, or that male gamer widows do not exist, neither of which is true. Finally, due to the sample of convenience in which participants were self-selecting individuals on relevant *Facebook* pages, or referred

through someone else, it is thought that random samples may benefit the representativeness of future studies.

Nonetheless, the current study was meticulously carried out. It contributes to existing research and draws attention to the significance of this growing phenomenon. It may be the first study of its kind in New Zealand. Therefore, the current study presents an area of consideration (at least) in therapeutic practice in New Zealand.

Future research

Future studies in this field should aim to solidify the conceptualisation and definition of IGD. It is also thought that including a male perspective of gamer widowerhood would be beneficial to future studies. Additionally, the risks of developing IGD should also be clarified, as the participants were unsure what 'normal' was, and where their partners sat on the 'scale' of dependence. It is imperative that future studies examine the presence of co-occurring disorders. Additionally, the current study attempted to get a sense of what the relationships were like before, during, and after gaming was excessive and received acceptable descriptions. However, a mixed method approach in which the state of the relationship (before, during and after gaming became excessive) is measured using an empirical test in addition to a semi-structured interview may strengthen the results. Finally, appropriate treatments and support absolutely must be developed for the sake of the many gamer widows that are growing more helpless by the day without specialised support.

Conclusions

The current study, inspired by Northup and Shumway (2014), confirmed existing knowledge regarding the effects of problematic gaming. The findings indicate that, similarly to other addictions, excessive gaming can have detrimental psychosocial effects and seriously affect individuals in close relations with the affectant. Due to permissive social expectations and a lack of awareness that gaming can become problematic to the point that an individual may require professional assistance, many women tolerate their partner's excessive gaming despite the emotional pain they experience as a result, or the destructive effects on their relationships. The bottom line is that these women suffer, and their experiences should not be minimised because of an erroneous perception that excessive gaming cannot become an addiction. Caution is therefore advised for those who are struggling to cope with an addiction, or cope with a partner's dependence of gaming. Though it is not strictly confirmed that the gaming partners in this study were/are gaming addicts, the experiences of the participants remain significant, and some continue to feel isolated and frustrated on a daily basis.

New Zealand research on these issues is lacking, verging on non-existent. Perhaps this is because the concept of problematic gaming is relatively young, and the majority of psychiatrists in New Zealand have not been educated in this area and therefore lack understanding of the phenomenon and may not feel confident in managing it (Dallur & Hay, 2017). The current study highlights a need for greater clinical recognition of gaming addiction in New Zealand and a greater societal awareness of the dangers of excessive gaming. As is often said, everything in moderation.

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Appendix a

Ethics Approval Document (EA1)



AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology
D-88, WU406 Level 4 WU Building City Campus
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

13 July 2017

Jason Landon
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Jason

Re Ethics Application: **17/206 In a rapidly-changing environment, what effect does video game use have on romantic relationships? A qualitative study**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 12 July 2020.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,



Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: s.m.tan1992@gmail.com; Daniel Shepherd

Appendix b

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

In a rapidly-growing industry, what effect does video game use have on romantic relationships? A qualitative study.

A descriptive account.

Interview Schedule

The Interview aims to explore:

- Participant background; e.g. employment, home, family etc.,
- How the relationship was before gaming was present or was excessive
- How your partner/ex-partners excessive video gaming has affected them
- How your partner/ex-partners excessive video gaming has affected you
- How your partner/ex-partners excessive gaming has affected the relationship

Background Information

- Introduce self and AUT University
- Purpose of study – to explore and understand effects of excessive gaming on romantic relationships in New Zealand

Interview Format

- Format of depth interview (open questions, hearing their views)
- No right or wrong answers – their views are important
- Confidentiality and limits around disclosures of harm
- Withdrawal at any time from interview as whole, or in not answering particular questions
- Timing of interview (around one and half hours)

Recording of Interview

- Digital recording of interviews – check they are happy with this
- Report, use of quotations, anonymisation
- Check if have any questions?
- Check if happy to proceed?

Consent

- Obtain signed consent

1. Background

The aim here is to create a picture of the participant and the participants' relationship with the gamer. The kind of question you could ask to get this section started is – *'Tell me a bit about yourself?'*

- What is the participants living situation?
- What level of commitment does the participant have with their partner?
- Does the participant have any children?
- If yes, does the participant have children with the gaming partner?
- How long have the participant and partner been in a romantic relationship?
- How does the participant describe their relationship with their partner overall?
- What was the relationship like before the participant felt that their partner gamed excessively?

2. Changes in gaming partner

This section is trying to get a history of participant's partner's gaming activity – we want to know when they first started and why. The kind of question you could ask to get this section started is – *'When did you first become aware of your partner's gaming?'* Then you could follow this up with *'Tell me about that experience'*

What does the participant know about the development of their partner's gaming habit?

What has the participant learnt about their partner's gaming habit as the relationship has progressed?

Awareness of gaming

Social activity

- How does the participant's partner typically engage, socially?
- Does the gamer spend time socialising outside of the game?
- What kind of social activity did the gamer typically engage in before gaming became excessive?

Motivation for continuation and current gaming activity

- What types of games do they play?
- How often do they play?

- How is the participant's partner affected by their own gaming?
- Has gaming increased or reduced?

3. Changes in participant

These questions are exploring how the participant has been affected by their partner's gaming habit.

You could approach this section by saying "*Have you been impacted by your partner's gaming habit?*"

- Previous view and feelings about gaming
- Participants involvement in gaming
- Has the participant been impacted by gaming?

If yes...

- In what ways has the participant been impacted by gaming?
- How do they feel about it?
- Feelings towards gaming
- Have feelings towards gaming changed?
- Knowledge about gaming addiction

4. Changes in the relationship

This section attempts to understand how the relationship has been affected by excessive gaming. This can be prompted by asking "*I'd like to know a bit more about how excessive gaming has affected your relationship....*"

- How would the participant describe a typical day with partner?
- How would the participant describe a 'good' day with partner?
- How would the participant describe a 'bad' day with partner?
- How would the participant describe the relationship with their partner before gaming was excessive?
- How would the participant describe the relationship with their partner since then?
- In what way has the relationship been impacted by gaming?

5. Closing questions

This section hopes to instil closure in the participant. E.g. '*What would you like to change?*'

- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- How do you feel after talking with me about this?
- Do you feel hopeful for the future?
- Is there anything you'd like to change?

If yes...

- How do you plan on making those changes or working towards those changes?

6. Any other comments/questions?

- Thank participant for their time
- Reassure re: confidentiality and ask if there is anything they would not like to be discussed/ quoted in the final report
- Ask if it's alright to call back check some of the details after the interview
- Check if participant has any questions re. participation
- Give koha (petrol voucher) and referral information

Appendix c

Consent Form



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Consent Form

For use when interviews are involved.

Project title: *In a rapidly-changing environment, what effect does video game use have on romantic relationships? A qualitative study*

Project Supervisor: *Dr Jason Landon*

Researcher: *Stephanie Tan*

☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 12 July 2017.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature :

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):
.....
.....
.....

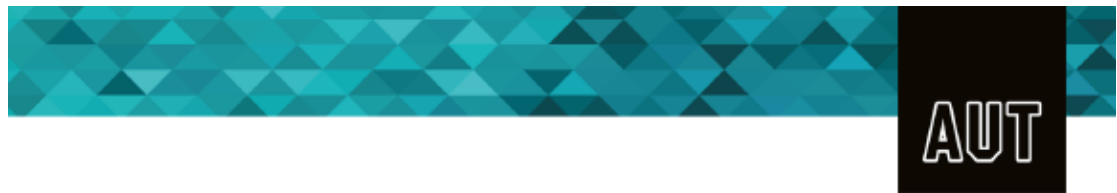
Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the date on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number type the AUTEK reference number

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix d

PGR1 Approval Letter



8 June 2017

Stephanie Tan
27A Hartland Ave
Glendowie
Auckland

Dear Stephanie

Thank you for submitting your PGR1 Research Proposal application for the Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) in Psychology.

Your proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences, which will be noted in the Postgraduate Research Committee July 2017 meeting.

Details are:

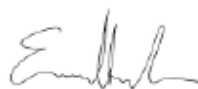
Current programme:	Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) in Psychology
Enrolment:	Dissertation enrolment 36 weeks
Student ID	1304325
Topic:	In a rapidly-growing industry, what effect does video game use have on romantic relationships? A qualitative study
Primary supervisor:	Jason Landon
Secondary supervisor:	Daniel Shepherd
Start date:	27 February 2017
Expected completion date:	10 November 2017

For more information about the programme of study, please refer to the *Postgraduate Handbook*.

The AUT website for forms and handbooks is:

<http://www.aut.ac.nz/being-a-student/current-postgraduates/academic-information/postgraduate-forms>

Yours sincerely



Associate Professor Erica Hinckson
Associate Dean (Postgraduate Research)
Postgraduate and Research Office
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Cc Primary supervisor: Jason Landon

Appendix e

Reddit Ad



Appendix 2

Partners (or ex-partners) of video gamers
wanted to take part in AUT University research!

**Has your partner gamed in the last week? Do you feel
that their gaming is excessive? Tell us about your
experiences!**

AUT University is conducting interviews with partners
(or ex-partners) of excessive gamers to tell their story!

Males and females between 18-50.

Interviews will be 1 to 1.5 hours long and held in AUT
rooms at the North Shore Campus at a time that suits
you (a skype interview can be arranged if need be)

Please contact Stephanie Tan for more information and
to take part.

s.m.tan1992@gmail.com - 09 921 9999 ext 7700