Writing a part for ourselves; Identification with interactive media and its influence on self-esteem

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Declaration of scientific integrity:

The author hereby declares that she has read and fully adhered the Code for Good Practice in Research of the University of Basel.

Abstract

Video games can influence us, be it in behavior, such as making us more prosocial, or in affect, as in making us feel deep emotions. While these are subjects currently being researched there is still little other research concerning what playing video games do to or for us. In this literature review, therefore, the question will be posed if video games could influence our self-esteem through the means of identification. Current theories regarding identification with media characters will be discussed. The first theoretical part will contain research about identification as well as specific differences in interactive as well as non-interactive media. The second theoretical part will concern itself with theories regarding self-esteem, which are related to identification. In the discussion part, these theories will be combined to argue for the hypothesis that playing video games can influence self-esteem.

Contents

Introduction

Video games have been found to influence the human mind, be it studies about aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2001), or studies on emotions, positive (Mekler, Bopp, Tuch, & Opwis, 2014) as well as negative ones (Bopp, Mekler, & Opwis, 2015). These studies show that video games can have a wide-ranging influence, they can make us sad or afraid (Bopp, Mekler, & Opwis, 2016; Endress, Mekler, & Opwis, 2016) while still being enjoyable for us to use. When playing video games, players are not simply passive consumers of media, they're active participants in shaping the happenings within it. There are numerous studies about how this influences the aggression potential of players (Konijn, Nije Bijvank, & Bushman, 2007), but also how video games can influence players to be more prosocial (Greitemeyer & Mügge, 2014; Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2009; Steinemann, Mekler, & Opwis, 2015). The central objective of this literature review is the influence video games can have on their players. If video games can have these effects on the player's behavior and affect, then could it have an effect on the player's self. To make this idea more concrete, this review will concern itself not with a broad idea of the self, but rather look at the self-concept and in effect the self-esteem of the player. Self-concept is, according to William James who coined the definition, is the dispositional, meaning the relatively stable part of the "Me". In his theory, he separated the "I", which is the thinking and perceiving subject from the "Me", which is the perceived object. The self-concept in this sense then becomes the part of our memory in which we have saved information about ourselves.The self-concept is often also described as the actual- or the real-self.The real-self is juxtaposed to the ideal-self, the "should" state of the self, who a person would like to be or be seen as. Often it is also called the actual- or the real-self (Cooper, 1992). Often observed is the discrepancy between our real- and our ideal-self, this discrepancy has been theorized to lead to changes in self-esteem (Higgins, 1987). In the context of this work it will be discussed if playing as a video game character can influence this discrepancy by providing an idealized form of self (Bessière, Seay, & Kiesler, 2007) and as such influence the self-esteem and potentially the well-being of players.

What is identification?

The concept of identification with media characters has its origins within clinical psychological research. Identification is a concept that goes back to the psycho-dynamic Studies of Sigmund Freud (1975). In its earliest years, the term was applied only as a developmental concept, it was viewed as a non-conscious imaginative process of children. Identification with their parents enabled children to incorporate their identity, values and so on, into their own superego. Freud incorporated the idea of identification within his theory of the Oedipal complex, the little boy wants to become his father, he wants to take on his character traits, values, but also his role, while simultaneously developing a true object-catharsis towards his mother, resulting in hostility towards the father which role he wants to take over as his mother's lover. Developing the concept further Wollheim was the first to distinguish identification clearly from imitation, imitation being external behavioral, while identification has an internal component (1974). While imitating we behave like someone else / as someone else does, but identification involves imagining being someone else and reflecting on the behavior we think they exhibit (Wollheim, 1974).

In more modern media research, Cohen defines identification with media characters as: "Identification is an imaginative process through which an audience member assumes the identity, goals, and perspective of a character." (p. 261, 2001) Cohen also states that one loses a sense of self when identifying with a media character. This could mean that due to losing a sense of self that they assume the identity of the character in replacement of their own. They in a sense assume the identity of the media character. Cohen in his work does not mention video games as a medium and focuses more on Television as the primary medium of his time. Comparing the technical standpoint of video games from 2001 with current standard it is clear that video games did not allow for realistic graphics. Realistic looking characters could have an influence whether or not people would identify with them. This will be further discussed in the next chapters, however, this is an explanation why is wasn't closer discussed, but the definition is applicable to a degree nevertheless. It does not fit perfectly due to video

games often providing a slate canvas, a featureless protagonist for the player to create their own character and choose their own role and identity (Cohen, 2001).

Similarity Identification. Similarity is regarded as an integral part of the identification model as it facilitates mental rapprochement between player and character, similarly to how people expect more rewarding interactions with people who are similar to them, it is theorized that players find characters similar to themselves more attractive (Van Looy, Courtois, De Vocht, & De Marez, 2012). Similarity identification is defined as the identification with a character who is similar to you, as such it might be someone with the same values, character traits or also external factors such as gender, ethnicity, or more (Cohen, 2001). But also dissimilarity seems to play a part in certain situations, as such dissimilarity within appearance can create satisfaction for players with high body mass indexes. In these cases, the character being more ideal facilitates identification better than similarity, this type of identification will be discussed in the next section (Van Looy et al., 2012).

Wishful Identification. Wishing to be someone is a specific type of identification, for example when seeing a warrior or a detective in a video game and wanting to be this character something is experienced called wishful identification (Konijn et al., 2007). Wishful identification differentiates itself from similarity identification in such that with similarity identification the identification is based on shared salient characteristics (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). While with wishful identification the traits do not have to be shared, but they have to be desirable for the player. They wish to exhibit the same behavior or attitudes, in a sense they wish to become the character they identify with. Interestingly wishful identification in 1996, was shown to be more common with male than female TV characters, and it was thought due to the male characters exhibiting more admirable traits (Hoffner, 1996). Meaning that girls identified more with men despite gender having an effect on similarity identification, it is also important how many desirable traits the character possesses. Desirable traits include physical attractiveness but also things such as admiration other characters feel towards them, as well as intelligence. There is also research showing

exactly which traits incite more wishful identification with male or female tv characters (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). In the same paper, it is discussed that wishful identification is a predictor of how likely someone is to watch a tv show, as such it seems to be a motivator to consume media. Because most research on the topic of media identification has been done in the context of non-interactive media, this research often has to be used to discuss interactive media. As such to discuss video games, in this case television will serve as an example. However, not only seems wishful identification to be a motivator for the consumption, there is also evidence that wishful identification with video game characters is a basis for enjoyment (Hefner, Klimmt, & Vorderer, 2007).

Embodiment. The concept of embodiment is another facet of identification, which also has its place in the more common and validated measurements of identification. Embodiment refers to the feeling of being in a different place, of feeling that you are currently somewhere else than your real, physical body. It has been described as the body of the user being completely immersed in the interface, and the mind is set floating in the telecommunication system (Biocca, 1997). Biocca discusses embodiment in terms of very early virtual reality machines, similarly to the more modern counterparts of the HTC Vive or the Oculus Rift, the machines they used in the lab provided a headset over two screens over the eyes, blocking out any other visuals than those generated by the machine, as well as headsets over the ears and tactical gloves, which in commercialized gaming equipment have been replaced with controllers, which give less tactical feedback and are more focused on controlling the in-game environment. In Biocca's research (1997), there have been circumstances where people would lose themselves in the virtual world, describing a feeling of having been there and losing a sense of self in the real, physical world. He also goes on that in order to further embodiment, the so-called theory of progressive embodiment, more senses would have to be stimulated by the machine in order to fool our brain to the degree that it completely loses the sense of self as the physical being standing in the room, with two screens in front of its eyes. Imagine the feeling of walking through a green meadow, smelling the cut grass, maybe it had just rain and you could hear your wet footsteps, but you could

also hear sword swinging, or guns shooting, tasting blood in your mouth, feeling the sting of the blunt sword head hitting your face, and smelling carcasses of a lost battle. Maybe not all of it sounds desirable, but if we take Biocca's theory (1997) about how we need to include more senses in our virtual realities to achieve embodiment, it seems reasonable that if these were possible we would much more likely feel like we are actually in the game world, rather than just being an outsider watching other people trot through a newly imagined land, we can never visit. More recent research of embodiment can also be found (Munster, 2011). Taking into account what has been researched by Hefner et al. (2007) and Biocca (1997) gaming is exciting or enjoyable because it allows us to enter a new and different world, detached from our reality, beyond our experiences or possibilities, with a version of the self that we would like to be.

Monadic Identification. This topic of identification has been newly inflamed with the birth of RPGs and complex, highly visually appealing and realistic gaming content, the discussion whether we lose a sense of distance, that we usually experience with wishful identification in non-interactive media when we are controlling a video game character. In non-interactive media identification theory people believe that we experience ourself and the character as two different entities, meaning in literature when reading about a character the reader doesn't feel as though they become the character, rather they identify with the character from a certain distance. This has been defined as dyadic identification, where the distance between media consumer and media character does not get closed.

Dyadic identification is by definition identification with a different social entity on the basis of observation, empathy and parasocial dialogue (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006; Konijn & Hoorn, 2005). But in current literature there is evidence that the self and the self-concept are not stable, rather they can be influenced and are state-sensitive, that is they are dependent on their situation (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1995). In line with Cohen's definition of identification, Klimmt, Hefner, and Vorderer (2009) describe that in interactive media, users adopt at least parts of the identity of the character, their self-concept gets altered into the direction of said character on the basis that they

wishfully identify with, in other words, wish that they were like the playable character. Identification with a media character is thus construed of media users' self-perception by the inclusion of perceived properties of the target media character (Klimmt et al., 2009). Identification in non-interactive media is more empathy-driven, meaning one identifies with what is happening to them and how they are feeling about these experiences. However, in interactive media a big part of identification is relating to a character and wishing to be like this character, going as far as players being able to take on the role of the character that was designed for them. Rather than watching a drama and writing their part for themselves they received a scripted drama and can act in it however they wish to. For instance, they can play out the role of an archaeologist adventurer like Lara Croft or a nameless child that fell down a hole into a mountain. Players can as such take on a specific role or create their own role in the given situation (Klimmt & Vorderer, 2003). In either case, the players usually do not perceive a character on screen that is different from them, they lose a sense of distance within their identification. Especially with young players, there is evidence that they identify "quite closely" with the player character and that there is no distance between player and character anymore (McDonald & Kim, 2001). In short being able to take on the role of the character and feeling as though we are them, closing the distance between player and character is called monadic identification compared to the dyadic identification of non-interactive media.

Group Identification

Another aspect of identification is group identification. It refers to the process of people identifying with their in-group, this in-group can be a minority such as people with a hearing disability or a majority group, for example when male gamers as compared to female gamers. The common conception about identifying with such a minority group used to be that identifying with a group, whom the rest of society has so many negative stereotypes towards, would negatively influence their self-esteem. This is based on the fact that society structures and regulates the perceptions and behavior

of all the individuals within it (Mead, 1934). A similar theory was that a person's self-esteem is formed socially on the basis of others' views (Gergen, 1977). So in other terms, because the more prominent and higher status of out-groups has formed a negative view on your in-group, identifying with said in-group can lead to lower self-esteem. But Identifying with a group has quite a few benefits. An example would be African Americans who are experiencing prejudice. Their well-being can be positively mediated by identifying with their minority in-group (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). This is especially important in the context of status between social groups, group identification becomes a tool in order to cope with the marginalization of the own status when it is impossible to move up in the social groups. The more viable option then is to identify with their own in-group and protect its identity and interests (Outten, Schmitt, Garcia, & Branscombe, 2009). This phenomenon has been described as the rejection-identification model, that is when getting rejected by a higher status group, one turns to identify with their marginalized in-group even more (Branscombe et al., 1999; Giamo, Schmitt, & Robert Outten, 2012). These two findings in relation to minority groups and in-group identification seem to first directly oppose each other and could not both be possible at the same time, however in recent research there has been evidence that both of these are indeed true. It was suggested that rather alleviating the negative impact of stereotypes directly via group identification, group identification gives one access to the tools needed in order to cope with it, it was shown that group identification can predict increased resistance to stigma, rejection of stereotypes as well as increased perceived social support, all tools that help achieve a healthy high self-esteem. At the same time group identification also predicted lower levels of self-esteem, consistent with Mead's or Gergen's theories (1934, 1977). As such group identification has direct negative impacts as well as indirect positive impacts on self-esteem (Crabtree, Haslam, Postmes, & Haslam, 2010). When examining online communities specifically, the anonymity provides individuals with concealable stigmatized identities a place to belong. These places might not be otherwise available and in turn being a part such a group ought to become an important part of identity.

The increase in identity importance leads to a greater self-acceptance (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Internet communities to which this might be applicable to, also include gaming communities outside as well as inside of the game, for example clans within World of Warcraft.

Measurements of Identification

Cohen (2001) defined a first set of items which can be used for measuring identification (see table 1). Before this set of items other researchers have employed different ways in order to measure identification, here are a few examples: In 1957 researchers Maccoby and Wilson used a combined scale of liking a character, wanting to be like a character and feeling like a character, as they theorized that identification was fantasizing oneself to be in the place of a character. A more naturalistic approach was asking the respondents directly to judge the distance they felt between themselves and the character (Newton & Buck, 1985), or similarly asking the respondents how much they identified with a character, the second approach left the definition of identification up to the respondents. Another used method was stream-of-consciousness while reading a story, participants were asked to say their thoughts and feelings out loud, these were then analyzed to determine the degree of identification readers experienced (Oatley, 1999).

Identification within Massive Multiplayer Online Games(MMOG)

In more recent years a scale for measuring identification within MMOG was developed (Van Looy et al., 2012). This scale was built on three dimensions, namely avatar identification, group identification and game identification. For this topic of character identification, the dimension concerning itself with avatar identification is the most prominent and as such will be most prominently discussed. Avatar identification has a second-order factor consisting of similarity identification, wishful identification, and embodied presence, these are concepts that were discussed earlier and will not be further elaborated upon. As this specific measurement is meant for online multiplayer games it takes the social component of gaming into account, as such there are items

concerning itself with in-game group identification as well as the broader community surrounding the game. Especially in-game group identification presents an integral part of the player identification. This measurement was validated using active players within the World of Warcraft who were reached via mailing lists. A total of 544 players responded. A confirmatory factor analysis was calculated revealing an acceptable goodness of fit to the proposed factors. The acceptable criterion was derived from (Byrne & Greaves, 2001) as well as (Kenny, 2011), and had a value of >0.90 for the relative fit.

Why do we identify?

As previously stated in its earliest stages Freud theorized that Identification came from the unfulfillable Oedipus complex which led to the imaginative process of identifying with their parents. By identifying with their parents they learned of their values and identity and could integrate this into their own superego.

Enjoyment. Modern research (Hefner et al., 2007) also shows that identification with video game characters also explains part of the enjoyment that we experience when we play video games. Playing video games enables one to act efficiently within the character role and as such identify with the protagonist and this on a much larger scale than participants who did not have a chance to interact with the story. The interactive component allowed for a more intense or "authentic" experience within the game and these experiences were related to higher measurements of enjoyment (Hefner et al., 2007). In a quasi-experiment (Trepte & Reinecke, 2010), it was examined if identification could influence game enjoyment by providing the players with avatars which could be modified to be similar or dissimilar to players. Player-avatar identification was positively related to identification and identification with the avatar was strongly related to game enjoyment. In addition, when controlling for the influence of identification on enjoyment, player-avatar similarity was negatively related to enjoyment, suggesting that identification by itself is a source of enjoyment when playing video games.

Education. It was discussed that identifying with media characters can lead to a positive change in attitude and behavior. It has been linked that teenagers who watched an episode of Friends discussing unwanted pregnancies were better informed about the failure rate of condoms (Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, & Hunter, 2003). Even more so than informing the viewers by talking about an issue and giving direct advice related to it, showing a program with characters modeling a discussion about sexually transmitted illnesses increased the engagement of the participants in discussions about STIs compared to participants who were not shown the modeled discussion (Moyer-Gusé, Chung, & Jain, 2011) As such media identification can also be used as an educational tool, there are studies providing evidence for the effectiveness of video games. Specially designed educational games can be effective even when it comes to complex material (Cheng, Su, Huang, & Chen, 2014). There has also been evidence towards the positives of interactive media outweighing the negatives of the possible failure within these games (Jensen et al., 2016). Identification can lead to enjoyment when playing a video game (Hefner et al., 2007), but it can also give a unique opportunity for education. As such understanding identification in video games could positively influence the educational value of educational games.

Video games as a media

Video games as a media form more specifically now, what sets it apart from television or books and how that might influence the way we identify with video game characters specifically.

Control. Control has been discussed within the concept of customization alongside with identification. It was shown that the sense of control that was gained due to the ability to customize was entirely mediated by the sense of identity, while the sense of identity is only partly mediated by the sense of control. As such those who engage in customization feel a sense of control due to their heightened sense of identity (Marathe & Sundar, 2011). While control is discussed within user research and not specifically within video games, we can still draw assumptions that control and identity

are related. In this study participants felt in control because they were able to customize a platform to fit their identity. This led to a heightened sense of control, which in turn lead to a heightened sense of identity. If applied to games this would mean that customizing the in-game world with your decisions and alterations could lead to a stronger sense of control as well as a stronger sense of identity. Games can also allow a player to choose a group or faction within the game to identify with, this can foster group identification. These factions can be simply structured, an example of that being Age of Empires in which at the beginning of the round the player chooses one faction to play as. A more dynamic approach is where instead of deciding on one faction at the start of the game, while playing the game one is allowed to make decisions which gain favor with one or the other factions. For example Tyranny, a game in which there are two factions you can side within any mission you can do, but also have decisions within missions that can affect the favor or disdain you earn with the respective faction leaders. This gains you loyalty and allows for different interactions, but you can also make the factions fear you which gains you wrath. Customization does not necessarily only influence identification with the in-game world and character, but it also adds replayability, this is defined as the player wanting to play the game again to make different choices and see what kind of different outcome it will produce. This is why many players of RPGs play the game multiple times. Taking the game "Dragon Age: Inquisition" as an example it allows you to control your environment by changing the look of your home base with different banners, thrones or other sorts of decor, but you're also allowed to shape the world with your decisions. As an example, you can choose who of your female followers should become the new highest member in the church. Meaning you can exhibit control over decisions which actually have importance. These customizations allow for a sense of control mediated by a sense of identity and as such video games needn't be treated as the same when compared to television media, but for lack of research the two will continuously be compared within this thesis.

Customization. Similarly, the process of avatar customization allows for higher similarity-identification, embodied-identification as well as wishful identification.

Identification, in turn, predicted autonomy and immersion as well as enjoyment and effort.(Birk, Atkins, Bowey, & Mandryk, 2016) Avatars represent more than simply their individual nature, they could represent an idea or a role in society and fostering identification with an ideal, rather than simply with an avatar, may have similar outcomes for the previously named constructs. As such avatar customization increases identification with the avatar because it allows for the player to create a character and a world which is more similar to them, fostering similarity identification. It can also enable the player to create a character akin to an ideal model character increasing the likelihood of wishful identification. This again speaks to the idea that video games have specific aspects which allow for closer identification.

Self-Esteem

This thesis will not focus on identification alone, but also the outcome of identification. We talked about educational value before, but also the influence on self-esteem. Self-esteem has been found to have a significant prospective impact on real-world life experiences. As such rather than be an effect of important life outcomes it can be viewed as a consequence of such, for example, self-esteem has a moderate effect on affect as well as depression (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). This is why, if video games do in fact have an impact on self-esteem it is important.

Basking in reflected Glory

This next section talks about a prominent theory within social psychology that concerns itself with identification as well as self-esteem called Basking in reflected glory was a theory first researched by Cialdini in 1976. It was researched within the context of college students identifying with their university football teams. The theory Cialdini proposed that in a case of victory the university students would want to identify with their football team more, in order to raise their self-esteem by association. Similarly to how we announce our own achievements in appropriate situations to better our self-esteem, we also announce the achievements that we had no actual contribution towards in order to raise our self-esteem. In Cialdini's study, the students were

interviewed about specific games and their language observed, it was shown that after a win the students were significantly more likely to refer to their university's team as "we won", while after a loss they were more likely to say "they lost". In a second experiment (Cialdini 1976) it was also theorized that one's own self-esteem is a predictor if one would bask in reflected glory or not, so if someone had just experienced something to dampen their self-esteem they would be more likely to identify with the victory of something related to them, but necessarily with something they actually achieved. It did not have a significant effect ($p = 0.08$) but there was an identified trend. Basking in reflected glory, or BIRGing is in effect a mechanism to raise one's own self-esteem through the related but not directly involved victories, while on the other side of the spectrum, cutting off reflected failure or CORFing, is a mechanism that allows people to raise their self-esteem by distancing us from related failure, so if their sports team loses they would blame it completely on the sports team by saying that "they lost", the college students in Cialdini's research (1976) acted as though they were not involved in the sports team's defeat. While most of the traditional research (Bernache-Assollant, Chantal, Bouchet, & Lacassagne, 2016; Wann & Branscombe, 1990) of BIRGing and CORFing has been done in the context of a sports team, a more modern study within the context of popular peers in adolescents was made as well. A connection was shown between popularity and association with popular peers, as such basking in reflected glory does not necessarily mean it only affects self-esteem. However, the study also found that being distant from popular peers influences likeability positively, as such BIRGing might come at a price in a similar way that association with the minority group has its positive and its negative sides (Dijkstra, Cillessen, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2010).

Measurements of BIRGing and CORFing

Now the development of the measurements for both BIRGing as well as CORFing will be discussed. The reviewed study (Spinda, 2011) specifically researchers self-reported measures within the sports context. Within the study, they measured

Identification with the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), but the focus is mainly on the two constructs of BIRGing and CORFing. They generated separate measures for both of them, each scale included 12 Likert-type items, judged on 5 point scales from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The first three items were generated using the basis of Cialdini et al. (1976), which indicated that sports fans were more or less likely to wear apparel related to their sports team, as such the first item concerned itself with this. The other two items derived from this research were more generalized items about the likelihood of displaying logos, such as emblems, of their favorite teams. The next three items stem out of research suggesting that sports fans show the behavior of sharing links to web pages of successful teams on message in order to BIRG (End, 2001), as well as BIRG by visiting team websites more frequently. These ideas were implemented in items that questioned online behaviors such as reading or avoiding online stories, posting messages online and chatting with fellow fans after the games. Also as part of the research of End (2001), "blasting" the fans of less successful teams was found as a way to BIRG online, but "blasting" can also be used in order to CORF, as such two items were used to represent these behaviors. The final four items were derived from post-game sports fan behavior identified by Gantz and Wenner (1995). Media was the first focus, with one item respectively about newspaper articles and highlights, the other two focused on post-game interpersonal communications. Examples for this are calling other fans of their favorite team or spending time with their family. The study further moves on to suggest that both BIRGing, as well as CORFing, are constructed from a multitude of behaviors rather than just one. This approach is interesting as it uses previous research on a topic in order to create a whole scale, rather than creating the items from scratch, for example with expert interviews, and validating these specific items. It creates a scale that implements different approaches to the same topic. When applying this to research in games this specific approach can be interesting, but also the topic of the scale. As demonstrated BIRGing is not a phenomenon limited to traditional sports. A scale focused on BIRGing in eSports, where communication between fans is implemented in

the viewing experience via YouTube or Twitch and usage of Twitter as a means for players, teams, and casters to get in touch with the fans is widely used, could be interesting for future research on eSports as well as BIRGing.

Self-discrepancy

Another concept that has been central within self-esteem but stems from clinical psychology, (Rogers & Koch, 1959) is the idea of self-discrepancies or the ideal-self compared to the real-self. The concept of self-discrepancy is discussed within a general context of discomfort attached to those self-discrepancies (Higgins, 1987). He describes two dimensions within this concept, one being the domain (actual/ideal/ought) the other being the standpoint (own/other). The domain expresses a type of self, actual meaning is it the current representation of the attributes you or someone else believes you actually possess. Ideal in contrast meaning the attributes you or someone else wish you would possess. Ought is a concept which concerns itself with the attributes you or someone else believes you should possess. The difference between ideal and ought lies within the difference between moral conscience and personal ideals. If applied to a hero within a story, or specifically a video game, this would be the difference between his "personal wishes" and his "sense of duty", comparable to decisions within computer games where you have to decide between saving those close to you and saving many. The standpoint of the self, however, describes as a dimension which viewpoint you are currently employing, (i.e., the difference when asked how you think you should behave compared to how you think your mother thinks you should behave). As such a person can have a multitude of different self-state representation depending on the significant other they are asked about, so it could be different for mother and father, but also best friend or partner. Two different categories were defined, the self-concept (actual/own and actual/other) as well as the self-guides (ideal/own, ideal/others, ought/own, ought/others). Up until the clear setting of these dimensions, particular measurements of self-esteem have not been uniform in their usage of own versus others standpoints. So while most of them have included only comparisons within the own standpoint, others

implemented the other's standpoint or have even had an ambiguous standpoint within the questionnaire (Wylie, 1979). The self-concept as such means your or other's idea of your current self, but it is mostly used as the combination of the domain (actual) as well as the standpoint (own). This means within this review as well as generally within other studies it is considered to mean your idea of your actual self, how you identify as. In other research, it is also talked about how the self-concept is made up of cognitive modules called self-schemas. Self-schemas are so called beliefs about oneself which guide the processing of information relevant to our self. As such the self-concept can be explained by researchers using hierarchical self-schemas (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984). Within this theorem, it was believed that low self-esteem was solely predicted by a globally negative self-concept (Demo, 1985), but within their study, Higgins (1987) found that including the measurement of discrepancy rather than simply measuring the self-concept, it led to a more accurate prediction. Especially if one would like to separate different discomforts which come along with different discrepancies, measuring the actual discrepancy is necessary. However, also the measure of actual-ideal discrepancy contributes to the prediction of self-esteem beyond a global self-concept negativity. When looking at the concept of discrepancy between actual as well as ideal self within video games, a study was done on the creation of avatars within the MMORPG of World of Warcraft (Bessière et al., 2007). The prediction was that players would create their main character closer to their ideal self than their real self. This prediction was supported by their findings. In addition, the researchers measured the psychological well-being of the players and found that the lower the score was, the more similar the created character was to the ideal self of the player. Their data suggests that virtual worlds offer players the opportunity to create idealized characters as virtual, alternative selves. They believe these results support the idea that despite the many rules constraints, and difficulties of the game world, its anonymity and fantasy frees players from the yoke of their real-life history and social situation, allowing them to be more like the person they wish they were. While in this study it was shown that people with larger actual-ideal self-discrepancies have higher depression and lower self-esteem,

it has also been proposed that enacting an ideal self online may reduce some people's actual ideal self-discrepancy and increase their feelings of self-confidence and self-worth (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Meaning the actual self-discrepancy is not necessarily a result of playing the idealized version of oneself, but playing an idealized version of oneself could be a coping mechanism to deal with a large actual-ideal self-discrepancy.

Discussion

So far the different theories related to the idea that video games can influence the self-esteem of the player have been given. In this part, it will be attempted to mend the theories together and create a more cohesive picture of how the specific aspects of video games, like interactivity or customization, as well as the theories related to self-esteem, such as basking in reflected glory or self-discrepancy, relate to each other and now together it can be theorized that video games influence self-esteem. In effect, in this literature research, no paper was found that directly relates identification with characters in interactive media with self-esteem. As such I have found theories stemming from different parts of psychology that could explain a difference of self-concept and self-esteem when identification happens. Before going in deeper into the connection of these theories the origins of identification will be discussed further. Wollheim (1974) talked about identification within the context of drama: "In effect what we do when we identify with another is that we write a part for ourselves, based on the other, in hope that when we act it to ourselves, we shall be carried away by the performance." (p. 171).

This thesis discusses this identification, this writing of a part for ourselves, in the context of video games. If we look at this quote more closely, we see many aspects that fit exactly to this specific kind of media. As an introduction to the discussion of this intersectional topic, I'd like to dissect this quote further under the light of video games.

"In effect what we do when we identify with another is that we write a part for ourselves [...]", writing a part for ourselves into a drama is necessary, there is no space to insert us into the drama directly, we can not influence it and the decisions made, the

same cannot be said for video games. If we take a look at a Role-Playing Game, we absolutely have these possibilities. Games are designed to give us a part to write for ourselves, through facets of control and customization.

"[...] in hope that we act it ourselves, we shall be carried away by the performance.", We wish for this performance to be ours, we put ourselves in the shoes of the other and when we do so we will enjoy the performance even to the point of being carried away. In video games, this distance creating by wishing to do something is much closer because in effect we are controlling the character on our screens to do as we wish, with obvious technical and creative limits, but nevertheless, there is a control element that is lacking in the other forms of media. This is what makes video games interactive compared to more traditional non-interactive media such as television or literature.

eSports and BIRGing

When looking at basking in reflected glory in relation to video games, it would be easiest to start with continuing with the example of MMORPGs and specifically first with the topic of group identification within the game. Similarly to how a sports fan might boast with his team's victory, a guild member might be proud of a successful raid he didn't actually participate in and will boast about it on his social media. By associating with the victory of his in game team, he would gain an increase in self-esteem. If we'd move more closely to current theories of basking in reflected glory which are quite strongly associated with achievement of sports team, in digital media we could find a similar phenomena within eSports (Wagner, 2006). eSports is defined as a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of player and teams, as well as the output of the eSports systems, are mediated by human-computer interfaces (i.e., competitive video gaming viewed online). Famous examples of eSport games include League of Legends, Dota 2, Counter Strike: Global Offensive and more. Similarly to viewers of traditional sports, the social interaction concerning their favorite team can include BIRGing, only that in eSports there is a real-time chat, where there is a constant stream of spectator comments

boasting about their favorite team, making fun of losing teams and more. But BIRGing also happens on platforms such as Reddit, Twitter or Facebook. This is possibly where traditional BIRGing can be applied to the most organically when it comes to video games, the focus within eSports, however, is skill and competition rather than identification with the in-game characters, as such while eSports is an interesting consideration within the traditional research on BIRGing, but will not be further discussed in this thesis.

BIRGing outside of Sport

BIRGing has been employed in other areas than its traditional field of sport, the study talked about in the theory section uses BIRGing in the context of adolescents in order to answer the questions why students hang out with popular peers, showing that being associated with popular peers brings more popularity (Dijkstra et al., 2010). But also in fields such as branding, where basking in the reflected glory of the good reputation of network partners could be an efficient tool for reputation management Helm and Salminen (2010). But there has been no paper using BIRGing within media to show its direct effects on self-esteem, however it has been noted that women who fit the attractiveness of models within magazines better, as in skinnier women in comparison to heavier women actually evaluated their sexual attractiveness actually higher than in a neutral condition, meaning that there is an effect of media exposure and positive feelings about one-self that can be elicited when women of similar body-types. If this woman who is similar to me is depicted as this ideal, then I can bask in her reflected glory as the ideal and are allowed to feel good about myself, this identification with this media character, be it a non-fiction media character, creates a more positive-self esteem (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997). Unfortunately, there seems to be no behavioral study, if these women might be more likely to engage in social media discussions about weight, look at magazines more often or share so-called inspirational weight loss pictures. These findings of positive or negative influence (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997), however, could also be tied in to the theory

of self-discrepancy and its influence on self-esteem. Women who are closer to the normal ideal of a woman's body are reminded of this, as such retaining a small-discrepancy between ideal and real self, at least the ideal or ought self of others, are experiencing a boost in self-confidence. Where women farther away from the ideal/other state are noticing the large discrepancy and receive a negative impact on their self-esteem due to this. When applying this research to video game characters, this could potentially mean when playing as a strong, achieved and important character the player could reflect in their glory and bask in the achievements of the character in the in-game world. Compared to the theory of self-discrepancy for BIRGing to show an effect the distance between character and player does not need to be closed. As such the player does not need to feel as though they become the character and rather associate themselves with them and achieve a better self-esteem through their achievements. As such BIRGing can also be done when people are identifying dyadically.

Identifying with interactive Media

Another topic to discuss is the connection of the topics of control, customization and why identification with video games and other interactive media is special compared to non-interactive media identification. Cohen (2001) talks about how there are many different types of media characters one can identify with, examples being: newscasters, sports figures, cartoon characters, fictional characters and game-show contestants. Out of these listed examples, it is described that fictional characters fit best when taking the definition of identification with media characters into account (Cohen, 2001). While there are video games that include real life people, for example, sports games who include the actual players from the teams around the world, most video games operate with fictional characters and as such, they lend themselves well as objects to identify with.

Game Avatars

Character Creation. Video games don't simply write fictional characters, they allow you to create and customize characters and let the player make more or less

important decisions. These could potentially put a whole other spin on identification with a character, especially when taking in mind the theory of self-discrepancy and how our self-concept has an influence on how we create characters or avatars within games (Bessière et al., 2007). There are no studies researching the direct effects of character customization influencing identification, but there are studies examining the effect of avatar customization on other factors. There has been evidence for example that allowing children to customize their avatars, as compared to having an avatar picked for oneself or being able to choose from a range of avatars, has an effect on both subjective feelings of presence and psychophysiological indicators of emotion during gameplay. This could affect the emotional valence experienced, and as such games could be more enjoyable (Bailey, Wise, & Bolls, 2009). Previously a study was already presented explaining that identification is directly related to game enjoyment (Hefner et al., 2007). These phenomena could be unrelated, however, similarity identification is increased by similarity between the subject which identifies and the object with which it identifies with. As such it makes sense that being able to customize how one is presented within a virtual world, especially making this representation more similar to oneself, could positively increase the enjoyment the player experiences when playing as that character. In effect, because the developers of a game allow us to make the avatar as similar or as dissimilar as we'd like we can directly influence how much similarity identification we experience this type of identification is mainly built on how similar a character is to us. And as discussed in the research of Hefner et al. (2007), an increased similarity identification can lead to an increase in enjoyment. As such video games offer a unique chance to change our presentation within a virtual world. This is especially interesting when looking at MMORPG or Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. The most discussed MMORGP being World of Warcraft which currently still has about 5.5 Million active subscribers, this is also the game discussed in the paper by Bessière et al. (2007) and a staple when talking about virtual worlds. The interesting thing when looking at avatar customization within MMORPGs is that it is not only a representation the player will see on screen as they are playing, it is also witnessed by

thousands of other players, potentially by their friends who play with them or by their guild members they care about. This has special implications for avatar creation within multiplayer games, compared to single player games.

Idealized Avatars. The avatars of the players of World of Warcraft were described as the player to be more similar to their ideal self than they themselves were, but even if this was the big trend there were smaller distinctions. The players had to fill out the personality inventory for the Big Five, one for themselves, one for their ideal self as well as one for their character they play in World of Warcraft. For three out of the five dimensions their prediction that the created avatar was more similar to the ideal-self than their real-self was, came true. Namely conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism. In the other two dimensions, their predictions did not come true. When looking at agreeableness, there was virtually no difference between character and actual self. The researchers give no explanation for this finding, but it seems not too far-fetched to assume in a virtual world where conflict between players and between programmed enemies is the way to progress, that a very agreeable character might not be optimal. But when looking at openness to new experiences, a measure of creativity, talent, and reflection, the results went opposite. The character to ideal self-difference was significantly larger than the actual to ideal self-difference. The researchers explain this by saying that the roles within World of Warcraft do not allow for creative characters, the primary form of progress within the game is achieved by fighting and gaining experience. Behavior mentioned within the Big Five Personality Index is, for example, visiting museums, this or anything similar is not possible within WoW and as such it makes sense that the in-game characters would score low on these particular personality traits. These findings suggest that players do not simply rate their characters as highly positive within all aspects and did so selectively for relevant characteristics within World of Warcraft. The second hypothesis stated that those with poorer psychological well-being would be more likely to see their character as realizing aspects of their ideal self. As such, they measured depression scores in order to show a relationship between well-being and the idealization of the created character. This

hypothesis again was supported within three of the big five constructs. Conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness. But it has to be mentioned that nothing can be said of the directionality of well-being and idealized avatars in video games. However, the low scores player's had on their psychological well-being questionnaire could be explained. The closer the character is to the idealized self of the player and with that further away from the actual self of the player, the more they're made aware of the discrepancy between their real self and their idealized self. In this case catalyzed through a self-created idealized self, rather than from the standpoint "other". Nevertheless, this could still have an influence on the player's self-esteem via the mechanism of being reminded of self-discrepancy by their own idealized avatar. Well-being and self-esteem have been linked numerous times to any type of psychological research (e.g., (Button, Loan, Davies, & Sonuga-Barke, 1997; Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997; Kong, Zhao, & You, 2013)). These concepts seem to be related as people with low self-esteem seem to suffer from low well-being. For instance, in the study of (Button et al., 1997) schoolgirls completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale as well as the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, these two scales were highly significantly intercorrelated, indicating a strong association among self-esteem and psychological well-being. This means that since the identification with the avatar within World of Warcraft seems to be related to well-being, it should also be related to self-esteem. This ties in with the theory of self-discrepancy and how it can affect your self-esteem. It was looked at how discrepancy can affect self-esteem in more profound ways than low self-concept. This could potentially mean that the discrepancy we experience when we create and play as an idealized avatar could have effects in similar ways that a discrepancy between real-self and ideal-self could.

Avatars and Group Identification. When measuring Identification for MMORPGs, as previously stated Van Looy et al. (2012) did not only measure avatar identification, they also measured game identification as well as group identification. Especially the group identification is important to our discussion about video games and self-esteem as it has been linked to self-esteem many times in prior research

(Branscombe et al., 1999; Giamo et al., 2012; Outten et al., 2009). So including again this idea that the avatar is not just a representation of themselves that is judged and played by the player, but also witnessed by others it could potentially lead to a different importance set on different things than if you would create the same character within the same world in a single player game. Bessière et al. (2007) describes how the self-concept but even more so the ideal self is mirrored within the characters we create within video games. In Van Looy et al. (2012) Measurement paper they also included Group identification, due to, as stated before, MMORPGs not being single-player experiences, the implication of this should be discussed, in connection with the theory that we have already examined. Group identification can lead to both increased as well as decreased self-esteem, depending on the status of your ingroup and yourself. There has been a long-standing debate whether or not "gamers" are a stigmatized group when asking the general public people seem to have mixed feelings about video games. When asked if video games are a waste of time, 26% of adult Americans reported that this is true for most games, while 24% reported that it is not true for most game and 33% reported that it is true for some games, but not for others. When asked if video games are a better form of entertainment than TV, only 11% reported true for most games, while 23% reported not true for most games and 37% reported true for some games, but not others (Duggan, 2015). These findings don't answer the question whether or not "gamers" are stigmatized. However, these results show that a significant proportion of the public still has negative feelings towards games and their usefulness, describing them as a waste of time. What they also reported on how many people identify with the word gamer, they found significant differences in identity with the word gamer depending on gender, while 11% of men identify with it, only 6% of women identify with it. As such men are more than twice as likely to identify as "gamers". While this thesis is about identification within the media, and especially about identification with interactive media characters, the fact that there are as many women as there are men playing video games, but less than half of the women identify as "gamers", could have potential implications for further research about identification and interactive media, as

women don't seem to identify with the role of "gamer" as readily and as such might exhibit different behaviours when it comes to identifying with in-game characters. This lack of identification with the term gamer could also potentially have implications for the findings of online communities and how identification with them work similarly as identification with minority groups (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Meaning that identifying with online groups gives protection from low self-esteem due to stigmatization. Women not identifying with the word gamer could potentially mean that they have the stigmatization of playing video games without the protection identification with the online community of gamers could offer.

Conclusion

As stated before there is no experimental study on the effect of identifying with video game characters on self-esteem, as such all conclusions drawn from the literature review need to be taken with care. The first conclusion that can be drawn from this review is that identification is a big part of playing video games and video games can be designed in order to increase identification, for example, customization of avatars can facilitate a different level of identification. Control is another aspect which could facilitate identification, sadly there is no research on the direct effect. It can be hypothesized, however, that being able to choose what your character does in a game can increase wishful or similarity identification. This is because the character then acts as the player wishes they would or in a similar manner to the player. Further conclusions can be drawn concerning self-esteem. Self-esteem seems to be influenced by different forms of identification, for example, group identification can influence self-esteem positively as well as negatively. But also identifying with successful groups in one's life, such as sports clubs, your own university sport's team or popular peers in your teens can improve your self-esteem through the process of basking in reflected glory. The other theory discussed in this thesis is self-discrepancy and how the difference between your real self and the ideal self can be a predictor for self-esteem. There is evidence that the way players create, when customization allows for it, or view

and describe their characters is dependent on the well-being of the players, also created characters seem to be closer to the ideal self in comparison to the player's real self. There is no experimental study currently on whether or not playing these idealized selves as characters in video games actively changes the self-esteem of the player, but connecting the research of how self-discrepancy can be a predictor for self-esteem together with how low well-being individuals play highly idealized selves as their main character it can be hypothesized that playing as the idealized self serves as a reminder of the difference between the ideal self and our actual self can negatively influence well-being or self-esteem. However, the other causal direction can also be argued for, namely that playing as an idealized self brings relief to players with a negative self-concept and function as a coping mechanism. Meaning that rather playing as an idealized self having led to low self-esteem, due to low self-esteem players play as an idealized self. Another conclusion drawn is that basking in reflected glory is not limited to traditional sports teams, and potentially associating close with the achievements of your in-game character and exhibiting typical BIRGing behaviors such as boasting online could positively influence self-esteem. More distant from identification with in-game characters, but still relevant to this discussion is the conclusion that in-groups within video games exist, for example, guilds or a subset of players of a specific class, or even just a game with which one could identify. This identification could again influence self-esteem as there is a decent amount of research supporting the hypothesis that in-group identification, specifically with a minority group, can influence self-esteem both positively and negatively. In sum, while there is no empirical evidence of identification with video game characters influencing self-esteem, this review consisting of previous and current research provides a theoretical basis of the possibility of such influence. This influence being potentially both positive as well as negative. The influence on self-esteem also has implications within the topic of the player's well-being, as in research shows self-esteem and well-being are strongly intercorrelated concepts.

Table 1

Proposed Items to measure Identification by Cohen 2001

While viewing Program X, I felt as if I was part of the action.
While viewing Program X, I forgot myself and was fully absorbed.
I was able to understand the events in the program in a manner similar in which character X understood them.
I think I have a good understanding of character X.
I tend to understand the reasons why character X does what he or she does.
While viewing the show I could feel the emotions character X portrayed.
During viewing, I felt I could really get inside character X's head.
At key moments in the show, I felt I knew exactly what character X was going through.
While viewing the program, I wanted character X to succeed in achieving his or her goals.
When character X succeeded I felt joy, but when he or she failed, I was sad.

Table 2

Scale in order to measure Identification within MMOG by van Looy 2012

Similarity Identification	My character is similar to me
	I resemble my character
	My character resembles me
	I identify with my character
	My character is like me in many ways
	My character is an extension of myself
Embodied Presence	In the game, it is as if I become one with my character
	I feel like I am inside my character when playing
	When I am playing, it feels as if I am my character
	When playing, it feels as if my character's body becomes my own
	In the game, it is as if I act directly through my character
Wishful Identification	I would like to be more like my character
	If I could become like my character , I would
	My character is an example to me
	My character is a better me
	My character has characteristics that I would like to have
Group Identification	I feel connected with the members of my guild
	The members of my guild are important to me
	I regularly go online to meet with others from my guild
	I have a lot in common with the members of my guild
	I find it important how the members of my guild see me
	My guild can count on me
Game Identification	World of Warcraft is more than a game
	World of Warcraft is a part of who I am
	World of Warcraft is more than a hobby to me
	World of Warcraft means a lot to me
	World of Warcraft is a way of life
	World of Warcraft is a work of art

Table 3

Basking in Reflected Glory Scale by Spinda 2011

"After the (favorite NFL team) win..."	
Basking Communication	I am more likely to read stories online to savor the (favorite NFL team) win.
	I am more likely to purposely read stories in the newspaper about the (favorite NFL team) performance.
	I am more likely to display the (favorite NFL team) logo, emblem, or insignia where I live.
	I am more likely to spend time with my family or close others
	I am more likely to display the (favorite NFL team) logo, emblem, or insignia where I work or go to school.
	I am more likely to purposely watch the highlights of the (favorite NFL team) after the game.
	I usually wear clothing or jerseys that display the (favorite NFL team) logo, emblem, or insignia.
Communication Disinhibition	I am more likely to "trash talk" to fans of other teams who have been defeated by the (favorite NFL team).
	I am more likely to "trash talk" to fans of other teams whose teams are not doing as well as the (favorite NFL team).

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