Who Stays in the Game?

Similarities and Differences Between Current and Former Digital Games Players

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Abstract

Former players offer important yet underutilized insights into the norms and expectations of game communities. Research to date has focused on players who have left particular games, but little is known about the broader forces that lead some players to ultimately quit games altogether. In this paper we report on the results of a nationally representative survey of the US adult population where respondents were asked about their leisure activities, including if they currently or have previously played digital games. By identifying patterns amongst people who quit as compared to people who remain active players, our goal is to better understand the factors that push or pull people away from gaming. Doing so contributes to the literature on digital game players broadly, while also potentially making it easier for game scholars to identify—and subsequently recruit—former players to participate in games-related research. Implications for future research recruitment are discussed.

1. Introduction

Former players represent a perspective from the periphery of a game's community who are more willing to speak frankly about both the positive and the negative experiences they encountered while participating in a particular community. In his research about players publically announcing their intentions to cancel their subscriptions to a Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG), Nathan Dutton [21] argues that people who quit can be seen as fulfilling a similar role to Johan Huizinga's [30] spoilsport. Dutton argues that the act of quitting is powerful because by deciding to leave the game, they are no longer invested in maintaining the magic circle of a particular gameworld. Huizinga describes the spoilsport as such:

By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the playworld in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. [30:11]

While we recognize that the magic circle is a contested concept within the broad field of game studies [16], Dutton's provocation that the person who withdraws from a game may speak more readily about the taken for granted norms and expectations of a particular community is still useful. Indeed, in our previous work we have found that former players are candid about the barriers and hostility preventing full participation in a particular gameworld, while current players tend to be focused on maintaining the exclusivity and mystique associated with the same game [3, 5].

Despite the insights they offer, former players are often a missing perspective in the study of the social aspects of digital gameplay, in large part due to the difficulty of identifying them during the recruitment stage of the research process. Nevertheless, we argue that former players offer important insights that are of interest to games researchers, and therefore it is 'worth' the extra effort to recruit such perspectives for future studies.

In this paper, we report on a subset of results taken from a nationally representative survey of US adults to compare what (if any) differences can be observed between current and former digital game players. By identifying any potential patterns among people who quit as compared to people who remain active players, our goal is to better understand the factors that push or pull people away from digital game play. In addition to contributing broadly to the academic literature on digital gaming, we also hope to make it easier for game scholars to identify—and subsequently recruit—former players to participate in games-related research.

1.1. Research questions

This research is part of a larger study examining digital gameplay experiences and leisure practices of current, former, and non-players as reported by participants of a nationally representative survey of the US adult population. The larger study includes a range of qualitative and open ended as well as close ended questions focused on leisure practices and values associated with digital game play. Here we report on a

qualitative, exploratory investigation of the survey response with the goal of elucidating patterns of game devices, play frequency, and social structures across current and former digital game players. Our immediate goal is to identify practices that characterize players who are more or less likely to continue to play over time. An additional, second order goal in this analysis is to offer up some suggested best practices for other researchers seeking to add the perspectives of former players when researching games and communities. The research presented in this paper was guided by three related research questions.

First, we sought to determine if a participant's social interactions in relationship to gameplay would have any impact on whether they remained a current player, or if they report they have quit. This was guided by the following research question:

RQ1: How do self-reported social play habits (who they played with and how often they played with them) differ between current and former players?

We also recognize that gameplay never truly happens in a vacuum, and therefore it might also be helpful to examine the leisure activities that current and formers partake in outside of gaming. This was guided by a second research question:

RQ2: What (if any) differences exist in the self-reported non-gaming leisure activities of current and former players?

Finally, we recognize that user and social experiences may differ depending on the device(s) a player uses for play and/or the devices(s) they have access to. Additionally, there are longstanding stereotypes about the level of commitment mobile players bring to gaming when compared to those who play games on a gaming console [37]. This motivated our third research question:

RQ3: What are the differences between the types of devices current and former players report using to access digital games?

Before moving on to a description of our methods and subsequent analysis, we introduce the theoretical framework that undergirds and motivates our study, and then briefly review the existing literature on quitting digital games.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

Theoretically informed by feminist game studies, our goal is to add to the growing body of literature that documents exit points from digital games and their surrounding communities. Rather than assuming playing or not playing begins and ends with personal choice, this theoretical approach recognizes that

gaming happens in a larger social context, and this context means that gaming as a leisure activity hails some demographics more readily than others. Feminist game scholarship has documented how games are marketed in a way that assumes they are more interesting to boys [10, 17], and when girls and/or women are specifically targeted, their interest in games is assumed to be focused on collaborative play [19, 24] or as a means towards self-improvement [14, 15]. This scholarship has also long-documented that choices around gameplay are never truly autonomous, and instead are shaped by social expectations and stereotypes about what is or is not an 'appropriate' leisure activity for girls and women [13, 28, 35].

Rather than games and/or their mechanics somehow being inherently more appealing to boys, feminist interventionist research has illustrated that when given an opportunity to do so, girls will play games too [23, 31, 34]. For example, Jennifer Jenson et al. [31] found that by creating a space for girls to become comfortable with particular genres more typically associated with boys' play (e.g. console fighting games) and practice their skills, their afterschool club participants became active and enthusiastic game players, even after boys were reintroduced to the club. Jenson et al argue that what gets read as feminine gameplay is actually a misreading of *novice* gameplay. In addition to finding that there are not really any marked differences between genders when it comes to play, feminist scholarship has also found that inferential sexism continues to shape how the games offered up to girls tend to be casual or educational in nature [18, 28], which in part might explain why women's play tends to be more readily associated with casual and/or mobile games rather than games played on a dedicated console or computer [15].

Documenting the barriers preventing equal access in turn allows for interventions to be designed and implemented to overcome these barriers to entry into digital game cultures [20, 26, 29]. And yet, very little is known about the other end of the player life cycle: *why* do players leave games and relatedly, *who* are the players who leave games? To what extent, for example, do the exclusionary practices that keep many women away from digital games, also play a role in pushing women who do play, out? Before moving on to a discussion of our methods and findings, we review the relevant literature to date about quitting, leaving, and/or discontinuing gameplay to provide further background for the data we discuss in this paper.

2.1. Literature about quitting

When “quitting” is investigated in the context of digital games, it tends to focus on churn—the rate at which players leave a particular game. Much of this attrition-focused research seeks to create models to better predict which players are at risk of leaving in the future [8, 22, 27, 43]. This is of particular interest to industry, as predicting who is likely to leave before they actually cancel their account allows for targeted re-engagement campaigns meant to coax players into staying (at least for a little while longer). Tangential to studies of churn, other scholars have examined the phenomenon of “rage quitting”—the moment at which a player decides to abandon a play session out of frustration [40, 45].

A literature scan for keywords related to quitting and games will also bring up research focused on gaming addiction, specifically that the some players have difficulty breaking from games if they exhibit problematic play patterns [32, 44]. While these studies seek to better understand *when* a player will quit (or in the case of addiction studies, when they *should* quit), these studies are less helpful to our questions about *who* leaves and if we can determine why, or identify contributing and predictive factors.

Rather than being equally open to all, game scholars—especially those informed by feminist theory—have documented the ways that some demographics have an easier time entering into particular gaming communities than others [9, 13, 26]. Indeed, researchers have endeavored to understand the gatekeeping practiced by certain members of online communities which act as a subtle and sometimes overt judgment about who “belongs” in a particular community and who is seen as an outsider [5, 18, 41]. At the other end of the player lifecycle—which we note is still a nascent area of investigation—other researchers have begun to probe players experiences about quitting gaming, or never begin playing in the first place [1, 4, 11, 21, 32]. However, these investigations tend to be more qualitative in nature. While providing rich, thick descriptions of why players leave a particular game, such studies are less able to determine if there are any patterns in terms of demographics, games played, reporting of negative player-to-player interactions, or any other sorts of commonalities to explain larger patterns of who quits gaming altogether, and why. In order to conduct such research, former players must be more readily identified, which is a larger goal motivating this paper. We will now discuss our methods and analytical approach before moving on to a narrowed discussion of our findings in relationship to the research questions set out in the introduction of this paper.

3. Method

Data was collected via a branching survey. Participant recruitment was handled via Qualtrics, an online survey management company [7], who we contracted to compile a panel that was a representative sample of the United States of America. The survey was open to people over the age of 18, US residents, and who agreed to our informed consent statement. Incomplete surveys were discarded from the dataset.

All participants were asked to describe their leisure activities and whether or not this currently or had previously included digital games. They were then asked which of the following statements best applied to their personal relationship to games:

Thinking about the past six months, which of the following statements best applies to you? For the purpose of this question, digital games are games played on a console, phone, PC, or other electronic device.

- A) *I have played digital games in the last 6 months.*
- B) *I have played digital games previously, but not in the last 6 months.*
- C) *I do not play digital games.*
- D) *I am not sure if I have played digital games.*

This mandatory question acted as a filter, and depending on their self-described relationship to digital games, they were directed to a different branch of the survey. All other questions were optional, including demographic questions. The survey used a mix of closed and open-ended questions; this paper focuses on a selection of the close-ended questions, analyzed in python using the scipy package for the clustering methods discussed in the next section. Open-ended questions are not addressed here, but will be analyzed and presented in future publications.

4. Results

The survey, fielded in September 2019, received a total of 1340 responses. These responses were distributed as follows: current players (participants who reported they have played games in the last 6 months, n=576), former players (participants who reported they have played games in the past, but not in the last 6 months, n=248), non-players, (participants who reported they do not play digital games, n=433), and participants who were unsure if they have played digital games, (n=83).

Because our previous findings suggest that women are more likely to have constraints on their leisure time than men [2, 4], we deliberately over sampled women in order to collect as many as possible open ended survey responses from former and non-players. Our

overall numbers were corrected back to being a representative US sample using the following methods. Respondents were asked whether they identified as Male (M), Female (F), Non-binary (NB), or preferred not to say. US census data does not include non-binary in their queries about gender. As such, precise measurement of the percentage of people who identify as non-binary is difficult to pinpoint [25, 38] and not easily captured by more traditional approaches to demographic data collection [42]. For the purposes of calculating gender representation in our study, we used 0.6%, and deducted this percentage equally from male and female US census percentages for an adjusted M 48.8%, F 50.6%, NB 0.6%. Weighted for gender representation in this way, our survey now includes a total of n=1329. Current players are n=581, former players n=241, non-players n=431, and respondents who are not sure if they do or do not play digital games n=76.

After completing this correction, our next stage of analysis sought to determine if there are any relationships between gender and who currently plays, who played previously, and who reports that they have never played digital games. According to our participant responses, men and women were almost equally likely to self-identify as non-players (33% of men and 32% of women), and also equally likely to have played at some point—either currently or in the past (49.6% of men, and 49.5% of women). Whereas women made up 48% of current players, they comprised 53% of former players. Furthermore, women were far more likely than men to say that they were not certain whether or not they play digital games (62% women, vs. 38% men).

While the percentage of non-binary identifying respondents in our survey (1.35%) is higher than this estimated national average (0.6%), the actual data sample is quite small at n=18. However, a few things are worth noting. First, as a weighted average of the population, even using a generous estimate of 0.6%, our sample size was more than twice that, at 1.35% of the raw number. Second, respondents who self identified as non-binary tended to be either current or former players (current n=8, former n=5). An additional n=7 preferred not to answer the question about gender and are not included in discussions of gender percentages above.

We now narrow our discussion to responses to questions directly related to the research questions laid out in the introduction. To address RQ1 we examine responses to questions where respondents indicated who they played with and how often they played with them. To address RQ2 we examine responses to questions where respondents indicated their non-gaming leisure activities and the frequency of which

they participated in the activities. To address RQ3 we examine responses to questions where respondents described on what device(s) they currently use or previously used to play digital games.

Due to space limitations, the analysis presented in the next section only reflects the responses of participants who answered A (current players) or B (former players) to the sorting question listed above in Section 3. Non-players (C) and those unsure about if they have played digital games (D) will be discussed in a future paper.

4.1 Social play

We asked current and former players to indicate with whom they played digital games and how often they did so. In addition to being able to indicate they play alone, participants had the option to indicate if they play with a romantic partner, their children, other family members, friends (in person), online with friends they have met face to face, friends they only know via the internet, and/or strangers online. The question was formatted so that all relevant answers could be selected; there was no limit to the number of social configurations a participant could indicate when answering question. In addition to indicating with whom they played, participants were also asked to indicate on a matrix how often they played with them according to the following scale: daily, weekly, occasionally, or never. We also provided a N/A option for participants to indicate that a particular answer was not applicable to their situation.

To reduce the dimensionality of participant responses we used a hierarchical clustering method [33] to partition the possible responses into six discrete bins. This clustering proceeded as follows: first, a participant-vector was constructed for each respondent, wherein the Likert-type ordinal values were converted to binary dummy variables. Next, a pair-wise matrix was computed using the Jaccard distance between each participant-vector. Finally, since each row of the distance matrix represents how similar a participant's response was to every other respondent, we applied an agglomerative clustering method (with a Ward linkage function) to partition the distance-vector dataset into the six bins.

Interestingly, when we compared the results of the clustering analyses, which were run separately for current and former players, we found that the attributes of the six clusters of current players and the six clusters of former players were nearly identical in terms of with whom they played with and how often they played with them. To assist with analysis, we created qualitative descriptions to differentiate between the clusters. The descriptions, along with the percentage of

Table 1: Ratios of current and former players belonging to each of the 6 qualitative clusters indicating with whom they played and how often they played with them

Cluster	Qualitative description of cluster	% of current players	% of former players
1	Tends to play alone	13.8	20.4
2	Plays alone or with others, but only in person, not online.	23.0	18.7
3	Plays every day with everyone (friends, strangers, in person and online)	21.5	7.2
4	Plays alone and designated all other options as N/A	11.8	6.9
5	Plays with everyone on a weekly basis	11.4	9.9
6	Plays with everyone, but only occasionally	18.5	36.9

current and former players that make up each category, are detailed in Table 1. We note that for former players, these social configurations were listed in past tense (“played”) but we used the present tense in the table for ease of formatting and comparison.

While the qualitative attributes of the clusters were similar enough to allow for cross comparison, the ratio of players in each cluster differs between current and former players. Of particular interest is that 36.9% of former players reported that while they played in almost every social configuration we asked about (alone, with family, friends both online and off, etc.), they only did so occasionally. These colloquial “weekend warriors” only made up 18.5% of the current players responding to our survey. The least populated cluster amongst former players (7.2%) was Cluster 3, where respondents reported playing every day with other people, yet 21.5% of current players fell into Cluster 3. Our interpretation, expanded in the discussion section below, is that the configuration and frequency of social play with others will be important when determining if someone will leave or remain an active player. A limitation is that this is a snapshot in time, and while a large number of “weekend warriors” are present in this dataset, more research is required to understand the process by which this cluster comes to ultimately exit gaming.

The gender breakdown for both current and former players belonging to each cluster is detailed in Table 2. Overall, we found that the gender breakdown of each cluster remains similar across current and former players. It is interesting that there are gender differences in the varying level of sociality that we qualitatively attributed to each cluster. Men (both current and former players) were more heavily represented in the clusters that had more social

attributes, especially Cluster 3 where players reported playing daily with all of the various social configurations we asked about. Women, on the other hand, are more heavily represented in Clusters 1 and 4, in which they indicated they played alone.

Reflecting further on the N/A option indicated by Cluster 4, we wish to highlight difference between how Clusters 1 and 4 described their social gameplay configurations. In both cases, respondents clustered into these groupings play alone. And yet, there is a difference in the way these two groups indicated their answer in the matrix. Cluster 1 indicated they played alone, while Cluster 4 indicated that all other social configurations were not applicable (N/A) to their situation. Qualitatively, we understood this as a distinction between respondents who have a spouse, children, other family members, etc. but do not or did not previously play with them (Cluster 1) and participants who do not currently have such social relationships in their life and therefore marked them not applicable (Cluster 4). Returning to the feminist game scholarship discussed above, it is not uncommon for girls and women to report being first introduced to digital games by family members (typically brothers or fathers) [23, 31]. That women made up more of the solo players who ultimately left gaming in our sample suggests the need for future research to better understand if the *lack* of family members to play with (Cluster 4) has an impact on their decision to ultimately quit. While our previous research has found that women are more likely to quit playing in order to care for a family member [2], to date we have not encountered women who describe a lack of family to play with ultimately causing them to leave gaming. Future research is required to unpack the possible implications for this finding.

Table 2: Summary of social configurations of gameplay, as reported by current and former players

Cluster	Qualitative description of cluster	Segment	Female (%)	Male (%)	Non-Binary (%)
1	Tends to play alone	Current	53.4	46.6	0.0
		Former	60.6	38.1	1.3
2	Plays alone or with others, but only in person, not online.	Current	53.4	45.9	0.7
		Former	54.8	45.2	0.0
3	Plays every day with everyone (friends, strangers, in person and online)	Current	31.5	68.2	0.3
		Former	37.6	58.7	3.7
4	Plays alone and designated all other options as N/A	Current	61.7	37.4	0.9
		Former	69.5	30.5	0.0
5	Plays with everyone on a weekly basis	Current	52.7	46.3	1.0
		Former	48.7	49.9	1.3
6	Plays with everyone, but only occasionally	Current	48.1	50.7	1.2
		Former	48.1	51.5	0.4

4.2 Non-gaming leisure activities

In addition to asking questions about digital gameplay, we also asked participants to indicate on a matrix what other leisure activities they participated in and the frequency of their participation in these activities. Our goal for including this question on the survey was to see if perhaps there were any trends among former players that indicate other leisure activities that have taken the place of gaming.

Our findings, visualized below in Figure 1, show a surprising similarity between the self-reported leisure activities of current and former players. The major (yet ultimately not unexpected) difference between current and former players is that former players reported that they played games less than current players. And yet, the reported gameplay amongst former players is not zero. Despite indicating they considered themselves as someone who has not played a game in the past six months, some still report playing games as part of their current leisure activities. We intend to follow up with qualitative interviews at a future date to further unpack why players answered the sorting question by indicating they considered themselves a former player, yet still report currently playing games on a phone or a computer daily or multiple times per week.

While this analysis did not provide a clear answer from where participants might be recruited once they leave games, this finding may be relevant to other investigations by games scholars. Gaming tends to have the stereotypical reputation of being an all-encompassing leisure activity [6, 36] but current players report participating in a wide variety of activities beyond digital games. We also note that the most frequent activity reported by current (and also

former) players is watching movies or television. Previous work by Marcus Carter et al. [12] investigated the usage of multiple screens during gameplay and while we suspect our dataset likely supports Carter et al.'s findings, additional follow-up investigations are required to better understand multiple screen ecologies and how they fit into an individual's gameplay experiences.

4.3 Devices

We used the same hierarchical clustering method as in section 4.1 to conduct a preliminary analysis of questions where participants were asked what device(s) they used to play games, and how often they played on these device(s). The six clusters of current players demonstrated clear patterns of device usage. As above, we created a qualitative description for each cluster, detailed in Table 3.

Unlike our analysis of the social configurations of gameplay detailed in section 4.1, there was little by way of discernable patterns when we used the same clustering method on former players' answers to which device(s) they used for gameplay. We decided to run the clustering algorithm again, this time sorting the former players into the "best fit" of the clusters as defined by the current players data. The results of this clustering are also reported in Table 3. While this is helpful for understanding the overall trends in the data, we are hesitant to make any particular claims about the stark differences between current and former players (e.g. Cluster 3).

Like the clusters in section 4.1, there are patterns that through qualitative interpretation, seem to indicate

Figure 1: Current and former leisure activities and reported frequency of participation in each activity. The number in each square represents the percentage of current or former players who reported participating in the leisure activity listed on the left hand side. A heat map provides a visual indicator of the most frequent responses, the key to which is located on the right side of the visualization.

differences between respondents who have games as part of their daily lives, and those who dabble. However, the ubiquity of smartphones used to play games is of particular note and warrants further investigation in future studies. Game studies as a field has more frequently studied online gaming communities (e.g. MMOGs like *World of Warcraft*) because they are easier to locate and collect data from. Mobile games and their players pose difficulties in terms of recruitment and observation, but given that all six clusters reported playing games on smartphones daily, we believe this is a worthwhile future endeavor. We suggest that turning to the study of console players, such as the ongoing work of Kishonna Gray [26], or the multiple studies of *Pokémon GO* (played via an internet connection and smartphone) presented in previous years at HICSS, offer potential paths forward for improving recruitment of current and former smartphone players.

5. Discussion

Returning to the research questions we set out in the introduction of this paper, on the surface, there are no clear-cut, obvious metrics that would allow us to easily predict who will remain a player, and who will quit. Our analysis of the social configurations of gameplay reported by both current and former players (RQ1) do not offer up any clear distinctions between current and former players, nor do the reports of non-gaming leisure activities (RQ2). Our analysis of devices currently or previously used by respondents to play games (RQ3) shows a commonality shared by all respondents of games played via smartphone, and we note that to our knowledge former smartphone game players are largely ignored by the quitting-specific literature to date. This under examination is, we argue, at least in part due to the gendered assumptions surrounding particular genres and devices upon which

Table 3: Summary of devices used to access games as reported by current and former players

Cluster	Qualitative description of cluster	Segment	Female (%)	Male (%)	Non-Binary (%)
1	Plays on a smartphone every day but never plays on other devices	Current	59.6	39.6	0.8
		Former	56.8	42.6	0.6
2	Plays every day on all devices	Current	19.5	80.0	.04
		Former	36.5	61.7	1.8
3	Plays every day on a smartphone and console, all other devices on a weekly basis	Current	38.9	60.7	0.4
		Former	63.9	36.9	0.0
4	Plays on a smartphone every day, all other devices are N/A	Current	61.9	37.5	0.6
		Former	64.7	33.7	1.6
5	Plays every day on a smartphone, weekly on a console, and other devices occasionally	Current	47.6	51.9	0.5
		Former	46.8	53.2	0.0
6	Plays every day on a smartphone, occasionally on other devices	Current	46.4	52.5	1.0
		Former	59.2	39.6	1.2

games can be played [18, 28, 37]. By using a feminist lens when designing our data collection tools, we were able to problematize these assumptions and expand our survey’s focus beyond consoles and PCs and include smartphones in our questions about games providing the conditions for this important finding that smartphones are much more ubiquitous than the game studies literature to date would imply.

Putting these findings in conversation, it indicates that when it comes to asking former players about their previous experiences playing games, *who* they played with was ultimately more memorable than *what* devices they played on. This may be in part due to the technology surrounding games is constantly evolving, so much so that a player who steps away from gaming—even for a year or two—might find it difficult to remember the specifics of the devices they previously used, especially if the devices were borrowed from a friend or family member. Christopher Paul’s [39] analysis of meritocracy of games and their associated hardware finds games build in an advantage that privileges the people who play them on a more regular basis than those who merely dabble. People who play consistently are rewarded, as knowledge of one game in a series will easily flow into the next (e.g. players with experience playing *FIFA 20* will not need much time to get up to speed when the 2021 edition is released). Those who play less frequently face a steeper learning curve, and may ultimately decide to quit if they cannot easily see that playing a particular game is ‘worth’ it. In future work we plan to revisit the device question by reformatting it to add an additional level of specificity, asking not only what device(s) were used and how frequently they were to play

games, but also to whom the device belongs. It is hoped that by probing about the source of gaming devices used to play, we will be able to understand if owning devices can be a predictor of remaining an active game player.

5.1 Implications for the recruitment of former players in future studies

Returning to our argument at the beginning of the paper, that former players offer important and interesting perspectives that are currently under utilized in the study of digital games and the people who play them, we conclude with a discussion about how these findings might inform future recruitment efforts. Given our observation that former players are more decisive in their answers when it comes to *who* they used to play with rather than *what* devices they used to play on, it would follow that a successful recruitment would focus on social ties, rather than ties to particular games and/or devices. Indeed, someone who has quit *League of Legends* is probably unlikely to continue to frequent the message boards and websites associated with the game. However, they may still maintain social ties with current players who would encounter a recruitment post and pass it along to former players in their social circles via other channels (email, social media, etc.). Therefore we suggest taking a similar approach to recruitment like we have here, and in our prior work [3]. By building a branching survey that can accommodate answers from current, former, and non-players, and then specifically including in the recruitment text that participants should forward the survey to people they know who

have quit gaming, it will ultimately increase the number of former players completing the survey.

By way of an example of putting these findings into practice, we return to the sociality clusters discussed in 4.1. Here we found that women were well represented in the cluster we qualitatively described as playing with or having previously played with other people, but only in offline settings. Such players would offer up an interesting perspective—why did they choose to play digital games, but not play online? For researchers interested in how players avoid harassment and toxic digital cultures, it would certainly be worthwhile to gather the perspectives of these women who appear to avoid online gaming entirely. However, recruitment efforts focused on online gaming-related message boards will likely fail. Such women would need to be identified through other means, such as a snowball sample that starts with current players who fall into different, more online-focused clusters. By including specific instruction to forward to the survey to the women in their family and friendship circles who may not play *League of Legends* with them, but have in the past joined in for a living room battle of *Mario Kart*, the survey will have a much higher chance of reaching the women whose prior gaming experience happened entirely offline.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we have reported on the results of a survey completed by both current and former digital game players. While we had originally set out to see if there were any unique characteristics that can be useful for identifying former players, we ultimately found that current and former players share more similarities than differences, especially when it comes to non-gaming leisure activities. Throughout this work, we have argued that former players may be difficult—but not entirely impossible—to recruit. By offering suggestions for how researchers might be able to recruit former players for future studies, it has been our goal to ensure that these interesting perspectives are better represented in game scholarship moving forward.

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