



**Do Others Understand Us? Fighting Game Community member
perceptions of others' views of the FGC**

Crystal N. Steltenpohl, Jordan Reed, and Christopher B. Keys

Author Biographies: *Crystal Steltenpohl*, is an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Southern Indiana. She holds an MA in applied psychology from Southern Illinois University Carbondale and a PhD in community psychology from DePaul University. She is a co-founder of the Online Technologies Lab, which studies the way people interact with and through technology. The Online Technologies Lab received a SCRA Community Mini-Grant in 2017 to conduct interviews at a fighting game tournament to explore fighting game community members' sense of community, social responsibility, and reactions to other fighting game community members' helpful and harmful behaviors. *Jordan Reed*, is a graduate student in the community psychology program at DePaul University. He is a founding member of the Online Technologies Lab, receiving a SCRA Community Mini-Grant with Dr. Steltenpohl. He examines metastereotypes and community prototypes held by members of the fighting game community. *Christopher Keys*, is professor emeritus and former chair of the psychology departments at the University of Illinois at Chicago and DePaul University. He was also the founding associate dean for research and faculty development in the College of Science and Health at DePaul. A fellow of APA, MPA, and SCRA, Chris served as President of the Society for Community Research and Action. He has received the SCRA Distinguished Contribution to Community Psychology Theory and Research. Chris is a co-founder of the Online Technologies Lab. Chris enjoyed playing video games when his sons were growing up.

Recommended Citation: Steltenpohl, C. N., Reed, J., & Keys, C.B.(2018). Do Others Understand Us? Fighting Game Community member perceptions of others' views of the FGC. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 9(1), 1- 21. Retrieved Day/Month/Year, from (<http://www.gjcpp.org/>).

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Abstract

Our perceptions of how well others understand us and our communities can affect how we see ourselves, as well as how we perceive and interact with others. Community psychologists may be interested in examining community meta-stereotypes, or how community members believe outsiders see them. The current mixed-methods study asked fighting game community (FGC) members about their perceptions of outsiders' understanding of the FGC. We collected data from 496 FGC members, who provided descriptions of others' perceptions of the FGC, reasons these perceptions exist, and their reactions to these perceptions. The data supported our hypotheses that FGC members feel misunderstood by non-members; gaming affiliation and media affiliation each had significant effects on FGC members' ratings of others' understanding. Non-gaming media were perceived as exhibiting especially high levels of misunderstanding. Respondents' negative comments focused on non-gaming media's overreliance on outdated stereotypes and lack of research into the community. Recommendations for community psychologists, researchers, FGC members, and media outlets are included, which may allow various stakeholders to explore key issues and sources of friction. Finally, future research directions are discussed.

Community psychology has struggled over the years to define community (Krause & Montenegro, 2017). There has been less attention to how community members see outsiders and believe outsiders see them. Interactions with outsiders may influence the ways people think about and identify with their communities (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Torres & Charles, 2004). If community members feel misunderstood by outsiders, it may be due to members' beliefs that others hold negative stereotypes of them. Community meta-stereotypes are views held by community members about outsiders' views of that community. Meta-stereotypes can have a profound effect on individual in-group members and interactions between groups (Klein & Azzi, 2001).

In-group members can accurately identify meta-stereotypes (Lichtenberger, 2004; Saroglou, Yzerbyt, & Kaschten, 2011; Torres & Charles, 2004), but can also exaggerate or minimize others' perceptions of them

(Saroglou, Yzerbyt, & Kaschten, 2011). Either scenario—exaggeration or minimization—can have implications for group relations. Meta-stereotypes play a significant role in the identity development of in-group members and can negatively affect self-perceptions (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Torres & Charles, 2004). Negative meta-stereotypes are associated with anxiety and a decrease in self-esteem for in-group members, as well as intergroup tension (Finchilescu, 2010; Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998).

How out-group members see in-group members is particularly relevant if the views of more dominant groups are affecting those from marginal communities. Those in the margins are more likely to be influenced by those in power than the other way around (Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008; Vorauer & Sakamoto, 2008) and are less likely to have their perspectives shared and known by others (Dello Stritto, Loomis, & Allen, 2012).

One of community psychology's enduring values is to help those be heard who often are not (Bond, Serrano-Garcia and Keys, 2017; Society for Community Research and Action, n.d.). Therefore, it would behoove the field to understand the meta-stereotypes held by marginal communities with which we work.

One community with much experience in dealing with meta-stereotypes regarding larger outside communities is the fighting game community (FGC), a sub-group of the larger gaming community where people play games involving combat, such as Tekken, Mortal Kombat, Persona 4 Arena, and Super Smash Bros. The FGC is a niche within the gaming community; games in this genre comprised only 6.7% of games sold in America in 2015, compared to the largest group, shooters, which comprised of 24.5% (Entertainment Software Association, 2016).

FGC members may find the perceptions of groups dominant relative to them—groups like non-FGC gamers or other, non-gaming individuals—relevant, and may be easily able to identify stereotypes these outsiders have about FGC members. Virtually no gamer surveyed by Dial (2013) believed violence and gaming are associated; however, they were aware others held those beliefs. Parents tend to associate their children playing video games with more conduct and peer problems and less prosocial behavior, but their children do not make these same associations (Lobel, Granic, Stone, & Engels, 2014). Being aware of these negative perceptions or stereotypes about gaming may affect players' willingness to be associated with gaming communities.

Despite popular belief, online gaming may provide opportunities for shy individuals to generate new friendships and strengthen old ones (Kowert, Domahidi, & Quandt, 2014). More specifically, the FGC may facilitate social interaction between players and allow for the formation of social capital among players from diverse backgrounds (Kong & Theodore,

2011). Its roots in arcades may have created an environment inclusive of people of color (Bowman, 2014). This inclusiveness is contradicted by games' often stereotypical or racist portrayals of some of the otherwise diverse cast of characters (Demby, 2014).

Moreover, tournament enrollment data suggest less than 5% of competitive FGC players are female (Kong & Theodore, 2011). A few well-known players have received attention for engaging in domestic abuse (Schreier, 2013) or arguing sexual harassment is inherent to the FGC (Hamilton, 2012), which may serve to reinforce negative stereotypes held by outsiders. Some FGC members insist players who engage in these negative behaviors do not reflect FGC values and denounce both the players and behaviors, while others argue such behavior is inherent to the FGC and is why the community is not more diverse. Regardless how accurate or inaccurate the FGC's image is, this complicated image may have a stifling effect on the community. Some women may feel less comfortable engaging with the FGC. Then, some outsiders may view the FGC as inherently unwelcoming toward women. In turn, more women may become more uncomfortable with the FGC.

The cycle continues, fulfills itself and strengthens.

Communities may hold different meta-stereotypes for different out-groups. Non-believers may distinguish between the stereotypes Catholics or Muslims may have of them, if there is reason to believe those stereotypes would differ in content or severity. Whether FGC members would distinguish between the stereotype(s) those in the wider (i.e., non-FGC) gaming community and non-gamers hold is unclear. However, an intuitive anticipation of experiences congruent with intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998) suggests other gamers who do not play fighting games

may be seen as more understanding of the FGC than non-gamers.

Would FGC members differentiate between stereotypes they believe individuals hold and those held by the media? We may be able to infer their feelings from previous research. In interviews with FGC members, Harper (2010) noted a “community perception of the press as insincere and lacking in genuine interest” (p. 65). Some exasperation with games media may come from the gaming community’s frustration over the role and expectations of games journalists. Some games journalists see themselves as traditional journalists, while others describe themselves as commentators or bloggers, who have a very different set of responsibilities to their audience (Fisher, 2012). Journalists tend to be held to higher standards accuracy and allowing all sides of an issue to be appropriately reported. In contrast, bloggers and commentators may have more leeway to be opinionated. To slightly modify a quote from The Big Lebowski, gaming-related bloggers and commentators are in a “better” position to respond to gamers’ critiques about fairness and completeness with, “Yeah, well, that’s just like, my opinion, man” (Coen & Coen, 2009).

Gaming-related media may be considered ultimately more understanding than mainstream media. Williams (2003) found Time, Newsweek, US World News & Report, and the New York Times have all historically characterized video games as a social threat (McKernan, 2013). On the other hand, Kotaku (a popular gaming outlet) treated gaming as a valuable form of artistic expression and explored a broad range of gaming-related topics. Kotaku presented critiques of the negative views about the gaming community held by influential public figures and institutions including politicians, academia, mainstream media outlets, and even other video game media outlets.

FGC members may not trust non-gaming media due to the “games cause violence” narrative seen throughout media coverage of psychological research since the 1990s. The media often forms tenuous connections between video games and what sometimes feels like anyone who has committed a notable violent crime. Mainstream news outlets suggested Adam Lanza, the gunman involved in the Sandy Hook massacre, may have been influenced by video games (Orr & Milton, 2013; Twenge, 2012); others include Red Lake shooter Jeff Weise (De, 2005), Aurora shooter James Holmes (Stevens, 2012), and Rep. Gabrielle Gifford’s shooter, Jared Lee Loughner (Berzon, Emshwiller, & Guth, 2011). Gaming news sites largely discount articles linking violent criminals to video games, and, unlike many mainstream media outlets, publish about studies with null or contradictory findings (Karmali, 2013; Schreier, 2015).

Taking all of this together, FGC members may feel more understood by individuals rather than the media. Outsiders closer to the FGC (e.g. people who play non-fighting games) may be perceived as more understanding than those who do not play games at all. To this end, we designed an exploratory mixed methods study examining FGC members’ perceptions of outsiders’ understanding of the FGC. We hypothesize the following for our quantitative data:

- FGC members do not feel understood by outsiders, and
- FGC members perceive varying levels of understanding from outsiders, such that:
 - those with gaming affiliation are perceived as more understanding than those without gaming affiliation, and that individuals will be perceived as more understanding of the FGC than those with media affiliation.

For our qualitative data, our research questions are:

- What stereotypes do FGC members think exist for their community?
- In the views of FGC members, do the stereotypes held by gaming group and by media group differ? Put another way, for example, will the stereotypes about FGC members held by non-gamers be the same as those held by the non-gaming media?
- What reasons do FGC members give to explain why these stereotypes exist?
- How do FGC members react to these stereotypes?

Based on our experiences with the FGC, we anticipate FGC members largely agree the stereotypes others have about their community tend to be negative, but these stereotypes may vary across groups. FGC members may believe gamers have fewer or less severe negative stereotypes of the FGC than non-gamers. Moreover, we anticipate FGC members think individuals are less negative in their stereotypes than the media. We also anticipate FGC members have a variety of explanations for why these stereotypes exist, but negative motivations will likely be attached more readily to the general (non-gaming) media. Lastly, we anticipate FGC members will vary on the perceived effects of these stereotypes on the community, but the effects will largely be negative.

We spent time trying to understand various responses to previous research by Harper (2010) to find the best ways to build trust between us and the various fighting game communities. Complaints about Harper's research included the cost of his book (\$125 at the time) creating access issues for FGC members, and a presentation title ("Everything You Always Wanted to Know

About Fighting Games (But Were Afraid to Ask)") inconsistent with how FGC members perceived his and his co-presenter's actual knowledge and understanding of the community (Miller, 2013; Newsman, 2013). In addition, some FGC members took issues with perceived confirmation bias and the way with which the presenters positioned themselves (as simultaneously experts and non-experts) relative to the community (a curiosity rather than a "community to be loved" (Miller, 2013)). Some FGC members also disliked statements Harper had made that were perceived as him downplaying the significance his research (and by extension, the FGC) has to academia.

While there were some positive reactions from community members (FGCRequiem, 2014), the negative reactions motivated us to ensure we were open with the community about our intentions, cultivated an understanding of the FGC's culture and history, and remained as non-judgmental as possible. We are not members of the FGC, and we have sought to have an open and engaged stance toward the community. Some FGC members have perceived our efforts to highlight how the FGC is a unique and meaningful community to be in good faith (dpu_fgc_study, 2017).

Methods

Participants

We obtained 496 FGC member responses to an online survey. Of these, 360 FGC members provided complete responses on quantitative questions about understanding/misunderstanding of the FGC, while 338 and 328 members responded to qualitative questions about what portrayals of the FGC are and what they think of these portrayals, respectively. Respondents were on average 24.4 years old (SD = 5.15, range 18-41) and reported varying levels of time spent on video games in general as well as fighting games more specifically. On average, respondents have been playing video games for 18.89 years (SD = 5.32, range 0-37) and

Table 1: Demographic Information of FGC Members

Characteristic	N (%)
Race/Ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	188 (37.9)
Black/African (American)	21 (4.23)
Asian	31 (6.25)
Middle Eastern	3 (0.60)
Latinx/Hispanic	37 (7.46)
Multiracial/ethnic	43 (8.67)
Decline to answer	173 (34.88)
Gender Identity	
Male	309 (62.30)
Female	15 (3.02)
Trans/Non-Binary ¹	3 (0.60)
Decline to answer	169 (34.07)
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	262 (52.82)
Lesbian/Gay	12 (2.42)
Bi-/Pansexual	39 (7.86)
Asexual	3 (0.60)
Sexually fluid/Queer	1 (0.20)
Decline to answer ²	179 (36.09)
Disability Status	
Yes ³	34 (6.85)
No	292 (58.87)
Decline to answer	170 (34.27)
Education status	
No schooling completed	1 (0.20)
Kindergarten/nursery school to 8th grade	1 (0.20)
Some high school, no diploma	12 (2.42)
High school graduate, diploma or equivalent	52 (10.48)
Some college credit, no degree	109 (21.98)
Trade/technical/vocational training	12 (2.42)
Associate degree	27 (5.44)
Bachelor's degree	92 (18.55)
Master's degree	17 (3.43)
Professional degree	3 (0.60)
Doctorate degree	2 (0.40)
Declined to answer	168 (33.88)
Location	
United States	270 (54.44)
Canada	21 (4.23)
Mexico	3 (0.60)
South America	1 (0.20)
Asia	3 (0.60)
Africa	1 (0.20)
Europe ⁴	27 (5.44)
Australia/New Zealand	4 (0.81)
Declined to answer	166 (33.47)

¹Numbers on trans identity may be underrepresented; we did not specifically ask respondents if they identify as trans.

²If a respondent answered in a manner where it was not possible to determine their sexuality (e.g. “male” may be interpreted as “I am interested in males” or “I identify as male”), we placed them in the Decline to answer category.

³Of those who provided information on their disability status, the most common responses were ADD/ADHD, anxiety, depression, and Asperger’s, while the most common physical disabilities were deafness and visual impairment.

⁴We included Russia as a European country.

fighting games for 11.21 years ($SD = 7.38$, range 0-28). Respondents were diverse on a number of demographic characteristics (See Table 1).

Respondents interacted with their top community in a number of ways, including in-person gaming nights, streaming, and social media, each of which roughly three quarters of respondents used to interact with their communities. While our respondents came from a variety of specific game communities, the most popular responses were communities relating to fighting games like Street Fighter, Super Smash Bros., Guilty Gear, and Mortal Kombat.

Instrumentation

The first and third authors worked with FGC members to create an original online survey, which can be accessed on the Open Science Framework (Steltenpohl & Keys, 2017). In line with Creswell’s (2013) description of concurrent embedded strategies, we utilized quantitative data to explore outcomes (e.g. perceived understanding or lack thereof) and qualitative data to explore processes (e.g. perceived origins of misunderstanding, effects on community members). Survey respondents were asked how well they thought fighting games and their communities are understood by four groups: other (non-FGC) gamers, non-gamers, games media (e.g. Kotaku, Polygon, IGN), and other non-gaming media (e.g. CNN, Fox News, BBC). Responses were provided on a six-point bipolar scale: completely misunderstood (1),

misunderstood (2), somewhat misunderstood (3), somewhat understood (4), understood (5), and completely understood (6). That is, higher scores denote greater understanding. Respondents were also asked open-ended questions about what the portrayals of the community are and what they thought of these portrayals. As this study was exploratory in nature, the questions were framed broadly to prevent respondents from being led to specific response patterns.

Respondents were also asked the following open response qualitative questions:

- 1) Please tell us more about your thoughts of others' understanding of the FGC. What are these other portrayals of the FGC?
- 2) What do you think of these portrayals?

Procedure

After obtaining IRB approval and support from an array of FGC members, we invited people with experiences with the FGC (positive or negative) to participate in the study via postings on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, various FGC-related subreddits) and on gaming sites. Respondents who identified their “top community” as anything other than a fighting game (e.g. League of Legends) or who were under 18 were excluded from the sample, as we were primarily interested in the experiences of adult FGC members. Adult members are likely

to be able to make a larger comparative time commitment to the community (when considering available leisure time) and are thereby likely to have relatively stable views and remain in the community in the long term.

Analysis

For the quantitative analysis, we computed descriptive statistics (average, SD) for all four groups combined to examine whether FGC members felt understood. A within-subjects 2x2 ANOVA was conducted to test the second hypothesis by comparing the effect of gaming affiliation (gamer, non-gamer) and media affiliation (individual, media) on FGC players' perceptions of the group's understanding of the FGC.

In line with consensual qualitative research approaches the first author created a codebook using open coding and data reduction. The second author independently examined the data and checked his own understanding of the responses against the codebook (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Williams & Morrow, 2009). The first and second authors met to discuss codes until consensus was reached, with the third author acting as an outside auditor. The full quantitative analyses and qualitative codebook are accessible on the Open Science Framework (Steltenpohl, Reed, & Keys, 2017).

Further, to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the analysis, FGC members were invited to participate in member checks three times. When designing the survey, we asked several FGC members for feedback on question wording and relevance to community needs. We also shared initial

results of the coding process with members to ensure the quality of the analysis. Finally, we obtained feedback on our manuscript draft from several community members.

Researcher Positionality. The three authors have varying levels of engagement with different gaming communities. The first author has been playing video games since she was four years old, has been involved with gaming-related forums since 2003, and has written for a few gaming websites; the second author plays a variety of video games and has been active on several gaming-related subreddits; and the final author has had experience gaming with family members. While none of the authors identify as FGC members, the first two authors attended an anime fighting game tournament and the first author has personal and professional contacts within the community. All three authors believe communities should be allowed to speak for themselves, and have made concerted efforts not to overinterpret qualitative responses. Having a member of the author team who was highly involved with gaming facilitated entry and participant recruitment. These different degrees of engagement also enabled the authors to view the FGC and the results from diverse perspectives that, taken together, yield valuable insights.

Results

The quantitative findings for each hypothesis and qualitative findings for each research question are presented in order. Hypothesis 1 states members do not feel understood by outsiders. Based on the distribution and mean of the data, FGC members rated others' overall understanding of the FGC somewhere between "somewhat misunderstood" and "misunderstood" ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.35$, 95% CI [2.57, 2.70]), in support of the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis states FGC members perceive varying levels of understanding from outsiders, such that: those with gaming affiliation are perceived as more understanding than those without gaming affiliation, and that individuals will be perceived as more understanding of the FGC than those with media affiliation.

In support of hypothesis 2a, there was a significant main effect of gaming affiliation accounting for a small amount of variance in perceptions of understanding, $F(1,359) = 38.90, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.026$, such that FGC players perceived slightly greater understanding from gaming-affiliated sources than non-gaming-affiliated sources (Table 2).

Table 2. Repeated Measures ANOVA Summary Table

Source	<i>df</i>	SS	MS	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Gaming Affiliation	1	49.1	49.1	38.9	<.001	0.026
Media Affiliation	1	733.9	733.9	580.49	<.001	0.287
A x B Interaction	1	5.4	5.4	5.94	0.004	0.003
Residuals	1,436	1815.5	1.3			
Total	359					

Note. – MS = Mean Squares.

As predicted in hypothesis 2b, there was a significant main effect of media accounting for a large amount of variance in ratings of understanding, $F(1,359) = 580.49, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.287$, such that those affiliated with the media were seen as less understanding than those not assumed to be affiliated with the media (Table 2).

[2.06, 2.27]) as “misunderstanding” of the FGC, but reported non-gaming media misunderstood them the most, with a rating somewhere between “misunderstanding” and “completely misunderstanding” the FGC ($M = 1.68, SD = 0.87, 95\% CI [1.58, 1.77]$).

In addition to the hypothesized quantitative results, there was also a significant interaction effect between the gaming and media factors accounting for a very modest amount of variance in ratings of understanding, $F(1,359) = 5.94, p = .004, \eta^2 = 0.003$ (Table 2, Figure 1). Other individual gamers were seen as the most understanding of the FGC, while non-gaming media was reported to understand the FGC the least by a fair margin. Using the language reflected in the survey, FGC members rated non-FGC gamers between “somewhat understanding” and “somewhat misunderstanding” of the FGC ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.18, 95\% CI [3.35, 3.59]$). Respondents felt non-gamers “somewhat misunderstood” the FGC ($M = 3.23, SD = 1.37, 95\% CI [3.08, 3.37]$). Respondents rated gaming media ($M = 2.17, SD = 1.01, 95\% CI$

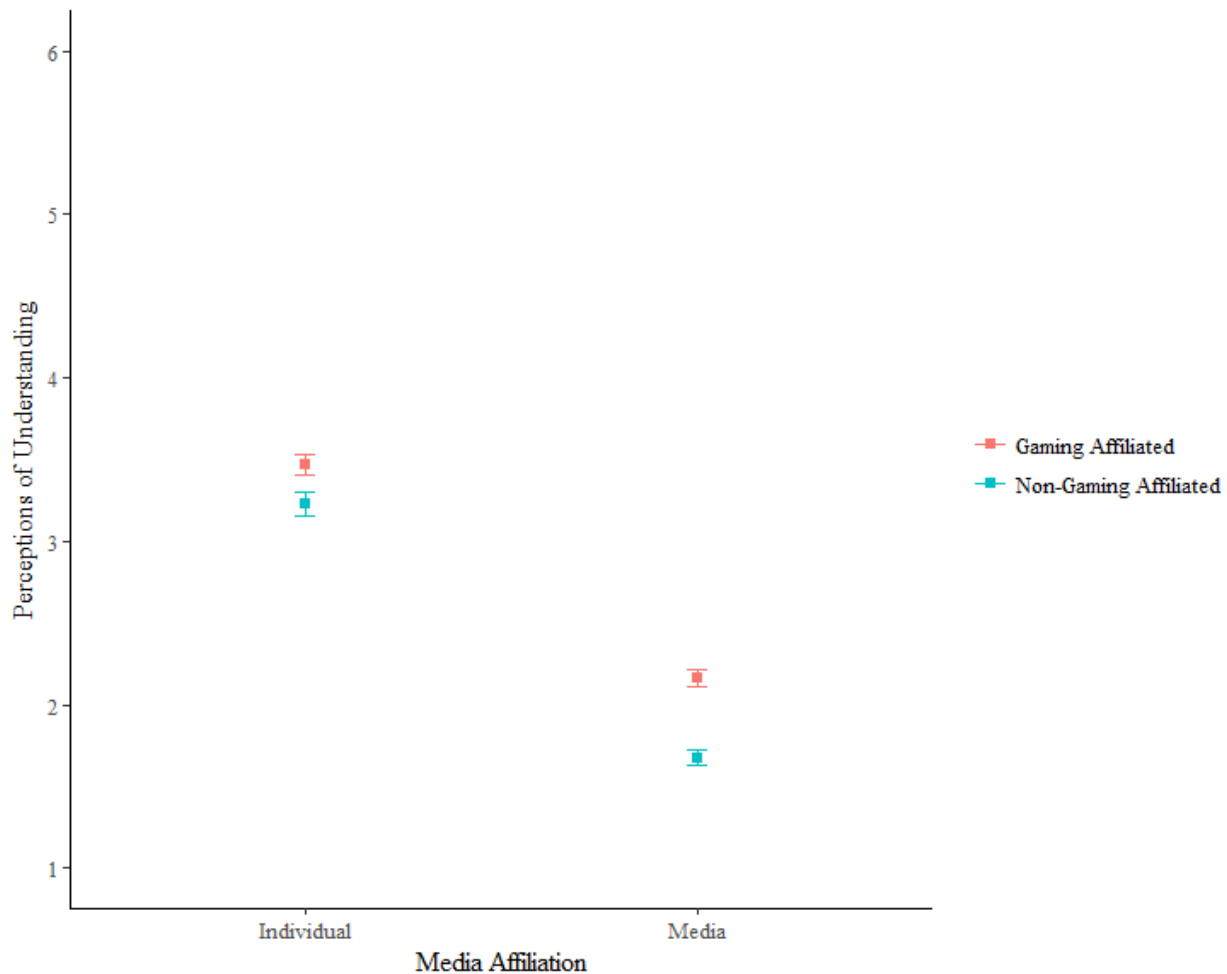
Overall perceptions of understanding and meta-stereotypes. In line with research question 1 about what stereotypes FGC members believe exist of the FGC, our thematic analysis indicated respondents paid far more attention to negative rather than positive portrayals of the community. The following prominent subthemes emerged under negative portrayals: aggressively competitive, antisocial/jerks, childish, elitist/arrogant, isms (any comments relating to homophobia, sexism, racism, etc.), having no skill (the games do not require skill or the players do not have skill), and creating barriers to entry. Other negative portrayal subthemes were: reduced legitimacy compared to other communities, negative generalizations (both general gamer and FGC-specific), players take the game too seriously for the games to be fun, players are violent/dangerous, fighting games are a

waste of time, and general negative responses. A few other comments mentioned perceptions that the community is not diverse. Responses usually mentioned at least one of these negative themes. Another group of FGC members mentioned being completely invisible to one or more outside groups.

In contrast, only a few responses indicated positive outside portrayals; subthemes were friendly/tight-knit (a possible alternative

interpretation of perceptions around entrée), passionate (a possible alternative interpretation of tryhards), and general positive responses. Like the frequency of positive responding, there were also few mentions of neutral or mixed portrayals. These portrayals focused on comparisons to esports and other activities or statements indicating the FGC was simply seen as a group like any other.

Figure 1. Perceptions of understanding of the Fighting Game Community



Note. Responses were provided on a six-point bipolar scale from “completely misunderstood (1)” to “completely understood (6).”

Gaming affiliation. Exploratory research question 2 concerns differences in perceptions of the FGC by various outsider

groups. Qualitative statements mirror the game affiliation effect hypothesized and reported above in direction and intensity.

Many respondents made distinctions between gamers and non-gamers, indicating those further from the FGC (the general media and non-gamers in this case) are less likely to understand the community. One FGC member stated, "Non-gamers usually share the [negative opinion] of the mainstream media. Lack of knowledge coupled with ancient stereotypes." FGC members mentioned common meta-stereotypes including non-gamer and general media descriptions of players as being virgins, parents' basement dwellers, low-lifes, and nerds.

In contrast, gaming media (e.g. Kotaku, IGN) were seen in a mixed light. Some comments painted a grim portrait, citing a history of misrepresentation of the community. As one respondent noted, "It's a real shame what the gaming media has done to set back gaming as a whole. Colin Cowherd [a former ESPN sports commentator who was known for making distasteful and controversial comments about esports and esports players] is a person who thinks of gamers as basement dwellers who never get out in the sun."

However, others said things were mixed but improving, with more accurate coverage from various gaming media sources. One FGC member stated:

Aside from the articles about EVO [major tournament] that come around every summer, a majority of coverage the FC gets in gaming media is either about Smash [a popular fighting game], or it's criticism regarding some gender based social justice issue, either accusing the community of being sexist, or accusing developers of putting sexist characters/outfits in their games. On the bright side Redbull [an energy drink company that has taken a recent interest in esports] has been writing really good FGC-related articles [on their website, Red Bull eSports] ...

Few comments about non-gamers and non-gaming media were positive. Most

respondents referenced use of outdated and inaccurate stereotypes of the gaming community or a lack of coverage: Among non-gaming media [the FGC is] portrayed just like any other e-sport, as nerds with too much time that don't get out much, but in fact the fighting game community is at best a reason to get out and be social with others at tournaments and events.

The consensus among respondents was that those with no gaming affiliation do not know or care about the FGC, although a few mentioned this reliance on negative stereotypes seems to be declining with time.

Media affiliation. As reported in support of hypothesis 2b and in response to research question 2 about differences in perceptions of various outsider groups, FGC players perceived far greater understanding from individuals than from the media. Some respondents highlighted the difference between "actual people" and the media:

Actual people are a little more reasonable [than the media]. At heart, eve[r]yone understands competition. It's in our nature to compete; fighting games, like chess, basketball, drinking games, allow us to express our competitive side in a more civilized way than simply screaming at one another and beating each other to death with sticks and rocks.

As noted above, the most negative comments were directed toward non-gaming media, with respondents describing non-gaming media as being behind the times, associating the FGC with "violent nerds," and positioning FGC members as wasting their time. One FGC member noted:

Other Media always reports these games as a horrible thing to be introduced to people because of its violent nature. Fighting games are usually depicted as extremely violent games because it's two people fighting each other, sometimes to death other times not.

Many will instantly believe, for those who have a poor perception of these games, that if one plays them they'll instantly become extremely violent and show off being very aggressive towards their family and peers. FGC members noted a general invisibility in the media, especially non-gaming media. As one FGC member put it, "Other media... Do they even know that fighting games exist?"

FGC members' beliefs about why portrayals exist. An exploration of research question 3 regarding why these portrayals emerged yielded four explanations: the FGC is different from other communities, lack of knowledge/understanding (almost universally applied to negative portrayals), shared understanding/values (almost universally applied to positive portrayals), and ulterior motives (specifically: agendas and favoritism). The explanations that the FGC is different from other communities and these portrayals come from a shared understanding/values were infrequently given and applied with some consistency across all target groups. The most popular explanation given was lack of understanding/knowledge, and it was also applied fairly evenly across all groups, regardless of understanding respondents felt any particular group was of the FGC. Most interesting, however, was the claim of ulterior motives, which was far more likely to be applied to the media than to individuals. While individuals were often described as being ignorant or unaware of the community, the media was accused of being interested only in sensationalism and clickbait (articles containing little actual substance--or in some cases, misinformation--but have catchy titles intended to catch readers' attention), with one FGC member going so far as to say, "It's mostly fed by clickbait. Fuck games media. Kotaku especially." Another FGC member posited that "in the case of fighting game communities, acts of sexism [are] easy to sensationalize."

Regarding bias and favoritism, FGC members noted a difference in the amount of coverage fighting games received in comparison to other (larger) gaming communities, for example RTS (real-time strategy games; e.g. StarCraft), FPS (first person shooters, e.g. Halo), or MOBA (multiplayer online battle arenas; e.g. League of Legends). Others noted the quality of reporting of negative events within these communities is also more lenient than reporting on similar events in the FGC. One FGC member asserted,

When someone in the FGC makes a dumb mistake or says something repugnant, it is immediately looked at as a blemish on the community as a whole. We're held to the words that came out of Aris's [a prominent FGC member who made sexist remarks] mouth some 4 years ago, meanwhile, professional CS:GO [Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, a FPS] players use homophobic speech almost constantly with no repercussions. There are no thinkpieces in major eSports publications about how the CS:GO competitive community needs to clean up its act, despite the callout for every hiding space being "gay spot" and players frequently calling each other "faggots." [...] It's clear that the big money involved in CS:GO allows it a level of legitimacy in the public eye that is not afforded to the FGC.

FGC members' responses to portrayals. Regarding research question 4, respondents had a variety of responses to these meta-stereotypic portrayals. There are those who had negative responses; subthemes here included frustration, a feeling that things will not change, being sad or upset, and general negativity. As one participant put it, [These portrayals] are often infuriating because neither [the portrayals from those who play games nor those who do not] give a positive view of the situation. They assume we are cheaters or play bad games when they don't even know what they're talking about.

A number of respondents indicated these portrayals hurt the FGC, namely by hurting the scene (e.g. making fighting games look boring, events not receiving enough coverage) or driving away potential and current members. One respondent shared, “The only one that really pisses me off is the media’s portrayal, because I believe it’s done maliciously, and I believe it has the potential to be harmful to both the gaming community and the gaming industry.”

Others expressed more neutral or mixed reactions. Emergent themes here involved resignation (“I understand”), a desire for change, requests for outsiders to give the community a chance, minimization of the portrayals’ effects on the community, and statements assuming responsibility (either through stating it is the community’s fault these portrayals exist or by saying it is the FGC’s responsibility to make the community a fun place to be). The most popular responses—statements involving resignation and statements involving minimization—were almost antithetical to one another. Few of these responses indicated a sense of responsibility for the perceptions. As one respondent put it, I feel like other communities only look at the face value of the community. They don’t understand the core idea behind the games that they see. They only see a bunch of people yelling or getting excited over some stuff on a screen. Which is completely understandable, don’t get me wrong? I think that the community needs to make the information that makes these games exciting for the better players, made available in SOME way. Whether it’s books, or some online articles. I feel the current media sites do a horrible job at letting outsiders know of the information that actually could be available. Again, the information that IS available only gives a face value to the games being played or shown. This actually does NOT represent what really goes on in a game or a match being played.

Understandably, FGC members had positive responses to positive portrayals. Positive responses fell under three main subthemes—the portrayals help the community (by attracting new players or changing perceptions about the community), the portrayals are improving, or general positive responses—with improvement being by and large the most common response among positive reactions. One FGC member said,

As a young gamer, these portrayals used to bother me a lot. Today, not so much. I think the negative portrayal of the fighting game community from non-gamers and other media will, in time, dissipate. As technology grows, and the generation of people who grew up playing these games become the leaders of today’s general demographic and community, mainstream media will see an acceptance of the fighting game community. That’s already happening today.

Beyond these reactions, FGC members commented on the accuracy of the portrayals. As might be expected, far more respondents felt the negative portrayals were inaccurate, although a few did comment the negative portrayals were accurate. As one respondent noted about perceived sexism and homophobia within the community, “I think it[’s] shockingly accurate and we as gamers need to step it up and help become guides to getting involved, instead of gatekeepers against women/lgbtq+/etc.” One participant who self-identified as a trans lesbian woman shared a specific example where she was watching an online stream of a tournament where a woman was doing very well. The stream chat during this time was filled with memes about women, comments about “trannies,” and suggestions for the men not to bother because “her twitter says she’s a lesbian feminist.” The respondent stopped watching the stream, noting it was “discouraging and downright scary and having people also say ‘OH SHES ACTUALLY GOOD’ hurts because there’s this huge ‘boys

club' mentality and you won't be able to fit in unless you got something to show." She closes her statement noting this forces people to stay away from the community, which is not something she wants to happen.

About a third of respondents who found negative portrayals to be inaccurate noted while there were "bad apples"—that is, people who fit these negative portrayals—these individuals were not representative of the FGC. These assertions were often followed by comments indicating these people ruin the fun for everyone. One respondent noted, "Some think of the fighting game community as very toxic, douche, or sexist. This is based off of a few occurrences that grow into blanket generalizations about our community. We are not hateful and we like to embrace everyone." In contrast to the woman's experience above, another woman noted, I think they are blown completely out of proportion. I am a woman, and the stereotypes of sexism in the community are generally exaggerated and only expressed by those who are not actually part of the community. Like any community, most times the only things outsiders hear about are the negative experiences, and then they [are] blown out of proportion and repeated by people who don't know anything about the community themselves.

Even among respondents who felt these bad apples did not represent the community at large, a few did note the FGC "needs better PR" or does "little to prevent the negative way in which [FGC members] are portrayed."

Discussion

Our quantitative hypotheses were confirmed in that: (1) FGC members generally consider their community to be misunderstood by outsiders, (2a) those with gaming affiliation were seen as more understanding than those without gaming affiliation, and (2b) individuals were perceived as more understanding of the FGC than those with

media affiliation. We asked (1) what stereotypes FGC members think exist for their community, (2) whether these stereotypes differ by the group they were describing, and (3) what reasons FGC members give to explain why these stereotypes exist. We found FGC members' opinions on gaming-related entities appear to be more positive in part due to the perception of shared knowledge or values. FGC members report thinking gamers and gaming media were more likely than their non-gaming counterparts to understand competition and social norms like trash-talking. However, even other gamers were still seen as only between "somewhat understanding" and "somewhat misunderstanding" of the FGC. FGC members saw the media as misunderstanding them more than individuals. Non-gaming media was seen as the least understanding group, and both gaming and non-gaming media were seen as motivated by popularity and monetary agendas to portray the FGC in a negative light. Lastly, we asked (4) how FGC members react to these meta-stereotypes. While FGC members reacted in a variety of ways, many felt the FGC is hurt by negative portrayals, which they saw as largely inaccurate.

Given the niche status of fighting games compared to the larger gaming market (Entertainment Software Association, 2016), popular beliefs about gamers more generally (Dial, 2013), and media coverage (and lack thereof) of the FGC specifically (Hamilton, 2012; Schreier, 2013) it is not surprising FGC members feel generally misunderstood. More interestingly, the strength of negative meta-stereotypes and reasons FGC members gave for the existence of primarily negative portrayals differed across out-groups.

Those with gaming affiliation were seen as more understanding of the FGC than those without gaming affiliation. This gaming affiliation effect appears to be, in part, due to the belief some FGC members have regarding

shared experiences and values. This belief is in line with intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998), but not with research done by Sigelman & Tuch (1997) suggesting the more contact the in-group had with the out-group, the worse the in-group's meta-stereotypes were. It is possible to reconcile these discrepancies if the FGC, being a subgroup of the gaming community, is perceived as more similar to—and having more similar experiences with—the general gaming community than other groups, like non-gaming media. For example, white and black university students may see themselves and their experiences as fundamentally different from one another, despite their shared status as university students. Since the FGC is a subgroup of the larger gaming community and the two shares being stereotyped by outsiders, among other experiences, the larger gaming community may not be as much of an out-group as people who do not play video games. Future research may test such a hypothesis.

Individuals may be perceived as more understanding because respondents felt a sense of control over changing those misperceptions, a sense they did not express with those affiliated with the media. In addition, media outlets reach more people and, given their negative portrayals of the FGC, are likely to disseminate more negative information about the FGC than individuals. On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine a scenario where an FGC member explains fighting games to another person in a one-on-one setting, possibly increasing the interest and understanding of the other party. However, it seems less likely FGC members believe a media conglomerate representative would be reachable for and also swayed in such a scenario.

We also asked what reasons FGC members to give to explain why these stereotypes exist, as well as how they react to these stereotypes. The most popular reason given for why these

stereotypes exist was ignorance, often due to a lack of interest or willingness to put forth effort into understanding the community and fighting games. As we have seen in previous research, many gamers believe media outlets may be motivated by money, misinformation, or popularity to misrepresent the community (Walker, 2013). In short, there are three possible explanations for the media affiliation effect, namely, the greater availability and thus greater impact of media perspectives than those of individuals, the perceptions of a relative lack of power, and the perceptions of the media's business motivations.

Study Strengths

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine community meta-stereotypes in community psychology. Given the centrality of the concept of community in community psychology, it is helpful to examine how members of communities, especially marginalized communities, believe they are being viewed by others. Moreover, since the number of people who play games continues to grow, it is important for community psychologists to become more knowledgeable about this new ecology and the communities within it. This study is also, to the best we can determine, the first community psychological study of this rapidly growing gaming ecology and one of the first studies of any sort with constituent validity (cf. Keys & Frank, 1987) concerning the FGC. It also offers the first quantitative demonstrations of the gaming affiliation effect, the media affiliation effect, and their related interaction effect on understanding in meta-stereotypes held by people who play games.

Our study's strengths draw upon our efforts to understand the FGC before designing our study. We spent time watching videos and streams of competitions, scouring news sites for news and thinkpieces about the community (and its responses to such

pieces), reading blogs and popular forums like Shoryuken, and talking to FGC members. This allowed us to design a study focused on issues the community found important, speak in a language we both would understand, and ultimately gain trust and make our entrée into the community easier. As noted above, we also engaged in member checks at various points in our research process by reaching out to FGC members about our coding scheme and initial results across our various projects, which appears to have been well-received by members of the community (dpu_fgc_study, 2017). These member checks were also instrumental in the creation of a follow-up study where we interviewed FGC members at an anime fighting game tournament (Steltenpohl, 2017). We believe these efforts, along with the use of mixed methods to triangulate FGC members' perceptions, improved the validity of our results.

These findings support both empirical research (e.g. Dial, 2013; Fisher, 2012; Harper, 2010) and our lived experiences within the gaming community at large. This study also contributes to the research done thus far on meta-stereotypes, much of which appears to have primarily focused on a specific community's meta-stereotypes with regard to another, specific outside group (Finchilescu, 2010; Saroglou, Yzerbyt, & Kaschten, 2011; Torres & Charles, 2004). Our results also suggest it would be wise for community psychologists to pay attention to the influence of the media in shaping communities and their perspectives.

Study Limitations. Of the 495 respondents who completed the survey, 135 (roughly 27%) chose not to provide responses for the quantitative questions, while 157 (roughly 32%) and 167 (roughly 34%) did not provide responses for the two qualitative questions. It is difficult to ascertain why respondents would not complete these questions. It is possible they only responded to questions they were interested in answering, as

suggested by Armstrong & Overton (1977). Given the proportion of missing responses, caution is suggested in generalizing too strongly from these data.

It had likely not gone unnoticed we were not visible members of the FGC. Prominent members of some FGC groups, as well as some gaming-related publications and businesses, did promote the survey, which likely modulated this perception, but it is possible some FGC members may have opted out of completing the survey, given the conflictual history between researchers and the community. Given the blunt nature of many of the responses, we think any negative perceptions surrounding our intentions were likely no more than modest inhibitors.

Implications and Future Research

Future research may examine whether FGC members who are more aware of or apply negative stereotypes to the FGC identify as strongly as FGC members as those who are not as aware or apply the negative stereotypes less often (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011). FGC members understand many outsiders perceive the community as being sexist and homophobic. This awareness of outsiders' negative stereotypes may affect how some FGC members—particularly those who identify with or are perceived to be a member of groups affected by sexism and homophobia—interact with the community.

Some FGC members seem to think negative stereotypes prevent people from joining the community, but negative stereotypes may also keep members in the community from fully participating. If being perceived as more inclusive is important to FGC members, they may have to make changes based on conversations they have within their communities about what may lead the FGC to be considered more accessible. One community “soft banned” certain sexy costumes for offline tournaments in the Dead or Alive community, viz., it was up to the

discretion of the tournament organizer. This community voiced a desire for people to focus more on the gameplay aspect of the games and wanting to avoid pushing people away from trying the game (Fahey, 2015). As expected, there were a variety of responses to this change. Previous research suggests community members will respond more positively to internal changes when they can see the value in them (Vakola, Armenakis, & Oreg, 2013). If FGC members value making spaces more inclusive and agree with the way in which these changes are made, they may respond positively. Community psychologists interested in membership and community development may be interested in how community values and changing such values can affect participation and feelings of inclusion among newer and more established members alike.

Community researchers working with gaming communities may anticipate members' perception of outsiders' misunderstanding. They may need not only to invest time in understanding the community, but also to make explicit where they and the community share values and interests. Researchers who have written on their experiences gaining entrée into communities have described the importance of aligning their own goals with the goals of the community, understanding the history of the community, and understanding community members' regard for the research community (Quandt, McDonald, Bell, & Acury, 1999). Researchers can facilitate community members' comfort and willingness to participate in research through discussing project expectations and outcomes with community members, entering the community without preconceived notions, and expressing understanding and compassion without forcing it (Matthew, 2017).

Like other groups, some FGC members also minimized negative stereotypes and the effects these stereotypes may have on their

community. Future research might explore how much a community's sense of outsiders' misunderstanding is influenced by how much control they feel they have over changing those misperceptions. This research could be particularly useful for those wishing for better relations with amorphous entities such as gaming and non-gaming media, which may be more difficult to access and persuade than individuals. FGC members—and members of other communities—may discount negative stereotypes held by those in the media because the media is seen as difficult to influence. On the other hand, FGC members may feel a greater impact from close friends or people they feel should understand them (e.g. other gamers) because of the possibility of changing their minds. This sense of efficacy could either change outsiders' stereotypes of the FGC or minimize the negative effects of FGC members' meta-stereotypes.

Community psychologists focus on a wide range of psychological phenomena, as our social world is incredibly complex, and recognize our own positions of power relative to the communities with which we work (Dzidic, Breen, & Bishop, 2013). More specifically, it is important for community psychologists to understand the intricacies of community members' meta-stereotypes, as it is likely perceptions apply to researchers. People who play games are aware others believe violence and gaming are associated (Dial, 2013) and researchers have continuously asserted video games produce only negative results (American Psychological Association, 2005, 2013, 2015). Given our commitment to participatory community research and empowerment (Bond, Serrano-García, & Keys, 2017; Keys et al., 2017), community psychologists are in a good position to explore effects of meta-stereotypes on building relationships with those perceived as outsiders, and help communities design and implement strategies to change outsiders' perceptions of their group, if that is what they desire.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence meta-stereotypes exist within and affect the FGC. It also expands upon the literature by suggesting meta-stereotypes may differ depending on the out-group being discussed and encourages researchers to develop theory to include community meta-stereotypes. Understanding meta-stereotypes from a community perspective allows us to anticipate challenges and opportunities with working with communities, particularly if they are marginalized or otherwise inhabit a niche. To the extent we can understand community meta-stereotypes and how they affect relationships with outsiders and within the community, we can also take them into consideration when working with and within communities to foster change.

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge Joshua Moore, Mark Belcher, and Robert Hubbs for giving feedback on the survey and for sharing the survey on social media. We also thank DieHard GameFAN, Evansville Esports, Game Informer, and others for publicizing the survey. Thank you Christopher Shorten for helping with the data analyses, and to the Online Technologies Lab for continued help with the project. Lastly, we thank various FGC members on Reddit and elsewhere on social media for providing ongoing feedback on our data analyses and interpretation of results.

Disclosure Statement

None of the authors have any commercial associations or financial interests that might create a conflict of interest in connection with this manuscript.

Corresponding Author

Crystal N. Steltenpohl, College of Liberal Arts
3046, 8600 University Boulevard, University
of Southern Indiana, Evansville, IN, 47712,
cnsteltenp@usi.edu.