(Don't) Stop Playing That Game: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Video Game Addiction Stereotype

Chet Daniel Breaux

Western Kentucky University, cdb3492@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses

Part of the Communication Technology and New Media Commons, and the Other Film and Media Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/1067

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses & Specialist Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
(DON’T) STOP PLAYING THAT GAME: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEO GAME ADDICTION STEREOTYPE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts

Chet Daniel Breaux

May, 2011
(DON'T) STOP PLAYING THAT GAME: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEO GAME ADDICTION STEREOTYPE

Date Recommended April 3, 2011

Dr. Jane Fife, Director of Thesis

JF for Elizabeth Weixel
Dr. Elizabeth Weixel

JF for Wes Berry
Dr. Wes Berry

Richard H. Booker May 17, 2011
Dean, Office of Graduate Studies and Research Date
I would like to thank Dr. Jane Fife for her unending enthusiasm, support, and advice. I also extend my thanks to Dr. Wes Berry and Dr. Elizabeth Weixel for being outstanding teachers and for agreeing to participate as committee members. Special thanks goes to my good friends Elisa Levine, Jessica Mattson, and Jesse Knifley. Without your help and friendship this project would have never been possible. And finally, I want to thank Beth Berger for her constant encouragement and confidence in my ability.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8: <em>How to Win Video Games</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The growing popularity of game addiction discourse has necessitated study of how video game critics rhetorically construct addiction. In the following thesis, I analyze contemporary examples of texts that link game addiction to drug abuse. I use Robert Cover’s analysis of how game addiction stereotypes form in conjunction with Aristotle’s rhetorical principles to isolate the persuasive appeals used by authors to rhetorically construct game play as addictive. These addiction arguments, however, are rooted in a larger historical context, and I present examples of game guidebooks and comic books published in the late 1970s and early 1980s to illustrate their rhetorical responses to game addiction rhetoric. I found addiction arguments utilize fear appeals combined with ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade audiences to reject games as potentially dangerous and worthless virtual pursuits. The authors of early game texts use ethos, pathos, and logos to dismantle fear appeals and present video games as a new genre that can be mastered through skill and practice rather than a meaningless virtual experience. This research provides ground for further explorations of game addiction rhetoric, and implications for the continued study of video games.
INTRODUCTION

Most contemporary video game critics strive to develop new systems to understand an interactive text in order to create an adequate framework through which games can receive accurate critical attention. The most significant divide in scholarship exists between in-game narrative and the act of play. Narratologists view video games as evolutionary; games position players within interactive narratives only possible through the development of computer technology (Murray). Ludologists contend that interaction constitutes meaning, and narrative creation rests with the player (Aarseth, Smedstad). Ludologists often argue video games remain unable to convey traditional narratives, and critical inquiry should focus on the meanings derived from engaging interactive texts.

Interestingly, this debate often concerns the founding texts of video games, or “the classics.” The simplicity of these titles provides a kind of critical vacuum for theory and criticism. Pong, Pac-Man, Asteroids, and Donkey Kong represent a few of the progenitors that sparked not only an industry but also a cultural revolution. These video games act as a primary text, or code, that creates an on-screen representation. An examination of early games from a narratological standpoint yields little to no substantive meaning. Pac-Man ate cherries and ghosts and functioned as a sign that signifies only Pac-Man. For ludologists, these games represent the height of game narratives. The act of negotiating the patterned game world of Pac-Man becomes valuable, thus a narrative can
form from an individual game play experience because “it is this participation within virtual spaces that make video games such a revolutionary medium and video games such powerful sites of nostalgia” (Fenty 21). Because of the revolutionary nature of video games, a growing number of critical voices continue to actively disrupt adoption and acceptance of the form. These barriers tangibly affect the ongoing study of narratology and ludology, and it remains important to the future of game studies not only to analyze titles and produce criticism but also to actively engage the stereotypes that inhibit widespread social and cultural acceptance.

Some individuals continue to hold beliefs that relegate game studies into an overly simplistic and intellectually barren field. Their associations contain multiple links to a conceptualization of video games reliant on simple stereotypes and misinformation from the media. Controversy fuels these perceptions and a short news blurb can often inform a malevolent understanding of games. Contemporary titles such as *Grand Theft Auto IV*, the *Call of Duty* series, and *Bulletstorm* motivated a substantial response from critics as promoting violence, corrupting youth, and pushing the boundaries of decency. Many of these titles place players in the position of performing acts deemed indecent; *Grand Theft Auto* allows a player to hijack vehicles, kill innocent civilians, and have sex with prostitutes. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* positioned players as an undercover agent in Russia and, during a now infamous level known as “No Russian,” shoot civilians in an airport security line.

The striking realism and mature content present in many contemporary blockbuster game titles constructs an ever-expanding shadow of misunderstanding. Such fundamental misconceptions lead to the rise of a powerful contingency of anti-game
criticism, which remains ingrained in contemporary discussions surrounding the usefulness of technology and, in turn, the academic discussion of games and their social and cultural implications. Video games often receive attention focused on separating the genre from other forms of new media and “the majority of the growing number of discussions—ranging from the apocalyptic to the rapturous, about what the computer revolution has done, is doing, and will do to how we write and read, teach and learn, create and play—are at some level grappling with the issues of computer-enabled interactivity” (Fenty 21).

The act of participating in actions deemed socially reprehensible rather than passively observing them leads to a moral outcry that continues to resonate heavily in the public consciousness. The controversy, however, is nothing new. Human history illustrates, often painfully, the inherent ambivalence some people hold toward innovation, and our pursuit of consistently expanding the boundaries of knowledge and understanding. The fight to limit the influence of video games began with the advent of the game itself, with the very beginnings of a revolutionary medium.

Video game opponents increasingly voice concerns over the perceived dangers of digital interaction. Their influence grows as technology grows, and their attacks continue to function as an obstruction to the larger social acceptance of video games. Often their most popular method of attack focuses on linking video games with the rhetoric of substance abuse and physical addiction. This strategy relegates video games to a low culture/class activity that manifests dangerous behavioral and physical changes within the player. Game opponents often utilize a rhetorical strategy of building ethos as concerned parents or past players. They construct the locus of addiction in the home and typically
target children in order to persuade their audiences based on the fears associated with drug abuse or an invasion and disruption of the home by a foreign substance. The inability of these individuals to negotiate the concept of an interactive game world creates a fundamental misunderstanding of how games operate, and leads them to rhetorically construct game worlds as unreal, unnatural, and dangerous.

These arguments continue to negatively impact the legitimacy of video games in various social discourses and therefore necessitate further study. The presence of this rhetoric can be traced to the very beginning of video games, albeit with some difficulty. The rapid expansion of video games in the 1970s and 1980s received attention, particularly economic attention, due to the speed of the game revolution. Concern surrounding the expansion of games, however, never received the kind of widespread media coverage that now exists. Game critics largely voiced concerns within their homes and communities, but the problem of addiction remained nonetheless ingrained in conversations concerning the continued role of video games in culture and the home. Consequently, little print evidence exists that could reveal the precise language and strategy used by game opponents during this time. Several texts written in the 1970s and 1980s, however, provide detailed responses to these attacks and, through contrast, illustrate the pattern of rhetorical attacks against games.

These texts represent the first tangible formation of a game culture extending past the physical limits of the arcade. The authors formulated early treatises on the usefulness and necessity of video games under the guise of a simple guidebook or selection of comics. The scope of this thesis will cover several of these examples, and analyze the
rhetorical strategies used by early authors of video game texts to legitimize a field and combat video game opponents.

Because of the limited ability to represent reality analogously, games often necessitated secondary texts positioned within, and around, the game world. For example, early box art often resembled the cover of a cheap fantasy novel (and typically disappointed many game players when they finally played the pixilated game that differed so profoundly from the box art). Though the in-game world looked nothing like the fantastic cover, it created a visual frame of reference, an inaccurate one, for the player. In addition, other supplemental narratives and interpretive acts occurred within surrounding texts, such as guidebooks and video game comic books. Prototypical game play narratives, mostly stories of how an author became involved in games, became part of the subject located in these guidebooks and comic books that originated during what is referred to as the “Golden Age” of video games, a time that extended for roughly ten years from the early 1970s to the early 1980s. More importantly, these texts survived. The scope of my research thusly focuses primarily on this period’s secondary video game texts, which manifested in the form of instruction sets, manuals, guidebooks (Bloom, Blanchet, Kubey) and comic-style “funnies” (Alterman, Stine). They function as cultural archives from which meaning and histories endure and provide context for the foundation of video game discourse.

These texts also provide the only remaining stable record of early arguments concerning video games. Game opponents produced no book-length works denouncing the industry, but their arguments largely remained a part of the public discourse surrounding games. In recent years, however, game opponents have emerged once again
to voice concerns over the increasing popularity of games and the implications surrounding new genres and modes of play (Roberts, Bruner). For example, the rapid expansion of the MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role playing game) generated public health concerns, studies, and narratives of addiction. To substitute for the lack of available textual examples from the 1970s and 1980s, I chose two recent texts noteworthy for their rhetorical construction of games as dangerous and addictive substances. These texts, *Playstation Nation* and *Cyberjunkie*, illustrate the same arguments used against early iterations of the video game and arcade culture. They function as a continuation of anti-game discourse rather than a deep temporal rift between two time periods.

To illustrate the critical importance of game texts from the 1970s and 1980s, I move to a brief discussion of nostalgia theory, an emerging framework of game studies, to illustrate the necessity of rediscovering the history of games (Taylor, Whalen et. al). Early game texts amplify a powerful notion and feeling of nostalgia and reveal the broad impact of games on a large portion of the population. Even for individuals who only experienced a brief glimpse into the classic games, a commonality of experience remains entangled in the software. In particular,

one would think that in such a medium (when tomorrow is always better than today, and certainly better than yesterday) that the past would be left behind—“played out,” so to speak—but many gamers’ lists of their top ten favorite games include classic games right at or near the top. In particular, many older gamers view games they played in their youth as some of the best games of all time—“classic” games played in noisy arcades in intervals measured in quarters and skill. (Fenty 20)
Though my personal history of games began after this period, I still view the classic titles with a certain degree of reverence. They established the groundwork for the games I grew up playing, and I continue to see their influence on the development of new software. The process of shared remembrance, though, can serve as a potential rallying point for games in academia and lead to greater social acceptance because as the so-called ‘Nintendo Generation’ has matured, we have grown to associate video games with our early childhood and adolescence, and our memories of the iconic characters of those early games become a way of activating nostalgia for that period. In this way, video games themselves have become quotations of our shared past, referencing their role in a general experience of youth. (Whalen 6)

An examination of the shared nostalgia surrounding early video games and texts provides context to the current debate in game scholarship and creates a crucial frame of reference for overlooked video game history. Early texts represent important historiographic artifacts in an industry where “the conventions of this form of storytelling are only a few decades old and were created in a formal vacuum by men and women who still walk among us. There are not many mediums whose Dantes and Homers one can ring up and talk to. With games, one can” (Bissel 13). They can also capture specific moments in the process of interaction. The study of older titles in their original form (on an Atari console vs. a flash version of the game) becomes increasingly difficult as time goes on, and criticism needs a readily available way to connect to the aesthetic past of the form under appraisal, which is not always so easy with video games.
Out-of-date hardware and out-of-print games can be immensely difficult to find. Say you want to check something that happens about halfway through some older game. Not only do you have to find it, you will, once again, have to play it. Probably for hours. Possibly for days. (Bissel vii)

Early texts provide information that can supplement the study of these titles and create context around their evolution.

I will use Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as a theoretical basis to explore these texts. *Ethos, pathos,* and *logos* create a lens through which the appeals of these authors can be critically analyzed. Many contemporary rhetorical criticism models concerned with games analyze internal game engines and dynamics (Aarseth), or secondary sources crafted by users. A large portion of rhetorical analysis focuses on user-generated content associated with games (Alexander, Whiteman). Discussion boards and fan fiction written by individual users constitutes what is seen as a new digital literacy. The early texts, however, function as static units in a larger community that existed before the highly adaptive nature of Internet communication (Alexander, Whiteman). The rhetoric and design of early secondary texts, therefore, provides a critical time capsule that has been ignored. Rhetorical criticism accelerated past them and moved to contemporary electronic resources. These models thusly fail to yield adequate ground, and possess few links to the texts I cover in this thesis.

When applied to early secondary texts, Aristotle’s rhetorical analysis provides a solid critical basis for understanding these guides, and gaming rhetoric. *Ethos, pathos,* and *logos* provide a critical framework to examine the persuasive appeals used by contemporary authors and authors writing during the 1970s and 1980s. Authors faced
challenges in establishing a preliminary approach to a genre that was, and still is, dismissed by many as childish and unimportant. Within the guidebooks, the solution to these challenges develops through a careful balance of rhetorical appeals. Wherein *logos* is the primary appeal for the technical nature of these texts, *ethos* and *pathos* are often constructed in an effort to provide legitimacy for the genre in an age when both players and authors remained partially unsure of the inherent value of the activity. While attempting to describe useful strategies to improve gaming performance and score, they often provide unnecessary details or personal narratives to construct authorial credibility, and appeal to a larger audience that dismisses gaming.

Additionally, Aristotle’s concept of fear appeals illustrates how game opponents seek to persuade audiences to reject games. The contemporary texts I chose provide examples of the process needed to generate fear in an audience. These authors typically begin by building *ethos*, and then transition to a strategy that links games to a dangerous, unreal substance. This strategy begins a process of signification amongst the audience, and any further mention of a frequent player conjures images of a drug addict. Robert Cover analyzed the process of signification in his article “Gaming (Ad)diction: Discourse, Identity, Time and Play in the Production of the Gamer Addiction Myth.” I will utilize this framework in conjunction with Aristotle to conduct a rhetorical analysis of the trope of game addiction in texts from the 1970s and 1980s as well as contemporary examples.

In my first chapter, I outline the framework mentioned above in detail, then transition to application of this framework using contemporary examples of addiction rhetoric. This analysis constructs a representative example of how authors create the
addiction stereotype and generate fear appeals based on them. With the examples analyzed, I move to discuss how authors in the 1970s and 1980s actively sought to rhetorically dismantle this stereotype. They rely on ethos to construct authorial credibility before transitioning toward a dismissal of fear appeals associated with video games. To illustrate this process, I provide several examples from early game texts.

In my second chapter, I focus on a specific element of the game addiction stereotype. In contemporary discussions of games and addiction, many authors utilize a strategy focused on separating games from a normative concept of reality. The act of engaging in a digital world thusly becomes foreign and unnatural. These authors use distinctions between realities to generate another common fear appeal. Many individuals typically associate addiction with repetitive participation in the unreal world of a substance, and these authors build specific links from video games to drugs using this strategy. The guidebooks written in the 1970s and 1980s, however, sought to disrupt this link by rhetorically constructing game play as an activity which required skill and mastery for success. The images provided in the books drag the digital world into the world outside of games and effectively freezes the rapidly changing nature of game play. The images create a locus for analyzing digital environments, and the authors use these images to rhetorically build credibility and demystify the digital world of a game.

In my conclusion, I will present the implications of this thesis that concern the field of game studies and rhetoric.
CHAPTER I

Game studies will continue to expand as games break sales records and receive increased media attention, but several obstacles persist and block widespread acceptance in social/political discourse. Multiple forms of new media attract attention for their perceived dangers, and “despite three decades of electronic gaming in a variety of forms… the celebrations and anxieties around technology continue to cite gaming as a prime example, and in many cases electronic games form the hub through which such apprehensions are expressed” (Cover 4). The rapidity of game development, the expansion of the game industry, and increasing public awareness contribute to these “apprehensions,” which often manifest in arguments focusing on video game addiction as a primary reason for rejecting their use by individuals.

Social perceptions of the usefulness of technology continue to create an oscillation between praise and blame surrounding video games. Within this model, gaming often garners simultaneous attention as revolutionary, but also socially detrimental to players. Those who argue that games represent a risk for potential addiction often rely on “linking gameplay in certain popular discourses to an anti-intellectual, anti-stability and anti-literary representation within class demarcations” (Cover 7). When game addiction advocates form these links, they generate ground to deploy various rhetorical appeals linking video games to explicit harm, and “the way is opened for the application of the rhetoric of drug addiction to games as a means to
discredit gaming and to express apprehensions over the use” (Cover 7). The low-
culture/class link disassociates video games from social norms of acceptance, allowing
for rhetorical appeals to frame the act of playing as disruptive and abnormal.

**Robert Cover’s Framework of Addiction Stereotype Manufacture**

Robert Cover examined the implications of game addiction rhetoric through
Derrida’s “diction of addiction,” which outlines a set of socially recognizable
characteristics typically applied to drug users. Derrida argues any mention of drugs
invokes a rhetorical recognition implicitly bound to addiction. Thus, any individual
thought associated with drugs is rhetorically situated with a label of addiction within a
particular set of ideological and political valencies (Derrida “The Rhetoric of Drugs”).
Cover adapts this framework to analyze the formation of the gameplay/addiction
dichotomy:

> The image-idea operations of the stereotype work dynamically—that is, the idea of gameplaying as addictive produces a particular form of game player, while simultaneously the utterance of game player invokes within some discourses the danger of addiction to gaming. But this only occurs through particular sets of ingrained attitudes that have emerged partly from a high-culture denunciation of gaming as a valid form of textual engagement, and partly through a set of moral panics around gaming as they emerge every few years in a variety of contexts. (1)

The identification of this dichotomy reveals the implications of the addiction stereotype, and how some individuals may perceive “the ‘digital world’ as an unnatural, unreal, dangerous substance” (Cover 6). The construction and perception of game worlds as
simulacra “reductively represents the user as an addicted stereotype, linking the activity of gaming with the ‘image’ of the drug addict” (Cover 6). Cover and Derrida’s image/operations model lays important groundwork for understanding how addiction appeals form by isolating the typical grounds for constructing such appeals: the unnatural perception of digital environments in game play, and the reductive image of games as drugs. The most effective appeals to addiction rhetoric rely heavily on the dichotomy between real/unreal, and any positive actions that result from game play are subsumed by the unreal nature of the text. Rhetorical constructs reliant on negative portrayals of the simulacra draw parallels to drug users, whom are often accused of living a life derived from falsity, from a sensory experience dominated by something non-existent. The substance controls the individual and the experience.

Cover’s analysis identifies the significatory system that motivates the game play addiction stereotype, but only presents the implications and implementation of the stereotype. His study never engages the larger rhetorical questions of how such stereotypes persuade and act on individuals. Thusly, the formation of the stereotype, of the actual rhetorical appeals used by individuals to invoke the stereotype, remain an important facet of dismantling preconceptions surrounding video games. An analysis of the rhetorical appeals used by many to dismiss video games can result in a greater scholarly understanding of how rhetorical choices, even within academia, can affect and motivate genres. However, a rhetorical model that sufficiently explains appeals used by game opponents does not exist. Early secondary video game texts actively responded to the rhetoric of game opponents. These para-texts were written to contextualize a new genre, and they require rhetorical analysis grounded in a perspective that treats text as a
written word, and not a visual experience. The games mentioned in these books received critical attention as ergodic, ludic mechanisms, but early attempts at constructing a rhetorical community through these secondary texts remain unexplored.

**Aristotle as a Rhetorical Framework**

An ideal model for exploring these texts must then utilize several existing models of rhetoric. The focus in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* on fear appeals provides ground for analyzing early and contemporary constructions of game play as addictive and dangerous. Fear appeals provide a framework for further inquiry focused on the genesis of addiction rhetoric, and combined with Cover’s analysis, form a basis for rhetorical exploration. Aristotle provides a working definition for fear appeals: “To turn next to Fear, what follows will show the things and persons of which, and the states of mind in which, we feel afraid. Fear may be defined as a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future” (103). The important area of analysis in this argument focuses on the painful picture of something specifically located in the future. Uncertainty remains the most important persuasive mechanism for addiction appeals in video games because it creates a possible evil, one that looms over parents, whom addiction advocates most commonly target for their role as guardian of the home.

The evil Aristotle outlines must also manifest sufficient harm. The individual must feel that real consequences are derived from the action or threat. Aristotle further qualifies the nature of a fear appeal by claiming a true fear is based on “destructive or painful evils only; for there are some evils, e.g. wickedness or stupidity, the prospect of which does not frighten us: I mean only such as amount to great pains or losses” (103-104). The “great pains or losses” that are derived from extensive game play become the
crux of contemporary rhetorical positions. Temporally, the fear used to form such appeals may also focus on uncertain, and future events: “And even these only if they appear not remote but so near as to be imminent: we do not fear things that are a very long way off” (104).

The physical location of the object or entity that elicits fear becomes central to addiction appeals concerning video games. The closer the item exists to the home or core family unit, the more dangerous. Video games typically exist in the home, whether they are accessed online, or by console with physical media. Proponents of video game addiction use the proximity of the game in the home to motivate fear, and build ethos amongst parents and guardians, who are constructed as responsible for introducing the game into the home.

A framework combining Cover’s analysis of game stereotype manufacture and Aristotle’s concept of fear appeals creates a model through which to analyze contemporary texts and early secondary video game texts. My analysis focuses on contemporary texts in order to establish the rhetorical strategy used by video game opponents to continually discredit the medium. I argue the contemporary examples also establish the same rhetorical exigency for early video game texts. Most examples of addiction rhetoric focused on video games from the 1970s and 1980s are lost. During that period, the debate largely existed in local municipalities concerned with the hours of operation for arcades, and never received scholarly attention. The early secondary texts, however, actively focused on dismantling these arguments, and rhetorically constructing video games as a useful medium.
Representative Examples of Fear Appeals Utilizing Addiction Rhetoric

There now exists a burgeoning list of texts that seek to free individuals from the power of media, and video games in particular. Various individuals, typically concerned parents, have created an entire genre of self-help literature with the purpose of “saving” individuals from gaming addiction. The prevalence of such media demands investigation by game scholars because these texts are both popular and widely available. Examination of contemporary texts that exhibit addiction appeals can illuminate their purpose and strategy while opening new avenues of discourse on their subject from a rhetorical stance.

*Cyber Junkie: Escape the Gaming and Internet Trap,* which was published in 2010, functions as a working example of addiction appeals targeting video games. The forward of the text sums up the new attention focused on media addiction quite well:

> Only in recent years have we realized how prevalent addictions are in our modern society. We have progressed in our awareness from the abuse of alcohol and other substances, through countless sexual practices that may leave us both bereft of satisfying love and/or with profound feelings of shame, and we’re now discovering new ways to bedevil ourselves with behavioral addictions, such as compulsive shopping or gambling.

(Ervingham ix)

The editor of this text utilizes many typified appeals designed to isolate and name the gaming addiction stereotype identified by Cover. Ervingham frames the text with a generalization focused on exploding the potential number of valences for addiction. He specifically invokes substances, actions, and behaviors that expand potentially dangerous addictions to anything, which functions to build the framework for fear rhetoric. The
object of fear potentially exists everywhere, and through utilizing this rhetoric, video games become the underlying target of his appeal. Through implicating usually innocuous actions such as shopping, Ervingham creates an environment where fears become real and dangerous through repetitious behavior.

Ervingham builds ethos in the introduction through the exploration of a potential addiction when he claims possession of “personal knowledge on this subject,” and continues by establishing a potentially harmful scenario: “Since my retirement, I have spent lots of time playing bridge and solitaire games on the computer to soothe feelings of anxiety and shame” (ix). He utilizes the scenario of a retired, established individual turning to games for a sense of purpose. Although solitaire and bridge appear as harmless distractions, the basis for a fear-motivated appeal begin to form. The ubiquitous nature of these games creates a real sense of commonality with readers. Most people begin a game of solitaire, or another simple computer game in order to distract themselves or simply to take a break from work-related tedium. Additionally, Microsoft packages these titles in almost every Windows-based computing platform. The software availability, and the common experience of playing such a game forms a fear appeal based on proximity and the potentiality of over-use.

Ervingham targets an audience of casual game players, who most likely never played a contemporary game title, and after he establishes ethos with his audience, he explains the dangers associated with game play, even playing a casual title such as solitaire: “It’s a short-term fix, which makes matters worse in the long run” (ix). His use of the phrase “short-term fix” signals the subtle, rhetorical shift from describing games as potentially harmful, to the ability of a game to cause actual harm. In the rhetoric of
addiction, the term “fix” typically describes an addict in search of drugs, and the use of those substances results in “short-term” relief. This example illustrates Cover’s “image-idea operations” stereotype mechanism, and how rhetoric forms the basis for using the stereotype. Ervingham attempts to persuade his reader through quickly linking game play to the notion of drug addiction. When this change occurs, the audience begins to imagine Ervingham’s addiction, even before the addiction receives formal treatment from the author. The future that Ervingham thusly constructs becomes filled with weeklong solitaire binges in which he refuses to eat, sleep, or interact with the outside world. The cards will become his only friends, soothing away his pain with a simple stimulus. The absurdity of the appeal, however, illuminates the simple, yet complex rhetorical devices present in game addiction appeals.

Once Ervingham communicates the potential for a drug-related addiction to video games, the audience begins framing the appeal in terms of a physical substance. Ervingham quickly shifts strategy to building the ethos of the book’s author: “Roberts’ book helps me to see the consequences of this behavior when it becomes compulsive. And calling it by name—an addiction that ‘medicates’ unwanted emotions—is a potent way of reducing its power to control our lives” (ix). Roberts’ text “helps” Ervingham to understand his addiction, and in this section of text Ervingham names the addiction much in the same way of an alcoholic or drug user. The addict must name the addiction to understand the power the substance holds on the individual. Ervingham builds logos and pathos through a link to medication and “unwanted emotions.” The audience immediately becomes the target of the argument, which essentially dictates an individual addiction based on any negative emotion. Lastly, Ervingham furthers the construction of a fear-
based appeal through utilizing “power” and “control” to illustrate the binding
manipulation and destruction of an individual under the influence of the substance.

Ervingham’s forward creates the rhetorical stage from which fear appeals form in
relation to video games. He builds ethos with the audience through his admission of
addiction during retirement, which demonstrates how games can affect the most
established individuals in our culture. The use of logos to craft a pseudo-
intellectual/scientific indictment of technology aims to persuade the audience to examine
even the most benign act of video gaming as potentially hazardous. Most importantly,
Ervingham appeals to addiction rhetoric in order to create the perception of a damaging,
harmful state of mind. Through bolstering the ethos of Roberts, the author of the text, as a
figure who can potentially save individuals from addiction to video games, Ervingham
persuades the audience to accept the logos of the text. His anecdotal introduction focused
on solitaire, a common and simple game, creates the need for the salvation from even the
smallest behavioral addiction to game play. The introduction of Cyber Junkie forms the
basis of fear appeals used by Roberts to persuade the audience to reject gaming as wholly
addictive and dangerous.

After the foreword by Ervingham, the author, Kevin Roberts, begins the text by
listing two pages worth of names and explanations as acknowledgements. Roberts does
not simply name individuals who aided in the writing and publication of the text. Certain
entries fuel appeals to ethos. One such entry reads, “Doug Rutley, for catching me in the
act of a gaming binge and scheming thereafter to get me to acknowledge my problem”
(xi). Such rhetorical appeals situate the author as an expert on his subject matter, as one
who lived a game addiction. The list of acknowledgements functions to further the subtle
appeal of *ethos* by simultaneously magnifying addiction from the simple act of gaming established by Ervingham and building credibility with the audience as an expert. For the fear appeal to gain traction with the audience, Roberts must amplify the claims in the introduction, because, as Aristotle claims, a significant fear must exist to persuade. The introduction continues to slowly reinforce the concept of a harmless object/action becoming addictive, and finally claims, “For many people, video and computer games and other forms of digital technology are harmless. They offer convenience or a way to relax or have fun with friends and family members. Unfortunately, all of these devices also carry potential to become addictive” (xiii).

Roberts’s introduction culminates in an appeal to fear designed to establish legitimacy for the entire text. The complexity of the appeal hinges on his personal experience, the anecdotal *logos* of his existence as a game addict. He shifts from a passive explanation of game addiction to the active confession of personal addiction (xiii). This appeal to *ethos* creates an expertise for Roberts, who uses his personal experience to establish the actual harms of video game addiction:

> Video games and many Internet activities have taken their toll on my mental, physical, and spiritual health. Excessive playing and Internet usage have given me carpal tunnel syndrome and persistent back pain. They are the primary factor in missed appointments and have even cost me jobs, not to mention a whole lot of money. They have been a significant barrier that has gotten in the way of friendships and relationships. I have chosen video games over virtually everything and everyone close to me. I would chat all night with online ‘friends’ all over the world instead of
going out with friends in the here and now. In much of my adult life, video
games, and then later the Internet, assumed a place in the forefront,
inexplicably drawing me away from social outings, dinners with friends,
and even time with my family. (xiii-xiv)

His personal explanation of the addiction forms the locus for fear appeals in the entire
text. He first establishes a real, medical fear derived from carpal tunnel and back pain.
Through naming actual medical problems the appeal to fear becomes grounded in *logos.*
Roberts uses these medical problems to demystify the ambiguous consequences of
playing solitaire mentioned by Ervingham and thusly appeals to the medical harms of
addiction. Cover and Derrida’s framework applies in this instance as health problems
represent a common concern of drug usage.

Roberts creates the second major appeal to fear in this section through monetary
and professional harm. Video games, like illegal drugs, result in financial instability and a
specific link to a lowering of class. Socially, drug users typically represent the lowest
order of existence, one derived from failure in the work place and home. Roberts’s loss of
“a whole lot of money” and jobs temporarily situates his character in the same position as
a drug addict, which further bolsters *ethos* with the audience. The explanation of his
situation, of his fall to the lowest social rank, supports the fear appeal through a threat of
social harm and instability. An individual game addict forfeits the benefits of social
experience to play, and in the process can lose everything.

Roberts ends the basis of his fear appeal with the disintegration of the self. Video
game addiction forces individuals from all meaningful social interaction and destroys
their lives. The disruption of the family unit remains a core facet of game addiction fear
appeals because the device, or locus of addiction, becomes the home or the device in the home. The platform (computer, console, Internet) exists in the physical realm of the family, and the individual “user” dislocates from normal interaction. Roberts uses the fragmentation of the individual as the climax of his appeal to fear. The ultimate impact of gaming addiction thusly becomes the utter “Reversal of the Situation” described by Aristotle in *Poetics*. Roberts includes the tragic element within his appeal to motivate *pathos* in the audience, to create some cathartic climax.

The passage above forms Roberts’s basis for an appeal to fear in his audience. His threats of bodily harm, social dysfunction, and the disintegration of a family all fulfill the tenets of Aristotle’s model of fear appeals. Roberts creates real, physical harm, which exists in close proximity to an individual both spatially and temporally. The game exists in the home, and the potential for addiction and destruction is immediate. The remainder of Roberts’s text focuses on specific personal anecdotes, which describe the process of addiction in game players. He even provides a nine-step system to treat the addiction that relies on the previously established methods of treating physical substance abuse (154). Through establishing an appeal to fear in the introduction, though, he rhetorically necessitates his text as crucial to combating game addiction. His appeal to fear demonstrates how authors utilize the written word to motivate a specific action within an audience, but other contemporary texts construct fear appeals through the visual application of Cover and Derrida’s “image-idea operations” framework.

Kent and Olivia Bruner, who argue from the perspective of concerned parents, create the perceived destructiveness of play on the cover of their book *Playstation Nation: Protect Your Child from Video Game Addiction*. The cover portrays a young boy,
most likely in his teens, mindlessly staring at the screen with a controller in hand. The ominous blue glow from the screen fills the room and then bleeds onto the cover. The cover portrays the child as zombie-like, some form of sub-human incapable of productive action. His shoes are untied, his clothing is wrinkled, and his hair disheveled. The authors use the boy on the cover as an iconic representation of a video game addict. The cover uses *pathos* to persuade the audience by presenting a young, impressionable male, which represents the typical perception of a game addict. Even before reading the text, the authors present the audience with a visual signifier of video game addiction.

The front cover acts a primer for the text by constructing a rhetorical appeal aimed at beginning the “image-idea operations” sequence for the audience. When parents see the image, they want to protect their children from the unseen element in the cover art, which is the actual game. The Bruners use *pathos* on the cover to establish themselves as parents, who would face similar problems with gaming addiction as other parents of a child this age. The naming of video game addiction in the title anchors the text in a framework of substance abuse. The mentioning of addiction simultaneously evokes images of a drug addict and fear of harm. The visual rhetoric powerfully constructs the appeal to fear by showing the impacts of a video game on a young male, and “the very indications of such things are terrible, making us feel that the terrible thing itself is close at hand; the approach of what is terrible is just what we mean by ‘danger’” (Aristotle 104). The proximity of the threat remains crucial to both Roberts and the Bruners. In reference to this particular front cover, the threat is localized. It occurs within the home; the very nucleus of the family is subjected to possible harm. Additionally, the
text implicates the parents as the possible source of harm because they brought the object of fear, the game device, into the home.

Rhetorically, the image the child on the cover of *Playstation Nation* evokes the intended effect. The mere depiction of the child playing a game while isolated from other members of the family invokes the entire addiction loop. Socially, children who read too much rarely receive negative reinforcement, but children who play video games for any period of time become locked into a rhetorical system, which immediately indicates some form of addiction. The high/low cultural split fuels the appeal to fear in these contexts because the game player implicitly neglects other beneficial activities such as reading. Regardless of the actual amount of time spent playing, the very image of the player can “produce the figure or personage of the ‘frequent’ or ‘heavy-use’ game player as suffering an addiction, as an addict” (Cover 5).

*Playstation Nation* follows a fairly typified game addiction text structure. The first chapter of the book, “Our Story,” establishes ethos for the parent/authors. In it, they chronicle their skeptical adoption of a game system, and dismiss the possible effects as relatively harmless. The lengthy anecdotal evidence in the first chapter builds ethos through the construction of the authors as credible, normal parents, who live in a normal household. They explain the first interaction their children had with video games occurred when they took a small trip and had to rent a console to save the babysitters from their rambunctious children and the section is aptly titled “Innocent Beginnings” (4-5). Through establishing a sense of normalcy in the home, the authors gain credibility with the audience, and also demonstrate the unexpected, and ever-present danger of video games.
The text, however, quickly transitions into a section entitled “The Trojan Horse,” which implicitly echoes the appeal to fear presented on the cover. The Bruners’ use of combative rhetoric establishes the proximity of harm needed for an appeal to fear. The language in the chapter becomes active, and the inanimate console springs to life in an attempt to lure children into the depths of addiction: “But when a Super Nintendo unit sits beside your television screaming out the names of your children twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, you face a much more challenging dynamic” (7). The use of the second person appeals directly to the intended parental audience in an almost accusatory tone. The claim generates pathos by situating the parent audience as the source of the threat to children. Through the militaristic invocation of the “Trojan Horse,” the appeal to fear begins to enter the foreground of rhetorical construction.

The Bruners supplement the appeal to fear through logos by providing multiple news articles and studies designed to increase the legitimacy of their claims. The anecdotal evidence abruptly shifts from parents describing their problems with their children’s game “compulsions” to naming an actual addiction (20). Immediately following the accusation of addiction, several articles citing various psychologists “noted that players of video games showed symptoms similar to those induced by drugs and other pleasurable activities” (20). None of the studies appear particularly authoritative, and most of the research identifies secondary sources from regional news sources. Yet, the intended parental audience receives sufficient diluted evidence to establish a link between video games and substance addiction. Through this rhetorical strategy, the authors solidify the appeal to fear.
Playstation Nation and Cyber Junkie forward the typified pattern of fear appeals, and the general rhetorical strategy used by authors to link video games to substance addiction. These contemporary examples demonstrate the ongoing prevalence of video game addiction, and also provide concrete examples of how such appeals form. In the early 1980s, however, accusations of game addiction occurred on the periphery of public discourse. Games, at that time, existed in relatively infantile stages where simple dots, colors, and noises constituted the entirety of game play experience. Many parents and politicians during the 1980s remained unconcerned with the rise of the genre and focused little attention on the implications of game play. Debates typically focused on the possible harms of arcades, intrusive brick and mortar representations of the Other in a community, a place where children could gather for long hours and foolishly dump quarters into a Pong machine. Such inclusive parental/political discourse, though, failed to reach widespread publication and political attention during the technological optimism of the 1980s. Instead, a rhetorical community centered on child welfare and family values quietly persisted through the development of video games and recently re-emerged as a manifestation of the ongoing oscillation between praising and blaming technological advancement.

How Authors in the 1970s and 1980s Re-appropriated the Image of the Addict and Countered Fear Appeals

While video game opposition sought to decrease the influence of the local arcade, game supporters began writing and publishing texts designed to simultaneously legitimize video games as new media and create new modes of expression, new ways of explaining and analyzing games for a growing community of players. Game authors
during this time actively re-appropriated the image of an addict and fought the social construction of gaming as a low-class activity. Many authors designed rhetorical strategies focused on answering the increasing number of arguments against games. Their strategies range from historically situating video games as paramount to other forms of entertainment, to appropriating the word “addict” as something positive in the game community. These varied responses illuminate the complexity of game communities in the infant stages of the now expansive industry and demonstrate how these publications crafted new avenues of game community interaction which occurred before the rise of the Internet.

(Re)Telling History

The first, and perhaps most striking example of a game addiction response I located, comes from Steve Bloom, author of Video Invaders (1982). Bloom’s text differs from many through the physical media and overall design of the text. Video Invaders hardcover design and studied approach to video games distinguishes Bloom from the many paperback, anonymously written popular game guidebooks of the 1980s. Bloom’s text uniquely blends multiple modes of writing which formed a general primer for video games in the 1980s. The table of contents appeals to a broad range of topics, and establishes a more comprehensive, and credible, text than his contemporaries. The actual guide section of the book consists of around 20 pages, while the rest of the text covers varied topics such as game history, the potential future of hand-held games, and possible upcoming game titles.

Bloom appeals more directly to a sense of legitimacy than other authors during this period by situating video games in a context. He relies heavily on *logos* to persuade
his audience in favor of accepting games as an ongoing manifestation of entertainment
technology, the next step past the traditional board game. The appeal utilizes historical
documentation by grounding his argument in the very beginnings of electronic
entertainment. In this way, Bloom inherently rejects the concept of game play as
something unnatural and wholly new. He also surveys the contemporaneous implications
of games, which establishes ethos by extending his expertise beyond a high score in Pac-
Man to something resembling the first video game scholar.

Bloom’s text begins with an introductory chapter outlining his experience with
video games. In comparison to the beginnings of a fear appeal outlined by Playstation
Nation and Cyber Junkie, Bloom’s introduction establishes game play as harmless. His
simple, direct, and informal tone begins building ethos for the remainder of the text: “I
guess I was 9. Yeah, that sounds right. That means my brother was 12, and my father was
36. The year was 1963. Lots of important things happened in 1963. John Kennedy was
shot. Sandy Koufax struck out 15 Yankees in a World Series game. I was in the fifth
grade, learning how to get into trouble” (vii). Rather than foreshadowing impending
danger, Bloom’s language remains optimistic. The year, and context, constructs ethos
through placing Bloom at the very beginning of video games. He recounts a story of a
typical rainy afternoon and begging his father to bring him and his brother to a
“Playland,” or pinball arcade. Upon arriving, his “Dad immediately does the only thing
you can do when you walk into a Playland — he gets enough change to keep [the kids]
out of his hair for a while” (viii). Bloom’s benign narrative constructs game play as a
simple diversion common enough for a middle-class American at the time. His tone
becomes nostalgic; the story creates common ground for his audience.
After establishing his personal context with games, and building ethos with the audience as a game player who constructs games as positive, he immediately shifts to building logos by grounding his story in a historical context. Bloom appropriates the history of electronic entertainment early in the text. Even in the narrative-based introduction, he weaves in the history of the “Playland,” explaining they dated to the early 1920’s and the games evolved from “Bagatelle, the 19th-century French billiards-like game that eventually became pinball” (viii). Bloom establishes both ethos and logos from the rhetorical construction of history. The explanation of the earliest forms of mechanical entertainment positions him as a historian rather than a delinquent. This explanation also marks his continuous trend of presenting games as innocuous, and an American form of recreation, evident when he claims Bagatelle, “was the first of America’s many love affairs with the world of mechanical amusements” (viii). Through grounding video games in a distinctly American past, Bloom constructs game play as natural and integral to the American experience, which implicitly works against the common “image-idea operations” noted previously. Bloom continually works to rhetorically construct games as positive in this model, presenting games as normal, and non-addictive.

In the first chapter of his text, Bloom begins discussing video games and investigates the very beginnings of the genre while explaining the controversy surrounding their inception. Frequent debate and misconception still fuels this same debate, but the definitive answer remains a group of students working at M.I.T. They created the title “Spacewar,” (this title was never formally published) which utilized technology necessary to project interactive images onto a CRT (cathode ray tube)
display, the foundational necessity of a video game (Bloom 3-6). This section of the text further establishes Bloom as an expert on the form, and engages his contemporaneous audience through investigating and writing a history for a new media form.

Bloom then recounts the story of Ralph Baer, a German immigrant who became an engineer working on display technology. Baer became the father of modern video games by creating The Odyssey 100, the first home computer game device, which plugged directly into a television (8). The console featured simple games, which utilized dots controlled by human interface devices (“paddles” or “joysticks”). Interestingly, many individuals cite *Pong* as their first game experience, but The Odyssey sought to bypass the arcade, or “Playland,” and enter directly into the entirely new home console market. The notable controversy arose when Nolan Bushnell, later the founder of Atari, released *Pong*, which bore a striking resemblance to Baer’s game *Tennis*. The question of *Pong*’s origins, or the technology behind it, became one of the early legends of video games, derived from the struggle between two men at the foreground of an emerging field. Bloom recounts the development of these titles and technology with striking accuracy, and presents the history of these two men well before most knew of the controversy around them.

The inclusion of this story represents an attempt at solidifying the history of a fledgling industry, and linking the development of video games with an entrepreneur-like passion. The historic explanation builds Bloom’s *ethos* by constructing his expertise as not only a game player, but also involved member of a community. Bloom’s telling of history begins to form a background or context for early video game players. They no longer play new titles in an isolated arcade but begin to participate in a community,
which Bloom rhetorically constructs through including a past and a future. These authors, Bloom in particular, begin forming the basis of a rhetorical community decades before the rise of the Internet. The complex interweaving of social and historical analysis also generates *ethos* and a sense of traditional, perhaps academic, knowledge applied to a fledgling industry. Upon establishing history, he transitions into writing about the contemporaneous issues facing video games.

Bloom remains one of the only authors of this time to consciously address the issue of video game addiction. In a chapter entitled “The Great Debate: You Got Trouble Here…,” Bloom presents a brief, though complete, historiographic perspective of video game addiction. The illustration accompanying this chapter visually communicates the polarized nature surrounding game play addiction. The image shows a courtroom with a large American flag extending past the judge, whose representation consists of a blocky, 8-bit figure. His face bears no noticeable facial features, and the gavel appears connected to his square hand. The characteristic black robes of a judge bleed into the geometry of his frame. Fixed under him are a group of faceless, featureless digital men. They appear angry, and their fingers point in multiple directions in a clearly accusatory manner. To the left, a group of angry kids plays on a console feverishly. A small baby has an outstretched fist clenched in anger at the other side of the courtroom. Opposite the children stand a few adults with menacing looks on their faces hovering over another console. A woman raises her fist in anger with her mouth opened to a scream. The jury is composed of more digital people, framing the issue for the reader as audience, and spectator in this courtroom (115). Comparatively, this image works as counterpart to the *Playstation Nation* cover art. The authors both use children as the locus of the image and seek to
generate *pathos* from the implication of potential harm to children. Bloom, however, re-appropriates the image of the child, situating the concerned parent as the enemy and potential harm as opposed to an arcade machine, a source of simple fun.

After using visual rhetoric to frame the chapter and argument, Bloom begins methodically presenting the early history of game play addiction. In the 1930s and 40s, New York’s mayor Fiorello La Guardia began focusing on the negative social effects of gaming. According to Bloom, La Guardia focused on heavily on pinball, which, “he concluded, was a bad influence on children,” and would no doubt “lead them into lives of vice of and other immoralities” (114). The city finally banned Pinball in 1942, but Bloom further isolates the history and origins of Pinball, and how the primary application of the device focused on gambling (116).

Bloom’s critical contribution to game history, and the story of pinball, rests in his construction of the initial position of games as gambling devices. He then provides analysis separating the two, disambiguating games from gambling and categorically establishing gambling as a distinct social issue. Historically, the distinction simply marked the beginning of game play with no financial reward. Rhetorically, Bloom uses *logos* to present the complex past of games but actively breaks associations with perceived negative aspects of game play. Bloom explains, “Gambling had to go. With the introduction of flippers in 1947 and the prohibition of pay-outs, pinball finally began to achieve the aims of the industry’s anti-gambling, ‘For Amusement Only’ faction. No longer would the game be a refuge for two-bit gamblers, nor could it be accurately labeled a ‘game of chance’; flippers made it a game of skill” (116). The skill/chance distinction represents Bloom’s appeal to *logos*; his classification of games as skill-based
marks a fundamental shift toward opposing game addiction. If a game requires skill, then time devoted to improving that skill inherently rejects the rhetorical construction of the player/zombie and combats a major avenue of persuasion used by proponents of game addiction. Bloom’s response to addiction rhetoric first focused on the skill/chance distinction, and he utilizes the analytical distinction to continue his dissection of accusatory game rhetoric occurring in the 1980s.

The attacks levied on pinball machines represented the beginning of a rhetorical trend that persists in discussions of technology today. Despite the separation from gambling, video games continued to draw increased attention due to the perceived impacts on morality. Bloom explains how certain organizations publicly attacked games, explaining the “tough talking National Association of Citizens Crime Commission was steadfastly against the industry, calling it a ‘ratchet that fleeces children of their carfare, their lunch money, their allowances, and even drives them to crime to obtain funds for their craze’” (Bloom 117). The inclusion of these arguments establishes a historical and theoretical context for game play addiction. Bloom presents the ongoing controversy as cyclical, as a continually surfacing social discourse on the usefulness or harm of technology, which further locates game play addiction arguments as a natural outgrowth of misunderstanding a new industry. Through establishing the context in which individuals labeled video games a “craze,” Bloom persuasively builds *ethos*, by de-emphasizing the harm of games. He supplies analysis on the seemingly endless negative technological determinism, and crafts a response through which harm is de-emphasized:

Again, parents are worried about their children’s schoolwork habits and whether lunch money is feeding them or forever hungry Pac-Men instead.
Town councils are reviewing zoning regulations and have denied many an arcade application on the basis that games are of no value to the community and only cause problems. Law officials are claiming a rise in juvenile criminal behavior—particularly at arcades, where rowdy, drunken crowds supposedly congregate. (117)

Through exposing political strategies, Bloom presents an appeal to reason by combating the flawed analysis of community cohesion and crime reduction. He answers these conclusions through an inherent dismissal of harm, which remains pervasive in the text. The extension of his narrative in the introduction further builds an ethos dependent on constructing a rational position on video games. He shuns the reactionary claims through logos and even admits, “Psychologists have determined that video games can be addictive. No doubt, there is a genuine apprehension over these games and the effects they may be having on our children. However, it seems that few can truly express what it is they are afraid of” (117). Interestingly, he admits the possibility of addiction in his text but specifically targets the rhetorical construction of the opposition and renders such opposition vague and irrational.

Bloom’s discussion of history closes with the analysis above. He refrains from condemning technology, or his opposition, and always maintains the ethos generated in the opening narrative structure, a persona linked to the positive aspects of game play, one who recognizes some form of value in a fledgling industry. The division of skill/chance establishes a categorical classification of games as distinct from the gambling apparatus his opposition links to this new media. Bloom’s skill-based ideology, wherein games become a positive practice of something meaningful rather than chance-based addiction,
represents a persuasive answer to game critics of the time. His building of history ultimately establishes some form of context for a new age in entertainment technology and the beginnings of a rhetorical community. He closes the introductory section of the addiction chapter with an argument of chilling clarity and relevance to the current social/political discourse involving games: “Gambling or not, pinball and all the other arcade amusements have always had the knack of raising the national blood pressure. Now, some 50 years later, equally strong language is being directed at the play and proliferation of America’s latest ‘craze,’ the video game” (117). For Bloom, the “craze” represents a change with positive societal implications, and his voice and rhetoric solidified this genre as a distinctly American innovation with minimal risk.

**Cracking a Joke: How Authors Used Humor to Disarm Fear**

Other responses to video game addiction in the 1980s utilized humor to generate *ethos, pathos, and logos* within an audience. These texts largely capitalized on the growing craze Bloom mentions in the section above. The swelling game sales created an incentive for authors to publish in several different genres, and “Jovial” Bob Stine wrote a book entitled *Blips! The First Book of Video Game Funnies*, which claims to be the first in the practically nonexistent genre of video game humor. Stine’s text further illustrates the broad range of rhetorical appeals used by authors during this time. Upon examining the cover, the intention of the text is clear. The cover illustrates an image of Pac-Man in distress eating energy orbs with a text box located overhead claiming, “I kill for a cheeseburger!” Stein’s cheesy joke sets the tone for the remainder of the text, which relies on simple jokes and images to convey a sense of harmlessness associated with
video games. The author’s decision to add “jovial” to his name also builds *ethos* by establishing a non-threatening persona for a text clearly targeting children.

Scholastic Book Services published Stine’s text, which provides a clear indication of the intended audience of the text. Unlike many other books of this period, it contains no guidebook or analysis of any games. It mirrors the comic book genre by illustrating several cartoons structured in panels with commentary by the author. The text does, however, show an attempt at solidifying a rhetorical community that was emerging in the arcade environment and developing a persuasive appeal focused on disarming game addiction proponents. In contrast to the other examples mentioned in this chapter, Stine provides no formal introduction, only another joke: “hey—what were you expecting in an introduction to a book of videogame cartoons—philosophy?!” The text focuses on jokes and allusions to situations common in an arcade such as a large angry individual waiting to take over a machine behind a player, and several comics detailing parental response to video games. For example, in Figure 1 an angry mother screams at a child saying, “Billy, you’ve been spending too much time at those videogame arcades!” The illustration represents the child in a digital form. He appears blocky (a parallel between early pixilated graphics) and angry while rebuking his mother. This image presents the ethical controversy surrounding arcades at the time, but the author generates *pathos* in the audience by illustrating the child in defiant opposition and the
mother as an overly concerned parent. Such playfulness seeks to disarm the fear appeals used by addiction proponents through constructing video games as a simple hobby or diversion for children.

Stine continues to subvert Cover’s “image-idea operations” model through appealing to children and though never dealing with the subject explicitly, he hints at an understanding of the contemporaneous political climate. In one of the sections of the text entitled, “10 good reasons not to play video games” the number one reason listed by the author is “nuclear war might break out, the machine might melt, and you wouldn’t be able to get your quarter back.” The subsequent items on the list remain blank and the author comments he “could only think of one good reason.”

Stine’s response to moral panics and addiction appeals becomes clear in these comics. The author’s construction of a harmless, comical persona builds ethos within the audience, fundamentally disarming claims of possible video game harms. In Figure 2, Stine presents an example of children fighting over a game after claiming the game would pacify occurrences of fighting in the home. The simplicity of the text and argument
remain eloquent, and oddly profound. The central concept Stine builds through *logos* in this example involves exposing game play not as dangerous but a harmless outlet for children. Stine illustrates to his audience that perhaps games never created violence, and the quarreling of children is only normal. His audience would recognize the fighting as common and central to the competition inherent in the genre. There exists no great moral significance to a game, just the next the evolutionary incarnation of America’s greatest pastimes no different than baseball or football. While the jokes are corny, they illustrate an ongoing and evolving debate on the usefulness of videogames in our society, something even the authors of the 1980s understood. Through appealing to children as an audience and using humor, Stine disrupts associations between game play, addiction, and harm.

Stein’s inclusion of rules and etiquette illustrates the commitment of many authors during the 1980s in forming some system of rules to govern the hectic and chaotic atmosphere of the arcade. Quite possibly the largest implication of many of these texts, *Blips!* in particular, is the push toward writing, the setting down of knowledge and the formulation a set of rules governing a community. These rules distinguished the arcade from any other social situation. In the section entitled “10 important etiquette rules for video game arcades,” Stine outlines some simple, yet important rules for the arcade. These rules are designed to govern the game play experience outside of the game. They create an ordered system much like the game text itself – bodies transitioning from the real world to a digital world.
Figure 3 provides the rules, and though somewhat humorous, the author’s act of writing, of protecting something in text, emphasizes a powerful persuasive tool. Through *logos*, Stine distinguishes video games from other media, and begins to form a culture. The “image-idea operations” model becomes fundamentally disrupted when game players immerse in an ordered system of interaction with media. An appeal to rules creates legitimacy for the form, and further builds *ethos* for the author. The screen of the videogame may change every microsecond, but the words of a book can endure long after a quarter’s worth of play. This text complements games and furthers their acceptance in the political landscape. Stine’s text marks the beginning of a shared language and importance surrounding games, and despite the comic nature of the text, the persuasive appeals still function.

**Playing the Gutter: The Adult Side of Game Humor**

One of the most interesting texts I located presents an alternate humorous take on video games. It presents a view in complete contrast to *Blips!*, though still relies heavily upon humor as a persuasive appeal. *Playing with Yourself: The Official Videogame*
Handbook is another example of a comic book style early videogame text. Written by Ira Alterman, the text provides a decidedly adult perspective on the early videogame craze in the 1980s. The term “handbook” clearly plays off the abundance of videogame handbooks available during this time. The text, however, does not include any guide, only jokes of a more dark nature. Alterman focuses the text on an adult audience and deals with mature and often offensive themes. The text, with its decidedly different approach to humor, utilizes various rhetorical strategies aimed at combating game play addiction arguments. Alterman disrupts fear appeals through a strategy of rhetorical dismissal, presenting games as harmless and simple distractions. His tone and language casts doubt on individuals who claim games are dangerous by humorously presenting the genre as a conceit, an extended joke that comments on the very nature of the explosion of new media in the 1980s.

Even the choice of publisher, Ivory Tower Publishing, begins building Alterman’s rhetorical strategy, which constitutes a comprehensive and sarcastic rejection of arguments against video games. Alterman rejects these arguments wholesale through providing commentary on the social situation of games in the 1980s. His jokes provoke offense, but within an audience of mature game players, transform game opponents into caricatures or outsiders. In Figure 4, Alterman uses religious language and practice to comment on the perceived devotion of game players (7). The benign text of the “prayer,” however, builds ethos by establishing a sense of profanity in the author’s
persona. This form of commentary positions Alterman as an observer who simultaneously praises and denounces the fanaticism around games.

The section entitled, “How to Get Out of the House: 10 Great Excuses for Going Out to Play Games,” provides a cynical and exaggerated approach to addiction/fear appeals. The section illustration presents a man with a rather devious look upon his face, and he is situated halfway out of a door, which evokes a sense of urgency. The description claims, “Sometimes the most difficult challenge that serious video game players face is getting out of the house to the video arcade” (3). The opening sentence establishes a will to escape, to go unnoticed to a dark arcade. The next sentence outlines, through problematic gender language, the difficulty with leaving: “Wives and mothers, both notoriously bad at video games because of their slow reflexes and dim minds, often fail to see the merit of video gamemanship. They think it is bad business and try to exert their influence in causing you to give it up” (3). Aside from the blatantly sexist rhetoric, this passage satirically undermines game addiction rhetoric. Particularly, the use of “influence” and the reference to giving it up demonstrate an awareness of the link between substance language and addiction. Alterman’s ridiculous recommendations for escaping the home function as inflated, comic responses to the game addiction proponents, and his language casts doubt on the entire concept.

He adopts a nonsensical stance to dismissing fear appeals and even plays on other constructions of game legitimacy. For example, Alterman provides his own list of arcade rules but one that rests in stark contrast to the etiquette section in Blips! His sarcasm comments on the very notion of game play etiquette, and his conclusion rejects the necessity of rules in an arcade. For example, one entry explains, “Don’t bring your
German shepherd into the arcade if he has diarrhea. Do tie him to the front door” (6).

Through playing on the rhetorical construction of a game-specific community, Alterman arrives at a different definition of play, one that requires no formal structure or ideology. The video game is simply a game.

Alterman’s most potent response to game critics occurs in two sections: “Treating Video Game Injuries” and “A Brief History of Home Video Games.” In the first section, Alterman comments directly on the alleged harms of videogame play. He begins, “playing video games can be very dangerous. And I’m not talking about what can happen if you try to muscle in on the game being played by Hells Angels class reunion. In the natural course of videogame play, a player can pick up some very annoying and aggravating injuries, which if left untreated can lead to brain cancer and lice” (7). Alterman’s pointed description of game play injuries leading to brain cancer and lice addresses opposition through wholesale dismissal. Alterman furthers the use of his satirical ethos to appeal directly to his audience and persuade them the harms of video games are all but nonexistent. He goes on to describe some of the common injuries associated with videogames such as “laser finger,” which he describes as a symptom from rapidly pressing buttons to and other made-up conditions. Alterman uses satirical logos to resist arguments targeting the harms of video games. Through his playful dismissal, he undermines the scope and purpose of accusations against video games.
In the next section, Alterman presents his most offensive content. In figure 5, an infant plays at an arcade cabinet entitled, “Death Rape” (19). This section focuses on Alterman’s satirical prognostication of future titles. He also provides a description of some of the most controversial speculative game titles. The titles mentioned include, “Tennis in the Nude,” “Divorce by Assassination,” “Petting Below the Waist,” and “Masochists Picnic” (19). Though none of these titles are real, Alterman provides explicit commentary on the public debate surrounding game violence and further illustrates how authors in the 1980s exhibited full awareness of videogame detractors. While Alterman’s appeal to logos remains offensive and distressing, his voice and tone illuminates the varied courses authors took at the time to defend videogames in public discourse.
CHAPTER II

In this chapter, I explore another common rhetorical strategy used by video game opponents that focuses on relating game play experience to something unreal and unnatural. I will establish a framework utilizing Robert Cover’s analysis of game stereotype creation in reference to the simulacra and virtual experiences associated with video games. After analyzing how these stereotypes form, I will utilize Aristotle’s fear appeals to illustrate the rhetorical implications of these arguments. Finally, I will examine several guidebooks from the 1970s and 1980s to explore how authors during this period sought to persuasively combat these appeals.

The Simulacra of the Game World

Video game playing has, in part, always been associated with a strange departure into new worlds. *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong* signify a kind of otherness, and people not familiar with gaming seem unable to understand how a particular system of inputs and images combine to form a game. To a player, the little yellow ball chasing ghosts and eating pellets acts as a form of code and a more sophisticated code than many people assume. The player instinctively recognizes the elements of a game and understands the little yellow ball signifies a Pac-Man ready to gather energy pellets to complete a level. For an outsider, however, the representation of a game world often conjures feelings of alienation. It becomes a foreign entity, with a language not easily understood. Because of
this disconnect, observers often view players as participants in the unreal, and such participation usually accompanies a perceived behavior shift in the game player.

Individuals who are not game players view the screen or display as the ultimate significance of the game play experience. For them, the representation on the screen typically equates to little more than a two-dimensional game board such as checkers or chess. The key distinction, however, lies in the intangible nature of a software-based experience. The actual software, the code within a cartridge, CD, or file, remains an abstraction whereas a physical game can be separated and analyzed through its constituent physical parts. The immaterial nature of software code often leads non-players to sanction games as worthless because the game play experience cannot be measured in standard physical terminology. The description of all action within a game therefore becomes mysterious and invalid. Game players and opponents alike often use the term “virtual” to describe physical interaction with software code, and particularly the term is often attached to the world within the game, although the exact definition of the term changes depending on the individual context.

Players often refer to the game world as if it represents a physical entity. Their actions within a game generate a sense of realness, but to a person unfamiliar with video games such interactions are decidedly unreal. To a casual observer, the activity of playing a game resonates purely with physical forms and media such as a board game. Though many publishers created video games based on board games, there remain several differences between the traditional conceptualization of a board game, even in digital form, and video games. To the observer, the digital board game retains associations with the physical world. In most video game titles, however, the method of interaction
between player and software becomes incrementally more complex. Video games establish a set of rules and the context wherein actions occur, and the player interacts with all of these elements simultaneously. This communicative loop forms a constant cycle of player input and software response in real time. To the passive observer, the game player appears fixated on a world within a screen, a digital facsimile of a real experience. To the game player, however, the interactive nature of the game creates a genuine experience.

Though some early titles such as Pac-Man and Donkey Kong did not represent reality, many titles did. Some of the first game titles were designed to create a simulated experience. For example, the programmers of Pong attempted to create a digital form of ping-pong. Other early titles adopted the same framework of creating a digital experience out of a recognizable physical activity and typically consisted of digitized sport games such as football, basketball, and baseball. These titles, however, appeared as overly simplistic representations of popular sports, which created a disconnect between the digital and real. It was difficult to see why a digital representation of such a common activity equated to the real experience. Robert Cover explains how these conceptual rifts allowed game worlds to become sanctioned and separated from the “real” world:

The gameplay experience is, in the similar rhetoric of addiction, given as the unreal or the virtual not because of something that takes it outside of physicality and normal behaviour nor because it relies on technologies which are relatively new. Rather, it is because the narrative, communicate, articulable ‘worlds’ that are evoked interactively have no physical
substance. The representation of digital cultures under the category of real/simulacral social or media activities is a visual one. (Cover 19)

Cover’s analysis explains the second major tactic used by video game opponents, which relies heavily on maintaining that games represent nothing real and time spent playing them results in nothing tangible or beneficial.

Video game detractors construct the unreal/real dichotomy in common argumentation to isolate interaction as mysterious, overly complex, and alienating. If the experience of playing a game occurs within an unreal environment, it becomes easier to dismiss the genre as a whole. Particularly in the context of early game titles, whose representations appeared basic, it was easy for video game opponents to equate games to low culture media. Robert Cover further explains how simplistic comparisons of videogames to other forms of media create the framework for rhetorical appeals designed to denounce games:

Such comparisons are usually just that—reductive statements of resemblance that liken the physicality of chemical substance dependence with activities that can, in many cases such as gaming, be quite self-consciously chosen because the are pleasurable, enjoyable and gratifying, and are located in a vastly complex matrix of desire, identity and sociality that produces the choice to spend significant time engaged in game activity. (Cover 5)

Cover’s analysis remains central to understanding the process of how a game addiction stereotype is formed through the invocation of the simulacra. By linking video games to simple repetitious actions in an unreal world, games become separated from other media.
For example, an avid reader may be labeled a “bookworm,” yet an avid video game player can be labeled an addict. The reduction of game play and comparison to low culture forms of expression represents a crucial step in rhetorically constructing an appeal to fear.

When video game opponents associate a game with a low culture form and present a gaming as a repetitious exercise which contains no tangible value, they begin to form a link between games and physical substance abuse. Socially, the identification of drug users involves a similar strategy. Individuals typically associate drugs with the departure to an unreal world, and time spent in that world remains pointless and dangerous. This association becomes vital to addiction arguments and enhances appeals to fear.

Across the various genres of video games, the separation between the real world and the digital world becomes most clear in the “RPG,” or role-playing game. Role-playing games, as the name of the genre suggests, task players to create an alternate identity, or avatar, which they will use to interact with elements within the game. Role-playing games have received the brunt of criticism surrounding addiction, due to the sheer size and scope of many of these titles. These games often contain virtual economies with real-world implications, featuring everything from currencies to fluctuations in the virtual economy stemming from increased or decreased demand for a particular item within a game. The almost limitless nature of interaction within an RPG necessitates players to consider the game even outside of a normal play experience. Even while the player is logged out, conversations via message boards and economic transactions continue to occur, which inherently erodes the traditional boundaries between the world
within a game and outside of that game. Interestingly, players of RPG’s have adopted specific language to separate the complex matrix of actions that can be performed in relation to the game play experience. According to Vill Lehdonvirta, “The conceptual dichotomy… can be found among role-playing gamers, who use the terms ‘in-game’ and ‘out-of-game’ to draw a line between ‘the game’ and ‘the rest of the world’. In scholarly circles, this boundary is known as the ‘magic circle’” (par. 7). The cyclical nature of game interaction creates a way for players to order and categorize their relation with the specific game text.

Though video game players constructed this dichotomy as a communicative mode designed to describe specific actions, game opposition seeks to destabilize this dichotomy in order to rhetorically disrupt the concept of a player consciously leaving a game environment. As I will demonstrate, game opponents must persuasively combat the ability of a player to make a conscious decision to separate from the game world. This strategy relegates game players to one experience, the experience of the game, which positions players in the unreal world. Game opposition thusly situates players in an unknown realm rhetorically constructed to associate danger with video games.

**How Authors Construct Aristotelian Fear Appeals by Invoking the Simulacra**

Video game opponents disrupt the “magic circle” dichotomy to enhance an appeal to fear. I once again use Aristotle’s concept of fear appeals to isolate this rhetorical strategy. Aristotle argues fear must remain close in proximity and the concept/object in question must possess significant power: “From this definition it will follow that fear is caused by whatever we feel has great power of destroying us, or of harming us in ways that tend to cause us great pain. Hence the very indications of such things are terrible,
making us feel that the terrible thing itself is close at hand; the approach of what is
terrible is just what we mean by ‘danger’” (104). Through situating a computer or video
game console within the home as a source of destruction, video game opponents utilize
one aspect of a fear appeal. Also, “the very indications” Aristotle mentions illustrate the
“image–idea operations” model mentioned in the previous chapter, which remains a
central tenet in establishing a fear appeal derived from the simulacra. Any indication of
significant time spent in another world results in associations with addiction.

**Representative Contemporary Examples**

For video game opponents, separating the world within a game from the outside
world typically occurs through appeals to fear, which focus on constructing otherness and
danger within the game. These authors persuade their audiences to reject video games
through rhetorically constructing a barrier between meaningful human experience and
video games. Through disrupting the “magic circle,” the game world becomes alien and
unworthy of significant attention. The rules and regulations of these worlds become
foreign and have the capacity to violently transgress into reality when players engage the
game. Kevin Roberts relies on such an appeal to establish dissonance between his
audience and a video game player: “Indeed, the intricacies of the cyber world, and the
allure of it, remain a mystery for many. Each one of the thousands of video games on the
market speaks its own jargon, making it exceedingly difficult for a nongamer to achieve
even a rudimentary comprehension of the particulars of a game…Cyber junkies seem to
live in a different world, which [friends and family] cannot penetrate” (Roberts 3). The
rhetoric used by Roberts relies heavily on mysticism and fantasy. He establishes an
unrealistic language barrier when he cites the “thousands of video games” that each
possess their own unique terminology. Roberts rhetorically blocks normal interaction through assuming a family member or friend could never learn the particular terminology associated with the game genre. The separation created isolates game players into a “different world.”

Roberts’s appeal utilizes the concept of otherworldliness to persuasively encourage a feeling of danger. Unknown worlds may appear insufficient to creating fear because of the vagueness associated with trying to capture or present the world to an audience, but when computers/game hardware act as a world, the danger moves into close proximity. The appeal functions to associate imminent danger with the devices and encourages the audience to resist this “allure.” The jargon in Roberts’s appeal not only separates family and friends from the game player, but also creates a defense mechanism for the player to keep others out. The language forms a mysterious barrier that players use to confuse non-players and thus render them unable to penetrate a separate world.

A particularly interesting rallying point for video game opponents involves the designation of a video game world as wholly unnatural. This “virtual world” directly competes with time spent in the “real world.” The act of play becomes an obsession with something that doesn’t exist. Often, the video game becomes separated from all other media because of the interaction with the virtual world. Olivia and Kurt Bruner demonstrate this process:

Watching television is a passive activity. It serves as a distraction from real life. Playing video games, by contrast, requires full participation. Rather than a distraction, it becomes a replacement for real life. The child enters a virtual world and becomes the character. With reading a book or
watching television, the child observed characters in a story. With videogames, the child becomes the character and feels an obligation to succeed. Because this obligation pulls the child further into a virtual existence, it pulls them away from real satisfaction. To use Dr. May’s words, it sucks life energy into a virtual obsession, leaving less and less energy available for natural pursuits. (59)

This example illustrates the complex process used to link videogames to addiction. First, the authors distinguish video games from other media through *logos*. The classification of games as dependent on complete and total interaction persuasively establishes necessary framework to generate fear within the audience. A book or television program remains passive, unable to harm children in the same way as an interactive piece of software. The game even possesses the ability to pull children away from “real” satisfaction. This phrase separates in-game satisfaction by labeling it unreal. The pursuit becomes unnatural and destructive to the child.

Another major facet of addiction appeals used by game opponents involves the process of linking game play to simple repetition. Comparatively, other forms of media rarely receive such a label; a reader must engage in a repetitious action to complete a text, but the game players continued play becomes rhetorically appropriated to signal addiction. The link begins, as previously shown, with defining the game world as unreal: “New technologies have steadily heightened realism and allow players to feel more a part of the game, thereby increasing the potential for addiction” (Roberts 5). In this view, the realism of the game world can entice players into spending more time in an unnatural state, and “excessive play impedes social and academic development. It damages
relationships and, in some cases, exhibits the hallmarks of addiction” (Roberts 5). The rhetoric quickly shifts to the active construction of a fear appeal by equating persistent play with tangible harms to an individual. This example of a fear appeal constructed from the dangers of an unreal world illustrates that “any concept of addiction involves a notion of behaviour change and a desire for or experience of repetition” (Cover 5).

The rhetoric traces danger from unreal worlds to construct perhaps the most common appeal to fear from game opponents. This mindset constructs games as a worthless pursuit devoid of academic and artistic integrity. This appeal often becomes the most accessible to parents or educators. In my own experience, this appeal is the most common. I have often been told to devote my time to more serious pursuits and that games are simply “kid stuff.” My experience, however, presents nothing unique. Since the development of the first video games, opponents often claimed the act of game play was dangerous because it carries the potential to corrupt youth and distract young minds from school or a “physical” hobby.

Unsurprisingly, these arguments occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. The authors of many guidebooks of this time appear cognizant of these arguments. They expend great efforts to construct the idea of game play as beneficial and complex, as something which cannot be labeled as simple and obsessive. Interactivity for these authors means something more. Pac-Man becomes an active and strategic negotiation of a dizzying amount of variables affecting game play simultaneously. The process embodies a complexity that inherently rejects reductive comparisons of video games with simple time-wasting activities. These authors respond to opponents with persuasive
appeals designed to halt associations with addiction. They emphasize mastery and skill to disrupt fear appeals and to elevate gaming above other forms.

**The Game Player as Master: How Guide Books Reframed the Simulacra**

The authors during this period form a prototypical argument in support of games through a rhetorical reconstruction of the necessary actions of games. During this period, games had become economically viable over a short period of time, and their influence was expanding. The industry was maturing, but in order for that maturation to take full form, games had to separate from explicit ties with the increasing public perception that associated games with teenagers whose moral fabric was quickly weakening due to game interaction. Authors sought to rhetorically re-appropriate gaming to a skill-based set of talents that required discipline and practice. What emerged from this strategy was a reconstruction of game play as pseudo-science. Steve Bloom, author of the previously cited *Video Invaders*, devotes a section of his text to game types. His descriptions outline what were the gaming archetypes including “Space Invaders-type games,” Pac-Man-type games,” and “Adventure games” (29-30). His classifications generate a form of reason and pattern. By grouping games into specific categories, Bloom creates order from the chaos of an ever-expanding library of titles. He describes archetypal titles, seminal works in the genres, and creates a frame of reference for approaching different games.

Such divisions mark the beginning of rhetorically re-imagining what it means to play games. Individual players no longer become isolated by an arcade or geography but actively participate in a continuum that contains a definite starting point and presents a path toward some form of a future. These works represent the first efforts to create genre and style. As Bloom comments, “And then there are those games that boldly defy
classification…games that will define future categories as did Space Invaders, Defender, and Pac-Man… there are two such games on the streets: Taito America’s Qix, and Atari’s Tempest… Both are unusual in design, entirely American-made (which is unusual) and proving very profitable” (30). Genre distinction creates adherence to pre-existing forms that remain established in criticism such as film, music, and literature. Interestingly, the names of the genres were simplistically identified, but the very act of classification sets up a framework for future study.

Bloom builds ethos through classification of titles. He solidifies his persona as an author by presenting an analytical perspective of video games. His building of ethos starkly contrasts with the Bruners and Roberts. They attempted to position themselves as credible parents or past players with a deep knowledge of the dangers associated with video games. Bloom, however, embraces this knowledge and uses it to create expertise thusly building credibility as an expert in a genre considered pointless and unnatural by opponents. Bloom’s construction of mastery forms a kind of theme for early game texts. By associating games with a defined set of practice-based skills, the participation in an unnatural world became ordered and defined. Through this appropriation, games possessed real-world goals, the very same goals of other skill-based actions: mastery.

The rhetoric of mastery and skill creates legitimacy in early video game texts. Just as Bloom constructs differing genres and form, other authors actively outlined justifications for the legitimacy of games. Kraig Kubey, author of The Winner’s Book of Video Games, details a similar argument within his introduction. He begins with an explanation of video games using violent rhetoric: “Across America and around the world, they storm through the doors of arcades and pizza parlors on their way to battle.
There are 35 million of them in the United States alone. They aim their lasers, fire their missiles, and explode their smart bombs in a tense and frantic fight against lines, flying saucers, and World War III attacks from Russia” (viii). Kubey compares players to soldiers, and the passage heavily relies on rhetoric traditionally ascribed to preparing for an attack; the soldiers “storm” through doors on their way to a “battle.” The numeric description mirrors news media’s constant update of troop numbers in theatre. By comparing players to soldiers, Kubey builds *ethos* with his audience. The ordered and practiced nature of a soldier suggests the discipline required by the game player. The use of *logos* in his numeric description establishes game players as a growing and large number rather than a small group of extremists.

Kubey continues his description by naming large arcades (unfortunately, most of these no longer exist) and comparing them to battlegrounds on which soldiers fight. He uses the rhetoric of honor and bravery to describe game players: “Most of them are what one would expect in any war that engages millions of soldiers. They are young men. Still, this is an all-out Armageddon and, more and more, the young men are being joined by women of all ages, by mere children, and by men of middle age and beyond” (viii). Kubey broadens the persuasive appeal above by including women and children, and he removes age limitations. Here, he achieves a kind of *pathos* through attacking the normal stereotype of the game player as a young male, and the deconstruction of this myth enlarges his audience as well as invites more participation in the game community.

Kubey reserves his strongest language to close this comparison: “Who are these warriors, these courageous fighters defending their nations and loved ones against onslaughts from across the ocean and from the far reaches of the galaxy? They are the
men and women who command the control panels of today’s video games” (viii). The soldiers in Kubey’s conflict are “warriors,” illustrating a push to something more than simple game play. The epic language subverts the central ideology of game opponents. Rather than games producing an internal threat, they protect us from something external, albeit fictional.

Kubey continues his introduction with an overt division between games and video games. His argument seeks to distance video games from traditional forms. Kubey argues against oversimplification of games directly by claiming, “Yes, they’re called games. But games seems the wrong word to describe a phenomenon never before seen on planet Earth. Games is fine for hopscotch and checkers. But not for these machines…Video machines are something more, something beyond…Some call them art. The machines seduce, they compel, they addict” (viii). Kubey’s description remains powerful; he distances video games from a reductive comparison to simple board games, but arrives at a striking conclusion of addiction. Kubey deconstructs the stereotype through logos and shows that games easily become more complicated than what his contemporary critics assume. They can be artistic and compelling; games can thusly become as addictive as the high-class pursuits of art, literature, and film. Kubey forms the important distinction that games are not inherently addictive; they compel players through excellence of form. He recreates games as a high art form and further builds ethos through recognizing the inherent beauty and complication of the form, rejecting the overly simplistic and reductive conceptualization of video games by his opponents.

Kubey’s text relies heavily on logos to establish his persuasive claims. He begins his first chapter, “Coin-Operated Video Games,” with language that complicates a
typified notion of playing an arcade game. A user can slide a quarter into the machine, but using that quarter to play for hours or attain a high score takes skill. Players must utilize strategies, skill, and practice to improve play: “Do you want to know about the safe spot on the Pac-Man board where you can hide for a minute or a year and never get eaten by a monster? Would you like to find out how the International Date Line in Defender helps you deal with Mutants? How about two strong strategies for hunting the nasty little saucer in Asteroids?” (3). Kubey’s use of ethos appears through this line of questioning. As a skilled game player, he knows the answers to these questions that may be hidden to the average player, secrets in the digital realm. Kubey, however, makes these secrets known and available to the player.

The process of writing, of setting down the knowledge of an expert player, demystifies and challenges the claims made by the Bruners and Roberts. The game world, or the world within the game, no longer represents something foreign and alien. Kubey relocates the rapidly changing experience of a digital text into the written word. This act temporally fixes a game in recognizable segments rather than discussing a moving artifact. The world can thusly appear “real” and players/author can begin the process of analysis, something video game opponents claim cannot occur.

Kubey, like most authors, outlines a specific set of rules to begin playing all games. These fundamentals act as necessary pre-requisites to successful play in games. The rhetoric used to describe the rules suggests power and authority. Kubey constructs his rules as “By Laws,” which lends credibility to his construction (5). Some of these rules appear simplistic such as “Keep Cool,” and “Not Too Much or Too Little, but Just Right,” while others usher in outside sources to support the strategy. In the section “Keep
Your Mind in Mind,” Kubey cites psychological research to indicate the success of his approach: “Video game play is also related to the psychological concepts of frustration and aggression. Psychologist J. Dollard first set forth the frustration-aggression hypothesis in 1934. Simplified, the theory says aggression is always the result of frustration. Video games are a safe and effective means of working off aggression” (11). Kubey’s establishment of a rules-based system of play further demystifies the “unreal” nature of games. His use of logos through the psychological study links game playing to a well established field and combats the studies cited by opponents. The link to psychology also further establishes ethos; Kubey personifies a studied player, one who understands video games and their social implications. The analysis also fundamentally subverts the link between video games, violence, and addiction by persuasively utilizing scientific reasoning in favor of video game play.

Many authors at the time devoted their guidebooks to a scientific, studied break down of popular game titles. Their calculations illustrate a remarkable level of mathematic precision, a precision used to build a strong persuasive appeal to logos in the texts. Kubey’s text analyzes the variance and patterns of several popular titles in astonishing detail.

In Figure 1, Kubey provides a chart demonstrating the variability of “modded” Pac-Man machines. A “modded” machine is physically altered to produced different play experiences. Most software created a repeating pattern. A “modded” machine would change that pattern to
generate different patterns. The tables show the differences between the machines and how the game play experience would change. Kubey also notes the differences in definitions between some of these terms used by different players. The analytical approach to games used by these authors illustrates the incredible complexity of the software and the dizzying array of possibilities in any situation within the game. Kubey’s use of these tables embraces the complexity of a game, and anyone not familiar with *Pac-Man* would no doubt have a difficult time deciphering the information. The table not only builds *ethos* through the persona of expertise but also appeals to *logos* through the accuracy of the information.

Kubey progresses into chapters divided by game and genre, providing similar table break downs for each. He also includes detailed charts to guide the audience in reaching a high score. In Figure 2, Kubey’s hand-drawn illustrations appear crude but reveal excessive attention to detail. The *Pac-Man* maze features accurately labeled

Fig. 7
pathways and memorizable strategies for the player to execute in order the beat specific levels. Under each illustration, Kubey provides the strategy names “Bazo’s Breaker,” and the classic “Donut Dazzler.”

Other texts of this time provide more robust examples of authors utilizing *logos* in the form of images. The visual rhetoric illustrates the ability of these authors to capture or freeze the simulacra of a game world, albeit momentarily. The act of freezing the image forms a microscope through which players could better understand the mechanics of game play. Kubey’s text presents a representative example and the most rhetorically powerful artifact due to his use of narrative. Other authors, however, created guides with more detail and strategies focused entirely on the software. In Figure 3, the images presented in the guidebook are exact representations of the two *Donkey Kong* screens. The visual design of the text uses *logos* to appeal to the audience’s intellect, and the professional nature of the illustrations adds to the *ethos* of the author’s.
The example shown in Figure 3 is representative of many other texts I located in the process of writing this piece. Among them, the titles all convey the same message of mastery and skill: *How to Master the Video Games, Score!: Beating the Top 16 Video Games*, and *How to Beat the Video Games*. The texts and authors remain historically noteworthy for transitioning video games from worthless quarter-eating behemoths to real artifacts of social change. The discolored leaves function as a reminder of where video games have been, and how they will continue to endure. Through substituting the rhetoric of mastery for the rhetoric of addiction, these authors disrupt the simplistic labeling of a player as an addict and seek to elevate video games to a true art form.
CONCLUSION

This thesis provides a critical reference point for the ongoing debate in game studies concerning the narratological and ludological frameworks. Video game addiction rhetoric affects both of these fields independently, and a greater understanding of how the addiction stereotype forms can aid both sides in overcoming ongoing rhetorical constructions of addiction. Early secondary texts also provide a greater historical context to the development of video games as a genre. These authors contextualize the formation of video games in popular culture and their texts act as powerful sites of nostalgic discourse.

Perhaps the most significant implication of this thesis involves further opening video games to academic study, and assuring their future in academic discourse. By understanding game addiction, the academic community can break down the entrenched stereotypes associated with discussion of video games. Many game players, including myself, often keep their associations with video games hidden from colleagues for fear of exposing themselves as professed game players. Robert Cover’s “image–idea operations” model illustrates how game play stereotypes can surface even in an academic community. Cover’s analysis provides a poignant reminder of how addiction stereotypes can dangerously affect the future prominence of game studies:
It does remain a fact that the stereotyping of gameplay as addictive continues, and it comes into play in submissions to censorship boards in various countries, it informs government ministers and politicians and lawmakers in their attitude to gaming, it has discernible indirect effects on industry and development funding, it is related to the capacity to study gaming—and to fund that study—within universities and it relates to self-attitudes to gameplay. For these reasons alone the production of the gaming addiction stereotype is worthy of further analysis and further research, and of being drawn back in to the more interesting questions around the nature of gaming. (Cover 2)

Most commonly, the associations ascribed to a game involve simple comparisons to childishness or lack of professionalism. Through understanding the addiction model, however, and taking into consideration Derrida’s substance abuse rhetoric, the academic community can thusly reappropriate video games as a legitimate topic of study. Also, by opening the complex workings and rhetorical positions of video game opponents to academic analysis, their positions can be included as part of discourse. By applying Aristotle’s classical rhetoric to a field such as video game studies, I seek to add more legitimacy and understanding concerning the nature of game studies in an academic environment.

The analysis of this thesis also provides further understanding of how addiction rhetoric is used in the public sphere to reject video games as unacceptable or immoral technology. These stereotypes continually inform the political process, often launching periods of increased scrutiny concerning new video game titles. This scrutiny often leads
to political action from government organizations, which often hinders the furtherance of video games as new media. Cover explains how the ongoing cycle of praising and denouncing new-media also continues to impact the study of games as a legitimate genre:

A cultural ambivalence toward media technologies is marked by the frequent celebration of technologies for the variety of benefits and possibilities that are given in various discourses, and the anxieties around change and disruption to existing social orders in modernity that are understood to be threatened by new technologies and subsequent emerging new social frameworks. (4)

A recognition of this cyclical framework remains crucial to understanding the potential benefits of video games, and how some voices seek to undermine their influence. The continued vacillation between praise and blame in public discourse surrounding video games garners increased attention and “although the vast majority of studies undertaking the examination of electronic games and the emergence of a gaming culture deny that games are addictive, a stereotype of the game player as addicted continues to circulate in various strands of ego-psychology and pedagogical study and, with greater force and political effect, in popular culture, news media and governmental rhetoric” (Cover 1). The continued success and existence of game studies depends on greater understanding of the social implications of the field, in addition to the major voices of opposition.

**Future Research**

Further explorations of this topic could focus on the role early video game texts played in establishing the video game subculture in the United States. As mentioned in my introduction, rhetorical studies of game communities have accelerated in the Internet
age. Gamer players create elaborate systems of communication that typically consist of discussion boards and sophisticated in-game chat programs (Alexander, Whiteman). Many of these studies focus on the specific language developed by game players to communicate both in and out of game worlds. Early secondary texts could further develop scholarship focused on understanding the rhetorical communities associated with video games. The inclusive language used in the guidebooks, in particular, can illuminate the complexity of early game communities. These texts can reveal a historic context and provide a case study for analysis of how early game communities formed in print as compared to online communities.

A study of the inclusive language and formation of rhetorical communities in response to addiction claims could have pedagogical implications and help to inform scholarship focused on game players in the classroom. Further investigation into the methods authors used to instruct, inform, and combat addiction rhetoric with their audiences could deepen academic understandings of multiple literacies. Instructors could also better understand the community and gain valuable insight into how the game addiction stereotype could limit student participation. In order to further incorporate new literacies into composition instruction in regards to video games, student/game player responses to addiction rhetoric should be explored.

Another potential area of research involves a study of the video game guidebook genre. The texts I located are the very first examples of a genre that continues to endure. Though game guidebooks became massively popular during my own childhood, their popularity has since waned. The rise and adoption of self-publication resources, especially youtube.com in this context, has considerably lessened the need for static
guidebooks in print. Users can generate their own level walkthroughs and strategies visually, which provides tangible benefits over print versions. Contemporary guidebooks largely function as expensive companion texts now, complete with sections of concept art and extensive amounts of often-unnecessary information (character bios, bestiaries). The early guidebooks illustrate the foundation of this genre and could be used as a part of a larger genre study.
REFERENCES


