

When Your World is Too Stressful, Step into A Different One for A Bit: Video Games as Escape

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When the COVID-19 pandemic hit worldwide in March 2020 there was a surge of people picking up video games as a hobby for the first time. As Ben Gilbert (2020) covered in their article, the pandemic resulted in Nintendo Switches being sold out across most of the world due to the unexpected high demand putting a strain on the company's production. People now had a lot of free time and were unable to leave their homes, so many of them turned to video games to be less bored, but also to forget about the pandemic and other social stressors for a while.

One game that without a doubt contributed to the increased demand for Nintendo Switch consoles is *Animal Crossings: New Horizons*. The game released on March 20, 2020 and its release lined up perfectly with when pandemic shutdowns and lock downs began to take effect. As Keza MacDonald (2020) discusses in their article, this simple game sets players on a deserted island and allows them nearly unlimited creative freedom is the exact thing that many people needed when big stressful world events seemed to be a weekly thing. One of the great things about *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* is the fact that a day in the game matches up with a day in our world, as the game progresses real time. This means that people can enjoy playing the game for months because of its slower pace, and even incorporate checking the game as part of a morning or nightly routine. For teens and young adults that are dealing with their schools being shut down, suddenly not being able to see their friends and the constant anxiety-inducing media around them, escaping to a deserted island for a little while seems like a great idea. Further, having something to do daily and almost build a schedule around can help teens find some organization in the chaos that is a global pandemic.

Animal Crossing is not the only video game that gained incredible popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. In November the app and PC based game *Among Us* became incredibly popular, especially among young adults (Basco, 2020). In contrast to the calming and serene world of *Animal Crossing*, *Among Us* is a game that pits users against one another in an online spaceship simulation. Most users play as a crewmate and try to complete their tasks on the ship, while 1-3 users play as the imposter who must try and kill the other players without being found out. Players are heavily suspicious of one another, after discussions and through a majority rules situation a player is voted off after each meeting. Many teens are drawn to the strategical aspect of the game and it filled their desire to play something that stimulated their mind (Basco, 2020).

While the pandemic brought about certain trends within video game consumption, video games remain a wonderful form of escape even when there is not a global pandemic. Video games allow players to go to another place for a little while and play someone who could be different from themselves. Hester (2020) notes how video games are a great way to escape from social pressures or stress, and for teens that can end up being something incredibly important to them. Young adults must deal with school, family, friends, maybe college applications or a part time job, and handling all these big stressful decisions all the time can wear someone down mentally. Video games allow teens to put aside their problems for a little while and engage with a world, characters and problems that are more easily solvable.

Video games can also be an important social connection for young adults if they choose to engage in online play. There are vast networks of young adults that play certain games across the world, and you can form lifelong friendships through these kinds of connections. Playing and interacting with people online can help a young adult with social anxiety make friends and maybe become more comfortable with social interaction. Young adults have more control in a virtual game world, and it can make that space more comfortable for them to interact in.

The biggest thing that video games bring to the escapism discord for any age group is the expansive range of genres and types of games available. There are different consoles to choose from,

playing on your computer or even playing on your phone. There are different mediums available, and people can choose what they are most comfortable with. Further, there is truly a video game out there for anyone, as there is such a variety of types of games and stories within games.

When it comes to video games teens and young adults face a disadvantage, and that is regarding the financial aspect of video game consumption. Video game consoles, the games themselves, a gaming pc or even certain phone apps, all cost money and usually a significant sum of money. For teens and young adults who maybe do not work or are not old enough to work, they may rely on their parents for money and might not be able to buy the necessary equipment to engagement with his hobby in the way that they would like. This is where libraries can be extremely beneficial because they can have these consoles and games available for teens to use. Further, there are library computers available for young adults to play games online. Libraries can help bridge the financial gap a little bit so that all teens and young adults can enjoy the entertainment and escape that video games provide.

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