Where *Minecraft* Lands Amidst the Social Fabric of Young Gamers

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Abstract

This research study examines the intricacies of the development of the social fabric of children aged nine to twelve-years old who play the popular video game *Minecraft*. The term "social fabric" functions as a catch-all for empathy, prosocial behaviors, and social competence. The research is grounded in historical context as well as literary context that details the development of *Minecraft* and the current research findings that exist already. The method for this study is interviews intending to draw out pertinent information about how important *Minecraft* is to children in the age demographic, as well as whether they display empathy, prosocial behaviors, and social competence, and finally, if they do, whom they display those behaviors and traits to. The study concludes that these children have at least some level of empathy, prosocial behavior, and social competence, and that most of them have high levels of these traits. The study also found that the noted traits were most often displayed to immediate family members and friends.

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Parenting is an ever-changing and therefore unique experience for both parents and children. In the average household across the world, no two children are raised in the exact same way or exposed to the exact same things. A key contributor to this unique experience for the last fifty years has been digital gaming. Digital games have a storied history, although that history is not yet very lengthy. Digital games are diverse when it comes to the various types that are available. Some types of games are first-person shooters, or FPS, roleplaying games where one creates and acts out their own personal character through a certain narrative, strategy games where the player must devise various and sometimes complex ways to achieve the goal of the game, and games that are a mixture of two or more of the previous types. Digital games are also playable through several systems. When it comes to people experiencing the transition from being children to young teens and the developmental milestones that come with it, a common way in which the activity at hand, gaming, is featured in the lives of young children is through home consoles.

For instance, when a parent must leave their child alone for extended periods of time (for work, romantic life, etc.), the parent or caregiver may try to find a way to entertain the child. According to Pew research, about 9 out of 10 parents allow their children to play video games (2014). So, video games are often used to occupy a child for these extended periods of time when, perhaps, a parent has work or other instrumental tasks to do. Instead of having to multi-task by both trying to work and worry about what the child is doing, having the child play a game on a console in their own home can put the parent's mind at ease. In this way, video games can be introduced into people's lives.

Therefore, it could be said that video games have found their way into the hearts and minds of many children and continue to do so currently.

Deciding what the impact of video games is on children is a hotly debated subject. Many would argue digital gaming turns kids to self-isolating and insular type habits, which then leads to socially inept adults. Maher (2013) writes about when the then-current Surgeon General Everett Koop put out a warning saying, "'All you have to do. . . is see a youngster playing a video game and watch his behavior as exhibited by body language or outright attacks on components of the game or the television screen to understand just how deep is the connection'" (p.96). In this statement, Koop is addressing another argument from those who consider video games a negative influence, and that argument is that video games hold an unhealthy connection to the player that may encourage aggression and obsession.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who argue that digital gaming can be a bountiful opportunity for children to form bonds with others, advance the development of their moral compass and socializing capability, and even expand their vocabularies at faster rates than other children who do not play video games (McGonigal 2010; Michelle et al. 2017; Utah Valley Pediatrics 2019). This study addresses examples of previously conducted research on digital gaming, which serves to supplement the results and analysis of an interview process that delves into the impact *Minecraft* (2011) makes amidst the formation of social fabric in young gamers. Furthermore, whether playing *Minecraft* encourages children aged nine to twelve to form social bonds and increase their levels of empathy and social competence, or if playing *Minecraft* encourages children to resort to habits of self-isolation. Prior research argues both directions of

influence (Brubaker 2020; Maher 2013). The next section will define terminology and history of existing research into the gaming done by children aged nine to twelve.

Terms and Definitions Via a Brief History

Developmental Milestones of a Nine to Twelve-Years-Old. This research revolves around the age range of nine to twelve-years-old. According to the CDC, there are several key changes that occur socially for children and adolescents this age. Examples of such change is the development of complex friend relationships and the introduction of peer groups (Middle Childhood, 2019). Similarly, the CDC stated three months later the growing interest in the peer groups that tend to form during this age range, and children quickly become more socially aware of themselves and those around them in general during this time (Young Teens, 2019). This research analyzes the results of the interview process with these developmental milestones in mind.

Social bonding and the formation of complex friendships and peer groups all occur within the age range of nine to twelve years old. Through the analysis of interview statistics as well as observation of the presence of multiplayer, availability of co-op, partner activities, and more during critical game analysis, this research will work toward revealing what the potential impact of *Minecraft* is for its young participants.

Video Games or Digital Gaming. The term "video games" is commonly known to be synonymous with "digital games." Digital games were not invented, however, until the 1970s. The first "video games" can be traced to the 1950s and early 1960s when games such as T*ennis for Two* and *OXO* were invented (Wikimedia 2021). They were displayed on analog screens and could only be built into individual systems with no game

cartridge or disc being available yet. Digital games thereafter became synonymous with video games when gaming technology took a leap forward with digitized gameplay that was true to the medium of going digital. This giant step forward in the gaming industry is marked by Ralph Baer's invention of the game *Pong*, which was released along with 27 other games on the Magnavox Odyssey home console system. The first of its kind, it came with a small joystick controller and all 28 games pre-loaded onto the console.

This console was then succeeded when in 1977 Atari released the Atari 2600, which introduced game cartridges and multi-colored games. According to History.com, after the release of the Atari 2600, there was a near decade long economic downturn for the video game industry which was characterized by "An oversaturated game console market. . . and a surplus of over-hyped, low-quality games" (2017). Many game development companies had to file for bankruptcy after this harsh drop in the gaming industry.

Video games made a strong comeback when in 1985 the long-time game company Nintendo released the Nintendo Entertainment System or NES (History.com 2017). The NES had the best sound and graphics to date and was popular for several years until Nintendo then released the first handheld gaming console in 1989, the Game Boy. After the original Game Boy's release, an entirely new era of gaming began, during which *Minecraft* emerged.

The Last Twenty-Five Years: 3D Gaming as The Roots of Modern-Day Gaming. Three-dimensional (3D) gaming, which is the foundation of nearly all modern-day gaming, was released in 1995 through Sega's Saturn console, Sony's PlayStation console, and Nintendo's Nintendo 64 console. The Saturn and Nintendo 64 had games

such as *Virtua Fighter* and *Super Mario 64,* which allowed players to play games in 32-bit and 64-bit graphics. In other words, they were the first video games to play a 3-dimensional character in a game world that could be rotated and observed in a full 360-degree camera pan. Over the next decade from 1995-2005, numerous gaming consoles emerged as the gaming industry would cross the gap from the early days of 3D gaming into modern-day gaming. Some consoles such as the Nintendo Wii, Nintendo DS, the PlayStation 2, the PlayStation 3, Microsoft's Xbox, and the Xbox 360 were released during this time and are still owned and played on today. This brings the world of gaming to when *Minecraft* was initially released in 2011. Minecraft is a 3D video game available on all platforms, and presents two main game modes to play, both of which encourage a cooperative style of play.

Literature Review

Prior literature suggests that parents are concerned with the impact that gaming has on their children's social aptitude and capabilities (Michelle et al., 2017; Utah Valley Pediatrics, 2019). According to McGonigal (2010) however, when children are gaming, especially on video games with the availability of multiplayer, games can lead to the formation of tighter social bonds and forming them more often. O'Connor et al. (2015) presents qualitative research findings that would support this conjecture by McGonigal. Durkin et al. (2013) state that gaming can assist with the learning process in grade school and encourage camaraderie among those with special learning needs. While Utah Valley Pediatrics state that children who play games run the risk of addiction and atrophied social bonds, Durkin et al. (2013) and McGonigal (2010) take a completely different

approach and state that video games are an opportunity to form and strengthen social bonds and enhance the learning experience.

Many parents are concerned with the impact gaming can have on the socialization and aptitude of the children who play them. This preliminary literature surrounding this topic is what prompted this study into the social competence and empathy levels of children aged nine-to-twelve who play *Minecraft*.

Rationale on Game Choice. *Minecraft* is one of, if not the, most popular video games with the age demographics delineated. Currently, the game has nearly 100 million active players worldwide (Gough, 2018) and roughly 20% are under the age of fifteen (Quora, 2015). The game was originally released in 2009 on PC, and it has since been released on PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, and Nintendo Switch. This research represents as many of those in the nine to twelve-year-old age range as possible. *Minecraft* as a stand-alone game has achieved and maintained widespread popularity and play, with a large number of those players being in the nine to twelve-year-old age range, which is why that game was selected.

Empathy and Displayed Behaviors

Authors, in turn, also hotly debate the factors of empathy and social behavior of young gamers. Utah Valley Pediatrics reports that children may begin to view video games as a "social replacement" and allow their behaviors outside video games to deteriorate since they see the virtual world as a viable replacement (2019). McGonigal (2010) echoes retrospectively however that video games, especially those of a cooperative nature, can imbue players with deep-rooted sense of the importance of what

she calls "weaving a tight social fabric" (2010, 9:12-10:05). This social fabric is the bonds and behaviors that we have and exhibit with other individuals that exists on a scale of strength level. While these two qualified inputs exist within the same decade, a third input makes an entrance among other literature mentioned previously between Utah Valley Pediatrics and McGonigal. This assertion is a reminder that Lobel et al. found in their own research study that empathy and the display of certain prosocial behaviors has no correlation with video game play, even cooperative style games (2017). Hygen et al. (2017) also found a similar association in their research study, although it is not discussed and pointed out as clearly as Lobel et al.'s (2019). So, the prior research and literature into the topic at hand offers several paths in their early stages of establishment that this study may follow in.

This section of review highlights what authors and scholars research findings say about the empathy levels and displayed social behaviors of young gamers. To discover how video games may fit into the empathy and displayed social behaviors of young gamers, the following research question is asked:

RQ1: What kind of influence does *Minecraft* have on the empathy levels and displayed social behavior of young gamers?

Social Competence

The primary factors of concern in this study are the social competence, levels of empathy, and prosocial behaviors exhibited by children in the given age demographic who play *Minecraft*. In similar research fashions Brubaker (2020); Hygen et al. (2019); Lobel et al. (2017) evaluated the relationship between video games and their participants.

Hygen et al. asserts that, according to their research, growing levels of social competence would predict a growing disinterest in video games entirely over the course of two years from the point of growth (2019). This particular finding determined one of its possible implications is that true social competence inspires a lack of interest in something like a video game. Brubaker responds with a correlation that establishes children who play cooperative video games with characters and gameplay that encourages the competence and social behaviors desired in the ideal individual often come away with crucial completions in social learning objectives (2020). However, Lobel et al. (2017) found that cooperative style games (such as *Minecraft*) appear to have no correlation whatsoever to the social competence and behavior of children who play them (2017). This grouping of literature and research suggests that this field is still a budding one in which qualified research seems to point in every direction.

This review section details what authors and scholars have to say about the possible affect games have on the developing social competence of the children who play them. To understand how social competence may be affected in this scenario, the second research question is asked:

RQ2: How does participation in the video game *Minecraft* impact the social competence of the children who play?

The results of the current study are reflected upon in the discussion and concluding remarks of this project regarding which direction the research went in reference to the impact on the social behavior of children who play *Minecraft*. The next section will include a description of the method, which addresses the materials and participants that were involved respectively.

Method

This study ran from September 2021 to October 2021. The study received ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board of Middle Tennessee State University (IRB 22-2035 7v, Appendix B).

Study Design

Parents of children aged nine to twelve-years-old who play the video game *Minecraft* were invited to participate in this voluntary study via the social media platforms of Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram. Social media handles as well as a phone number were provided for potential participants to reach out to.

This research consisted of a twelve-question interview process for each participant (Appendices A & B). In accordance with IRB research permissions, eight parents participated as interviewees and answered questions about their children's *Minecraft* gaming habits and their social behavior. The interviewees were permitted to answer questions at any length and encouraged to expand on topics and question answers that they thought were pertinent to the subject matter. The questions were intended to answer the research questions and to discuss the gaming habits and social behavior of children within the given age demographic (nine to twelve-years-old). Participants had the option of doing the interview virtually or in-person. If the virtual interview was selected, participants could be contacted over Zoom or phone call. Ultimately, all eight interviews were conducted over the phone via voice call, recorded, and later transcribed for clarity. Any quotes used are directly gathered from the combined 26 pages of single-spaced transcriptions.

Participants

The first three questions of the interview were constructed to pull out demographic information. Question one requested the age and gender of the child that plays *Minecraft* that was discussed in the interview. Question two was meant to find out approximately how long the child has been a *Minecraft* player. Finally, question three asked about the child's particular gaming habits concerning *Minecraft* (Appendix B).

Out of a total of eight interviews, seven of the interviewees were mothers and one interviewee was a father. In terms of the children, six out of eight were male and the remaining two as female. The average age of the children was about 11.13 years old, with the youngest being age nine and the oldest being age twelve. This particular age demographic was selected to be the interview parameter due to the developmental psychology literature in place that states that the nine-twelve age range is a part of the same developmental stage.

The shortest amount of gameplay experience was one year, while the longest gameplay experience was seven years, thereby resulting in the average gameplay experience of an individual child to be four years. The eight children collectively have a total of 32 years of gameplay experience on *Minecraft*. Finally, the average gaming session length is *2.44 hours of play occurring an average of five days a week*. The minimum time spent in a gaming session is for one hour and two days a week, while the maximum time spent is for three hours and seven days a week.

Results

While this section did not directly address either of the research questions, they were results worth briefly highlighting due to their indirect relationship to the two research questions. According to the literature, who they play with and how they play with those people is a very important sub-topic and has many implications that lead into the research questions. The first theme that will be reviewed is (1) "Playing and Engaging with Friends", and the next is (2) "Playing and Engaging with Family".

Organizing Theme: Socialization of Young *Minecraft* Player

Basic Theme: Playing and Engaging with Friends. Seven of eight participants reported their child often plays Minecraft with a friend or multiple friends either online or in-person depending on the day and time of the week. For example, one parent stated that their child plays online with the same group of friends regularly.

> She plays most consistently with the club she's in, which is two or three other kids around her age and the adult leader of the club. She has a lot of investment in what she is doing with her own builds and her club. Being a part of that and playing with them, it means a lot to her. (Mother Of eleven-year-old daughter)

Whereas, another parent stated that their son plays friends that he met online through the game system. They were not friends prior; however, the game has created a friendship between the children.

> They do like to talk about it and show each other their cities. They like to give each other advice on how to do things better or differently. They all

> play together when his friends come over to the house sometimes. (Mother of twelve-year-old son)

Not only does this boy play the game online, but he also plays the game with friends face-to-face at his home.

Basic Theme: Playing and Engaging with Family. Many participants also reported their child often plays Minecraft with a family member either online or in-person. For example, this child has plays the game in-person with a younger sibling.

> It lets them connect in a new and fresh way that may have not been there before. Especially when it comes to his younger sister, because playing *Minecraft* seems to break down the barrier that is sometimes between them and just lets them have fun together. (Mother of twelve-year-old son)

Parents also play *Minecraft* with their children. Not only does this child play this game in-person with his parents, but he also plays it with a relative online.

> He enjoys spending time with his parents, and just recently started playing with his cousin who lives in another state. They did not really have a relationship before and now they do because of the game. (Mother of nine-year-old son)

The game connected these children to family members in the home and outside of the home for this theme. The next themes identified address empathy and social behaviors among the Minecraft players.

To address **RQ1**, what kind of influence does *Minecraft* have on the empathy levels and displayed social behavior of young gamers, there were two themes identified:

(1) empathy and prosocial behaviors among family, and (2) empathy and prosocial behavior among friends. The first theme that will be reviewed is empathy and prosocial behavior among family.

Organizing Theme: Empathy and Other Social Behaviors Among *Minecraft* Players

Most of the participants reported that their child had vast amounts of empathy within them and that they often displayed that empathy through various acts involving several people in their lives. The one exception included a caveat that the child being interviewed about has severe ADHD and social anxiety. Disorders and chronic issues were not screened for beforehand, only the age and interest in Minecraft were used as prerequisites for participation and validity in this research. However, all of the participants reported that their child had at least some degree of empathy and exhibited prosocial behaviors to some extent. For example, this eleven-year-old girl showed empathy towards others at school.

> She is very empathetic and understanding toward other individuals. She has a friend in school, and the teacher was telling me that my daughter saw that girl was crying and she went and sat with her and talked to the other girl while she was crying and helped them process their own emotions and stayed until the other student felt better. This is not the first or only time, there are other examples. Like when I went and sat with her at lunch in first grade and she saw another girl crying and went to quietly check on her, with no show to it. She came back and said ‘she’ll be alright now’ and sat back down. I also find a lot of other notes from children in her backpack saying ‘thanks for helping me today’ or ‘thanks for talking with me today’ (Mother on eleven-year-old daughter)

The children provided support to others, and can also bring others together. This child is seen as a "connector" between individuals who may not otherwise associate, as well as a positive influence on the people around them.

> She is very outgoing and understanding. She brings people together. She serves as a connector between people and is a positive influence on the people around her. (Mother on ten-year-old daughter)

Basic Theme: Empathy and Prosocial Behavior Among Family. Many of the participants detailed who their child displays empathy and understanding towards. One dimension revolved around the child's empathy towards a younger family member.

> He is very helpful to his friends at school. but a better example would be a recent family vacation we took, where he played with his three-year-old cousin. He was very patient and empathetic with her as opposed to getting frustrated or upset that she could not keep up with him. (Mother on nine-year-old son)

These two older 12-year-old boys also display empathy and prosocial behaviors with their family at home and extended family.

> He is very helpful around the house and helps his little brother specifically learn his spelling words at night. (Mother on twelve-year-old son)

> Well, he likes to give things to his other siblings or nieces and nephews, mostly toys. He is very helpful to my husband and I whenever we need something. He goes to work with my husband a lot and they all know him and love him there. He likes to help my husband at work with any little errands he can. (Mother on twelve-year-old son)

An interesting layer about these last two entries is that the children interviewed about were homeschooled. They do not have the day-to-day interaction that most other children have (socialization) and yet their parents reported no decline or delay in the development of their empathy or prosocial behavior. Furthermore, the child was helpful and engaged with his parents.

Basic Theme: Empathy and Prosocial Behavior Among Friends. All of the results revolved around the display of empathy and prosocial behavior among friends as well.

This 10-year-old girl was rated highly by their parent on the empathy scale and prosocial behavior questions from the interview process (Appendix A). This appears to be reflected in this answer of how well the child weaves her social fabric at school.

> She was recently selected to be a fourth-grade ambassador at school because of how kind and welcoming she is to other kids. She is well liked and had many friends so they want her to be the one that gets pulled from class to walk and talk with kids who are brand-new to the school. (Mother on ten-year-old daughter)

This child highlights one of the common examples children this age can provide when it comes to prosocial behavior, which is participation in school fundraisers.

> He always wants to get donations for fundraisers at school, the most recent one had him all fired up about victims of hurricane Ida. He cares a lot about his friends from school as well and is very helpful to them. (Mother on twelve-year-old son)

This final entry demonstrates that the persons the children directed their empathy and prosocial behaviors to varied. It is important to remember that these friends can come from school, extracurricular activities and groups, or relationships that are strictly online.

> The people in her [*Minecraft*] club. It's all online and they have never met each other in real life, but they meet every week and chat away with each other when they are talking through their headphones. She enjoys playing with her club very much and they all help each other out on the game so that it is more fun for everyone. Again, they play every week and she has just loved it. (Mother on eleven-year-old daughter)

To address **RQ2**, how does participation in the video game *Minecraft* impact the social competence of the children who play, there were two themes identified: (1) Current frames of social competence, and (2) projected social competence in a challenging scenario. The first theme that will be reviewed is current frames of social competence.

Organizing Theme: Social Competency Among *Minecraft* Players

Basic Theme: Current Frames of Social Competence. One of the interview questions asked for parents to measure their child's level of social competency as it currently stands using a scale of 1-10 with ten being the highest and one being the lowest. This mother of a 12-year-old son used "shy at first" which other parents also stated when answering about their child's social competency.

> He is always shy at first around new people or a new group. It sometimes takes him awhile to figure out the right things to do and say, but he usually gets over that fairly quickly and starts to fit in. (Mother on twelve-year-old son)

This next child displays high levels of social competency as well as the mother's belief she has potential for future leadership roles.

> She is often reserved at first and likes to take the lay of the land, but I think she does fine and excels when it comes to being socially competent. She has such grace and aptitude when it comes to interacting with other people and it consistently shows on a daily basis. She could even assume leadership if she wanted to but I do not think she would force it. (Mother on eleven-year-old daughter)

Although the mother of the 11-year-old girl felt she had high level of social competency, not all parents agreed. This is an example of a child who was not given a high score when it came to social competency.

> I feel like he is not the most socially competent but very few people are at this age. He manages just fine at school and church and other things but I would not say it is his strong suit. (Mother on twelve-year-old son)

Another key concept identified and interviewed about was the social competency or capability of the children being interviewed about. All but one of the interviewees had positive responses when asked to imagine their children in particular scenarios where that skill would be challenged.

Basic Theme: Projected Social Competence in a Challenging Scenario. One of the interview questions asked the participants to imagine their children were dropped into a specific scenario where their social competency would be challenged by asking, "With prior answers and behaviors in mind, imagine your child is introduced to a new social

environment with new people they have not met before (such as the first day at a new school), how would they react?" (Appendix A). The results of asking this question reflected children who are armed with the knowledge, patience, and confidence to accept the challenge of a new environment and handle it accordingly.

This child seems to be apprehensive at first but is equipped with the necessary tools to overcome and thrive in the scenario.

> We actually had that situation happen just this last year, because he started at a new school. He was very nervous and unsure at first but at the end of just a few days had made friends and was talking about all sorts of people at school. We often times encourage him to walk up and talk to other kids when we are at the beach or the park and he enjoys that quite a bit. Overall, I would say he knows how to handle himself really well for a kid his age in these kinds of ambiguous social situations. (Mother on nine-year-old son)

This child displays great aptitude in uncertain social situations like the scenario coined, being characterized as a "social butterfly" with great poise in meeting new people in new environments.

> He just recently switched to a new school this last year. He's already made leaps and bounds in the school. He handles himself really well and knows how to fraternize with people. He has made many friends, feels comfortable and is on the football team. He is always a social butterfly. (Father on twelve-year-old son)

Several of the children discussed in the interviews recently experienced a similar scenario. The next section highlights the discussion around the themes delineated.

Discussion

This study examined the social competency as well as the levels of empathy and prosocial behavior displayed by children aged nine to twelve-years-old who play the video game *Minecraft*. This research was done within the context of particular psycho-social development that occurs in the particular time period of someone's life when they are nine to twelve-years-old and prior research studies that highlight the possible impacts video games may have on those who play them.

The findings the present study uncovered support the findings and conjecture that suggest that a multiplayer cooperative style game such as Minecraft encourages social support and a sense of community, as well as the proper formation of a tightly woven social fabric (O'Connor 2015; McGonigal 2010). A prerequisite for participants in this research/interview process was that the child that was to be interviewed about is an avid *Minecraft* player. The interview results of demographic-type questions related to the place *Minecraft* has in the lives of the children interviewed about reveal that *Minecraft* is a focal point for their time spent with friends and in some cases family as well.

The research yielded the identification of three different groups of people that empathy, prosocial behaviors, and social competence manifest in front of. These groups are family, friends, and online contacts. This identification points to the potential importance of socialization paths for children who are gamers. With other research fields contributing a great deal of study and literature to the topic of socialization among friends, family, and the ever-growing online community, this study provided a closer investigation and analysis on the importance of not only *who* children display empathy, prosocial behavior, and social competence to, but also *who they play with*. This closer

investigation could involve a transcription of candid gameplay with various groups of people such as friends, family, or others known only in an online manner. This transcription could then be analyzed.

The analysis of the interview results also reveals that there may also be a larger gamer community at play in this subject matter. While previous literature mentions video games such as *World of Warcraft* and *Call of Duty*, the age demographic of players participating in those games is unclear at best. However, many interviewees reported their children having great interest in the video game called *Roblox*. This game was described as being a similar focal point behind *Minecraft* that the children being interviewed about enjoyed playing with their friends and other people online. This broader gaming community begs the question of how a game like *Roblox* factors into the social fabric development of children in this nine to twelve-year-old age demographic.

Research Limitations

The primary limitation for this research study was the small sample size. While eight individuals can certainly provide ample amounts of valuable information, it may not provide the same conclusions as research with a larger sample size. The sample was also completely composed of parents and children from the mid-south. The video game *Minecraft* is played internationally by millions of individuals worldwide (Gough 2018). Thus, this sample is limited due to the narrowness of where the sample came from. This study also interviewed primarily mothers as opposed to fathers throughout this process, with seven interviewees being mothers and only one interviewee being a father. This was also interesting in an unrelated manner; it was explicitly mentioned by the father in the one interview that they were only participating in the interview because the mother was

unable to at the time. Finally, the study lacks any true conclusive capability due to the absence of method seeking to measure levels of apathy, antisocial behaviors, and social incompetence that may manifest. This reflects a missing proverbial yang to the yin of this research endeavor.

Conclusion

This qualitative style research afforded the opportunity to take a deep and thorough look at the empathy, prosocial behavior, and social competency of the eight individual children who were interviewed about. The interview results demonstrate the possible impact the game *Minecraft* itself has on the forming social fabric of young gamers, confirming that the game at the very least functions as a vehicle for the development of empathy, prosocial behaviors, and social competence. In terms of future research, this study should be repeated with a larger sample size and diversity of geographic area. This study, in conjunction with those improved studies that combat the present limitations, could work to further the field as a whole.

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Appendices

Appendix A (Interview Process)

Interview Questions

- Are you okay with me recording the interview, so that I do not have to type everything you say?
- Introduction: Thanks for agreeing to spend some time discussing the social behavior of your child with me, I am very grateful. I've got some questions prepared to guide us along the interview, but your responses are voluntary. You can also skip or decline any of these questions. You can also stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin? Then let's begin!

1. What is the age and gender of the child that plays *Minecraft* you will discuss in this interview?
2. Approximately how long has your child been a *Minecraft* player?
3. So could you tell me about your child's general gaming habits? (frequency of play, for how long, and typically when).
4. Do you have any thoughts pertaining to the influence or lack thereof that video games have on the social behavior (the manner in which people interact with each other) of those who play them?
5. How does the specific video game *Minecraft* factor into the gaming done by your child/children?
6. Who typically plays the game with your child?
7. Does your child have any kind of established friend group, a group of people they

depend on and/or like a lot, get along with, seem to relate to? (social fabric) How does the game play a part in this friend group?

8. When your child plays *Minecraft*, do they seek out other family members to play with them? How does it impact the relationships in your family?

9. Does your child play with others online besides their friend group or family members? (other individuals known only in an online manner)? How does this influence their social behavior or social fabric?

10. On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your child's empathy or understanding toward other individuals?

11. Does your child demonstrate any or all of the behaviors of helping, sharing, donating, co-operating, or volunteering? (general "prosocial behaviors" set) Could you provide examples?

12. On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your child's level of Social Competence? (the ability to properly evaluate and react to social situations). With prior answers and behaviors in mind, imagine your child is introduced to a new social environment with new people they have not met before (such as the first day at a new school), how would they react? What behaviors would likely come forth from them?

- Our time together is coming to a close now, so I just want to ask if there is anything else you would like to add before we conclude? . . . Thank you for your time and your input about your child's gaming habits and social behavior. What you have provided is invaluable and much appreciated.

Appendix B (IRB)

IRB

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building, 2269
Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

IRBF030 – Zoom Interview Informed Consent for Expedited Protocols

INFORMATION AND DISCLOSURE SEGMENT

(Part A. Participant Copy)

Study Title	**Where Minecraft Lands Amidst the Social Fabric of Young Gamers**
Primary Investigator(s)	Antonio Chioccio ***Faculty Advisor:*** DeAnne Priddis
Department & College	Communication Studies, Liberal Arts
Contact information	deanne.priddis@mtsu.edu
IRB ID	**22-2035 7v** ***Approval*: 09/17/2021** ***Expiration*: 09/30/2022**

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project in which you have been invited to participate. Please read this disclosure and feel free to ask any questions. The investigators must answer all of your questions prior to your participation and you must be given a signed copy of this disclosure.

- Your participation in this research study is voluntary.
- You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without loss of any benefits.
- In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with thisresearch study, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision at that time.

For additional information on your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the MTSU Research Compliance (Tel 615-494-8918 or send your emails to irb_information@mtsu.edu. (URL: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb).

Please read this section and retain this for future reference. Once you have completed readingthis section, please give consent as directed in the end of this document if you wish to enroll.

☒ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐

☐ **1. What are the prime types of physical contact the participant will have?**
The participant will have the following type(s) of contact(s) with the investigators or/and otherparticipants at least sometimes during this research:

☐ ☐ ☐ 1.1 ***Virtual Interactions*** ☒ ☐ ☐

Qualtrics *Zoom* *Telephone* *Other*

1.2 ***In person interactions*** **NONE**

2. What is the main category of this research?

2.1 ***Educational Tests Evaluation***: 2.2 Social/***Behavioral***

2.3 ***Psychological intervention or procedures*** 2.4 ***Physical Evaluation or Procedures***

2.5 ***Medical Evaluation*** *2.6 Clinical Research*

3. What is the purpose of this study?

This qualitative research project to learn about social behavior of children age nine to twelve who play *Minecraft*. Various behaviors such as social-competency or incompetency, empathy, and self-isolation all appear to be common behaviors in the case of nine-to-twelve year old children who play *Minecraft*. We are curious if these types of behaviors are isolated examples orif there exists other pertinent evidence in support of other conclusions.

4. **What type of data will be collected from you?**
   Study participation includes answering 12 interview questions on topics about their child'sbehavior that plays *Minecraft*.

5. **What are procedures we intend on doing to collect the above described data?**
   The interview will take place either on the phone or Zoom. An audio recording of the interviewwill be made to help for transcription of the interview only. The audio recording will be erasedafter the interview is transcribed. However, there will be NO video recording.

☒ 5.1 ***Audio recording*** ☒ 5.2 ***Video Recording*** ☐ 5.3 ***Photography*** ☒ 5.4 ***NO audio/video recording***

6. **What will you be asked to do in this study?**
   Your participation will include reviewing a consent form when you agree to participate in thestudy, and then answering the 12 questions either on Zoom or over the phone.

7. **What are we planning to do with the data collected using your participation?**
   The interviewing is being done to learn about the behavior of children ages 9-12 that play*Minecraft*.

8. **What are the expected results of this study and how will they be disseminated?**

   The student and professor will learn the various behaviors of children ages 9-12 that play *Minecraft* according to their parents. This data will be used for the student thesis. Your confidential information will help to further his education and research techniques. His researchmay be published later in an academic journal or presented at a conference.

9. **What is the approximate time commitment not including your preparation time forparticipating in this study?**
   the entire interview should take approximately 20 minutes. There is only one interview needed.The total time commitment will be less than 30 minutes.

10. **What are your expected costs to you, your effort, and etc.?**
    Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you will not be compensated for your time. Youmay choose to not answer any of the questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your decision will not change any present or future relationship with the Middle Tennessee State University.

11. **What are the potential discomforts, inconveniences, and/or possible risks that can bereasonably expected as a result of participation in this study?**
    You will be asked questions pertaining to your child that plays *Minecraft*

and their behaviors.You are free to skip any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

12. What are the anticipated benefits from this study?

a. The benefits to science and humankind that may result from this research:This data will be used to write a thesis, and potentially for future publication or presentation. Your involvement will remain confidential, as you are assigned a pseudonym.

b. ***The direct benefits to you:*** There are no direct benefits to the participants

13. **How will you be compensated for your participation?**
    You will not be compensated for your participation. The only benefit to you is to help furtherresearch in this field.

14. **Circumstances under which the researcher may withdraw you from this study:**
    The researcher may withdraw you from the study if you are not the parent of a 9-12 year oldchild that plays *Minecraft*.

15. **What happens if you choose to withdraw your participation?**
    Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to not answer any of the questionsor withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Your decision will not change any present or future relationship with the Middle Tennessee State University.

16. **Can you stop the participation any time after initially agreeing to give consent/assent?**
    Yes

17. **Contact Information.** If you should have any questions about this research study or possiblyinjury, please feel free to contact Antonio Chioccio by telephone 615-772-7967 or by email acc7p@mtmail.mtsu.edu OR my faculty advisor, DeAnne Priddis, at deanne.priddis@mtsu.edu.For additional information about giving consent of your rights as a participant in this study, to discuss problems, concerns and questions, or to offer input, please feel free to contact the MTSU IRB by email: compliance@mtsu.edu or by telephone (615) 494 8918.

18. **Confidentiality.** All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or thegovernment, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, *if* you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

You do not have to do anything if you decide not to participate. If you wish to enroll, thenplease indicate to the investigator that you are interested in participating. You will then give consent verbally via Zoom. The PI will schedule an interview via the virtual platform Zoom. ThePI will also give you directions on how to setup Zoom in your PC or mobile device. You will be given an opportunity to review the research again before the Zoom session and the PI will usethe signature section (Part B) to confirm and document your consent.

Consent obtained by:

Researcher's Signature	Name and Title	Date

IRBF030 – Participant Informed Consent for Zoom Interviews

(Part B: Researchers' Copy)

Study Title	**Where Minecraft Lands Amidst the Social Fabric of Young Gamers**
Primary Investigator(s)	Antonio Chioccio ***Faculty Advisor:*** DeAnne Priddis
Department & College	Communication Studies, Liberal Arts
Contact information	deanne.priddis@mtsu.edu
IRB ID	**22-2035 7v** ***Approval*: 09/17/2021** ***Expiration*: 09/30/2022**

PARTICIPANT SECTION

(To be filled by the researchers)

The investigator will fill this section to document Informed Consent:

Participant Name or ID	(print)	Age:

The investigator will read these questions and record the responses from the participants:	**Participant Response**	
You confirm that you have read this informed consent document	No	Ye
You confirm that the research procedures to be conducted have been explained to you verbally	No	Ye
You understand all of the interventions?	No	Ye
Did we answer all of your questions?	No	Ye
You are aware of the potential risks and discomforts?	No	Ye
You understand that you will be **audio taped and video recorded** and analyzed	No	Ye

The investigator will read the following and record the responses from the participants:

You affirm that you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study. You also understand youcan withdraw from this study at any time without facing any consequences.

Participant's

Response:

☐ YES
☐ NO

Informed Consent obtained by: Faculty Verification (if administered by a student)

Name	Signature Date	Date	Name	Signature