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An Evaluation of Mental Health Stigma Perpetuated by Horror Video Gaming

Elizabeth G. Dickens

Video games often feature mental patients in their storylines. This review is intended to test the hypothesis that these depictions potentially contribute to stigma surrounding mental health communities, and may negatively reflect on those with mental health difficulties. The criteria for evaluating the chosen games were created by combining elements from four separate academic papers. The games were analyzed via screenshots from online videos detailing a playthrough of chosen games, and text from the games themselves. The research within this paper suggests stigma can exist outside of conventional media platforms and highlights the availability of stigma-related horror video games inside the gaming market. This study also emphasizes how the depictions of those with mental health difficulties inside of video games have the capacity to harm mental health communities.

Keywords: stigma, mental health, video games, horror video gaming, review

The priming effect, a widely-discussed mass media effects theory, explains the influence media has over its viewers. Priming, defined as the impact of exposure to media on following judgments and behaviors (Roskos-Edwoldsen, Rokos-Edsoldsen, & Carpentier, 2009, p. 74), acts as an underlying force with the potential to guide people's thoughts and actions. In its initial application, the priming theory was used in reference to political science to explain the phenomena of mass media exposure having a significant effect on individual perspectives (Giddel, Shields, & Peffley, 1997, p. 289). Over time, however, this theory was applied more broadly. According to an updated discussion of media priming by professors David and Beverly Roskos-Edwoldsen, alongside Francesca Carpentier (2009), an associate professor in mass communication theory, the study of media priming in recent years has legitimized and undergone a massive shift from television to video games, in order to assess the reach and impact priming has on viewers (p.74). The potential expansiveness of media priming, in the context of video games, is dependent upon the developing community surrounding gaming.

Video Games as a Culture

According to the Entertainment Software Association (n.d.), the video game sector of the U.S. economy grows at an incredibly quick rate, especially when compared to its competitors (p. 1). Consequently, video games have developed into a form of culture, much like literature or film. In a study by Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, CEO of Serious Games Interactive, Jonas Smith, and Susana Tosca (2016), they state video games present an interesting perspective on digital media (p. 158). Horror video games uniquely found their place in gaming early on, and have essentially been a part of the horror community since the founding of modern-day video game consoles, according to video game designer Richard Rouse III (2009, p. 15). Rouse III (2009) attributes the success of video games in the horror genre to their ability to shed light on the inherently twisted nature of humanity, independently of other media (p. 15-16). However, the expanding exploration of this twisted nature has led to what social scientists refer to as stigma. According to Kaushik, Kostaki, & Kyriakopoulos (2016), stigma is

described on its most surface level, in terms of mental health, as qualities associated with mental conditions that are directed towards those deemed lesser in the social sphere (p. 470). However, to fully quantify the effects of stigma, it must be further broken into two subcategories: public stigma, resulting from the general population endorsing stereotypes, and self-stigma, a result of people with mental health difficulties internalizing these stereotypes (Chan & Mak, 2015, p.1). In accordance with the idea that media perpetuates such stereotypes, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2016) found cultural forms are fluid in their functioning, and highly integrated and shaped by society (p. 158).

Terminology for this Study

A study by Magnus Mfofo-M'Carthy, Charles Gyan, and Cynthia Sottie (2016) discusses the negative depictions of people with mental health difficulties inside of newspapers in Ghana as one example of stigma. The study uses newspaper publications through the allotted ten-year search parameters to provide evidence for the perpetuation of stigma through language, and conclude the use of language such as "crazy," "lunatic," and "mentally ill" perpetuate stigma and delay progress (2016). Therefore, to reduce the likelihood of unintentional stigmatization throughout this paper, the term "people with mental health difficulties" will be used to refer to those with diagnosed or undiagnosed psychological conditions, regardless of whether they are seeking treatment or not, that can affect the capacity of an individual to function ("Mental Health Difficulties," 2004).

Stigma Reinforced Through Media Exposure

Stigma has been directly attributed by various authors as an effect of media, or, more accurately, in the opinion of Anne Robbins, a reflection of medical professionals perpetuated through media (2015). In her dissertation, Robbins (2015) states the media is not independently responsible for the stigma surrounding mental health communities, for media merely reflects the views held in the medical profession (p. 17). This interpretation is an extension to the analysis

presented in a book published by professors Jim Flynn, Paul Slovic, Howard Kunreuther, and Baruch Fischhoff (2001) in which the authors examine the role of stigma in several complex social circumstances to provide evidence for how stigma is caused. Additionally, the authors (2001) provide explanations for the way stigma functions within society, and paint stigma as a compelling force interacting with various aspects of civilization to disrupt the lives of people (p. 331). Further research on what aspects of television shows and movies are responsible for perpetuating stigma was completed by Julia Maier, professors Scott Kaplan and Dr. David Vogel, and psychology researcher Douglas Gentile (2014). The study utilized a three-prong model analyzing TV shows and movies to explain the role stigma plays in treatment-seeking individuals (2014). The authors (2014) concluded that TV shows and movies are a powerful tool in shaping societal perceptions, and the portrayal of members of the mental health community in media contribute directly and indirectly to self-stigma (p. 254). The work of the authors mentioned above establishes that media affects the perceptions of people with mental health difficulties, be it through direct influence or indirect from the opinions of medical professionals represented in media. Thus, a further investigation into the sources that prompt stigma is necessary.

The occurrence of negative portrayals of people with mental health difficulties can be seen in even the earliest of classic films, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. George Domino, previously a professor of psychology, studied the attitudes of students before seeing the film, after seeing it, and after seeing a documentary about the actual experience of patients inside of the hospital the movie was filmed in (1983). To evaluate the effects of the film, Domino distributed a 108-item attitude questionnaire to 146 college students before and after viewing the film. Domino (1983) reported that students who watched the film exhibited less positive attitudes in four of the five attitudinal areas, which were primarily used to assess the shifting opinion of students towards mental health professionals, patients, and facilities (p. 180). His findings concluded, overall, "cinematography can be used as a medium which has an equally powerful effect on attitudes [towards mental illness]" (p. 182) as experiences with mental health in hospital communities (Domino, 1983).

Moreover, in a study conducted by mental health consultant Dr. Madhusudan Singh Solanki and psychiatry specialist Girish Banwari, several Hindi films were evaluated to identify the particularly stigmatizing portrayals of people with mental health difficulties within them (2016). In their research, Solanki and Banwari (2016) established that the dream-like visual experiences in films, combined with audio, have prolonged impacts on viewers (p. 21). To accompany these lasting images, the researchers (2016) discovered a number of harmful stereotypes endorsed throughout the duration of these films, including the ideas of horrific asylums, drug-addict anti-depressant pill poppers, and electroconvulsive therapy for the intent of punishment. In the conclusion of their study, Solanki and Banwari (2016) state the trend of confirming the stereotypes society holds against the mental health community through media only further stigma attached to mental illness (p. 22).

What Solanki and Banwari found is also consistent with the findings of John Goodwin (2013b) in his 55-movie study of twenty-first century horror films. Goodwin (2013b) advocates that modern horror films influence public opinion by misinforming the public and discriminating against mental health communities (p. 230). Goodwin (2013b), emphasizing the popularity of the horror genre, also advocates for the reasonability in concluding such films have impacted the viewpoint the public holds of people with mental health difficulties negatively, given the circumstances set forth by horror film producers. Accordingly, Goodwin (2013a) speaks to the confusion, delays in treatment, false beliefs and conflict treatment-seeking individuals experience because of stigma inside of horror films. This can also be seen in Brian Smith's (2015) analysis of media representations, which associates high levels of self-stigma with a decrease in treatment-seeking patterns in people with mental health difficulties (p. 1). Smith (2015) uses various studies analyzing the ways in which people receive their media to provide evidence for the abundance of media portraying negative images of people with mental health difficulties and to justify his subsequent labeling of media as a primary cause of stigma (p. 1). Smith (2015) goes on to explain the connection between self-stigma and treatment seeking, as self-stigma can then delay the recovery process

and prompt unnecessary stress for mental health professionals (p. 1). In specifically connecting the idea of negative representations of people with mental health difficulties to the concept of self-stigma, Smith (2015) is further qualifying the effects of inaccurate media portrayals through the internalization of cultural stereotypes and behavioral responses particularly associated with self-stigma (Chan & Mak, 2015). In addition, Patrick Corrigan and Amy Watson (2014), in association with the University of Chicago Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, published a study claiming stigma has the power to deter people with mental health difficulties from pursuing their goals and aspirations, due to their claim that fear leads to avoidance. These authors (2014) use a variety of previously published studies to provide evidence for the impact collective stigma has on every aspect of life for people with mental health difficulties. The establishment of this correlation uniquely characterizes the relationship between media and stigma as heavily co-dependent, and thus supports the analysis above, stating media has the capacity to influence the opinion of the public towards people with mental health difficulties negatively.

Video Games as a Medium for Stigma

Despite the above research, the relationship between stigma and media has still not been fully explored. Just as Roskos-Edwoldsen et al. claimed in 2009, the media priming theory has shifted to evaluate the ability for video games to influence the thoughts and behaviors of players. However, this research only investigates the relationship between video game violence and actualized violence in the real world. For example, in a study by Dr. James Sauer, Natalie Nova, and Dr. Aaron Drummond, it was found different reward structures selectively affect in-game aggression, whereas narrative contexts selectively affect postgame aggression (2015). In comparison, a study by Wolfgang Bösche focuses on the potentially negative and positive affects violent gaming has on the formation of aggressive thoughts and concepts in players (2010). Regardless of their conflicting conclusions, these authors represent the vast base of literature surrounding

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violence in video games. This, in turn, highlights the significant lack of academically published literature concerning the stigmatization of people with mental health difficulties inside of horror video games, despite calls from the research community for further investigation. Robbins (2015), in focusing on the portrayal of people with mental health difficulties in films, concludes her paper stating her method should be reproduced with the intention of examining other mediums to eventually pinpoint and reduce self-stigma in individuals (p. 76). Similarly, Smith (2015) states studies in the past have connected high media usage with more negative attitudes towards people with mental health difficulties, but acknowledges previous research hasn't fully explored possible mediums for stigma (p. 10). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to fill the research gap between stigma studies and video games that depict people with mental health difficulties in a negative or stereotypical light.

To further build the case for studying video games, an overview of current research discussing developments in the technological community is necessary. The primary concern of all recent technological developments in the gaming world have revolved around immersion—the utilization of virtual environments (VE), spatial cognition, presence, sound, and point of view—which all act as tools to achieve the highest player immersion, or player experience, possible. In a study by Julia Fröhlich, a cognitive interaction researcher, and Ipke Wachsmuth (2013), a cognitive and artificial intelligence computer scientist, the occurrence of VE immersion was explained further in terms of presence—defined as the psychological state of being a part of a VE that allows an unbroken stream of interaction (p. 160). The purpose of evaluating presence inside of a VE is to make the experience as realistic as possible, which can have repercussions when discussing the stigmatizing representations of people with mental health difficulties inside of video games.

An introduction to a collection of VE studies states media technologies are essentially a simulator, modeling extensions of an individual's body or senses (Biocca, 2009, p. 2). These authors use various studies defining presence, its effects, and its relation to real-world action and perception, as well as evaluations of real and virtual representations of environments to

provide evidence for the relationships between spatial cognition, embodied cognition, virtual reality, and real life. This collection of works emphasizes the efforts to bolster the reality of video gaming to make a situation more probable in the eyes of a gamer. As game developer Rouse III (2009) stated in an essay, the immersiveness of gaming is one of its core advantages (p. 21)

To add, a study published by Alena Denisova and Paul Cairns (2015) focused on the immersion in first-person video games versus the immersion in third-person video games, specifically in role-playing games. Denisova and Cairns (2015) believe immersion is a state of absolute engagement in a game (p. 1). These authors used a study in which players chose a specific game and played in either third or first person and were later distributed a 31-item questionnaire on their experience to provide evidence for which point of view gave the best player experience. The authors provided evidence that first person POV in the video game gave players a stronger sense of disassociation, as well as cognitive engagement, from the real world. This provides clear evidence players do become heavily immersed in gaming and feel they are a part of the virtual world, which could be a widely negative outcome regarding their attitudes towards people with mental health difficulties.

Another study by associate professor of game design Barbaros Bostan, and freelance video game developer Sercan Altun (2016), showed players make in-game choices to work towards goals via a system of incentives, goals, motivations, actions, reinforcers, or punishers (p. 57). In short, players satisfy a form of hierarchical needs per their in-game character's needs. The authors (2016) concluded the player's motivations determine the player's action towards reaching an objective in the game (p. 70). This explains why, even if they have the knowledge it is morally wrong, players will engage in behavior which may be ethically questionable to reach an objective. This directly ties back to the treatment of people with mental health difficulties within the reward-structure of most horror games, giving a clear reason for further research on the topic.

Study Description

This study focused on analyzing horror video games to specifically pinpoint their depictions of people with mental health difficulties and their potential to contribute to the stigma surrounding the mental health community. This was done by applying the definitions and criteria of stigma presented above (Kaushik et al., 2016, p. 470; Chan & Mak, 2015; Rüscher et al., 2005, p. 530). The evaluation of media such as television and newsprint have been investigated previously and yielded connections to stigma, and the following research aims to echo these results. The purpose of this study is to investigate the possible link between horror video games and stigma, given that they are a medium for communication, and to further work towards an effort to decrease the stigma surrounding people with mental health difficulties.

How do the depictions surrounding people with mental health difficulties present in horror video games contribute to the stigmatization of people with mental health difficulties?

Methods

Materials

The video games used in this study were found using the large game search engines “Itch.io” and “Steam Machine,” as well as Google and the Xbox One Store. These websites and applications are widely accessible to users, and provide a variety of free and pay-to-play games available to download to any Windows and most Apple computers, as well as Xbox One or PlayStation 4 consoles. The certain key words used to search for video games were “psychological horror games” and “horror games,” as these terms are generally used within the video game community to classify games. Games released between 2010 and 2017 were utilized within the study, to keep the data current and relevant. These criteria produced an abundance of usable games, but a list of 4 AAA titles directly coincided with the theme of mental hospitals were compiled: *The Evil Within*, *Outlast*, *A Chair in a Room: Greenwater*, and *The Park*.

Design and Procedure

The research design of this project was that of a review, in order to identify the possible link between stigma and horror video gaming. Previous studies published by Robbins (2015) and Goodwin (2013b) called for the investigation of the stigmatizing effects of media through various media. In this study, the alternative medium chosen to investigate was video games, given the absence of literature surrounding the topic of video games and stigma and the relative availability of video games in the constantly growing and immersive culture surrounding gaming. Robbins (2015) explained that furthering such research can analyze potential media which perpetuate or reduce stigma surrounding mental health in the future (p. 76-77). Therefore, the recommendations of Robbins’ (2015) study were used to guide the research process.

The criteria for evaluating the chosen games were created by combining elements from four separate academic papers, each detailing their own stigma-causing stereotypes. Combining the efforts of these researchers allowed for a more complete picture of what stigma can look like in media manifestations. The developed criteria for stigma were that the game negatively stereotyped people with mental health difficulties by portraying horrific images of asylums, pinned people with mental health difficulties as addicted to prescription drugs, painted mental health facilities as using electroconvulsive therapy as punishment (Solanki & Banwari, 2016, p. 22), promoted fear and subsequent societal exclusion of those who experience mental health difficulties (Rüscher et al. 2005), and those who treat it (Smith, 2015, p. 1), and depicted those with mental health difficulties as seeing themselves as “enlightened member[s] of society” (Hyler, Gabbard, & Schnieder, 1991).

As games were examined, they were evaluated using the definitions of stigma provided by Kevin Chan, a psychiatric researcher, and Winnie Mak, a faculty member at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, dealing primarily with the endorsements of stereotypes to portray a certain community negatively (2015). According to their paper, public stigma is the “the prejudice and discrimination that result from the general population endorsing stereotypes about mental illness,” whereas self-stigma is the “harm to self-esteem that results from internalizing cultural stereo-

types about mental illness” (Chan & Mak, 2015).

The games were analyzed via screenshots from online videos detailing a playthrough of chosen games, and text taken from the games themselves. If possible, primary sources and direct engagement with the games were used to gather evidence, however, if the title was not available for firsthand play, it was evaluated through an online video accordingly, providing proper sourcing to the original content creator when necessary.

Findings

Images of Horrific Asylums

The Evil Within is set within Beacon Mental Hospital. Upon arriving at the scene as Detective Sebastian Castellanos, the player discovers scores of bodies of both patients and medical staff littering the floor (Markiplier, 2014a). Similarly, in Outlast, investigative reporter Miles Upshur is thrown into a psychiatric cell inside Mount Massive Asylum after being attacked by a patient in the opening sequence. (Markiplier, 2013a) These games lend themselves entirely to the stereotype of a “horrific asylum,” and perpetuate the idea mental hospitals are inherently violent places, and prone to catastrophe. Following this theme, A Chair in a Room: Greenwater finds its core setting in a mental hospital (GT Live, 2016b), and utilizes virtual reality technology to give the “experience of... being the protagonist of a horror film” (“A Chair in a Room: Greenwater, 2017). This first-hand experience, according to game developer Rouse III (2009), is the primary advantage of gaming— its level of immersion. Along those lines, although the game The Park is set outside of a mental hospital, single-mother Lorraine is sent spiraling through her memories of being carted through what is likely a mental hospital throughout the gameplay, while the walls around her are covered in negative messages such as “all that you love will be carried away” (Jacksepticeye, 2015a).

Fear of People with Mental Health Difficulties

Images which paint people with mental health difficulties in a negative light also contribute to the

stereotype they should be feared. One “creature” in The Evil Within is the AlterEgo, which is created by connecting a person with dissociative identity disorder to the STEM system (a system which uploads the subject’s consciousness into a generated reality [Markiplier, 2014c]). This idea is echoed as the player is directly pitted against an enemy described as a psychiatric patient (Markiplier, 2015). Along these same lines, throughout Outlast, the player is confronted with aggressive mental patients as the core enemies of the game. People with mental health difficulties are also seen surrounded by puddles of blood, guts, and gore, as well as attacking other patients (Markiplier, 2013a). The representation of people with mental health difficulties in the game directly reinforces the idea people with mental health difficulties are monsters to be kept from society and feared. Likewise, in A Chair in a Room: Greenwater the player is sent through a severely altered reality in which they’re sent through “fragments of [the players’] memories” (GT Live, 2016b). Following this same gameplay pattern, throughout The Park, a mysterious hatted figure which appeared throughout the theme park stands behind Lorraine and guides her hand as she kills her son with an ice pick in a relived experience. (Jacksepticeye, 2015b) This characterizes Lorraine as violent and potentially contributes to the stereotype people who experience mental health difficulties are dangerous.

Fear of Those Who Treat Mental Health Difficulties

Throughout The Evil Within, Dr. Jimenez performs experiments on his psychiatric patient, Leslie. Moreover, the entirety of the STEM system is founded on the principle of patient experimentation (Markiplier, 2014e). Furthermore, in Outlast, Reporter Upshur observes the human experimentation going on in Mount Massive Asylum. The experimentation is so extensive the player encounters various mutilated bodies of mental patients throughout the game (Markiplier, 2013b). Depicting those who treat mental illness in such a negative light is a major deterrent for treatment seeking, according to mental health specialists Solanki and Banwari (2016, p. 22).

View of People with Mental Health Difficulties as Prescription Drug Addicts

A gameplay feature in *A Chair in a Room: Greenwater* is to take chlorpromazine, an antipsychotic prescription, to travel to the next step of the game. This occurs at various points throughout the gameplay (GT Live, 2016a). Incidentally, in *The Park*, Lorraine treks through her increasingly decaying home environment and finds her to-do list, instructing she repeatedly pick up her prescription for depression, all the while ignoring her father and husband (Jacksepticeye, 2015b). The idea portrayed in these games that those with mental health difficulties are more likely to become addicted to prescription medications fuels negative stereotypes surrounding mental health communities, and has the potential to incite self-stigma in those who experience mental health difficulties (Kaushik et al., 2016, p. 470; Chan & Mak, 2015; Rüscher et al., 2005, p. 530; Maier, Kaplan, Vogel, & Gentile, 2014, p. 254).

Electroconvulsive Therapy as Punishment

A key game mechanic in *The Evil Within* is the upgrade system, in which the player is seated in an electroshock chair by a nurse, and shocked with each upgrade. The nurse has dialogue which states “you mustn’t fight it. This is for your own good” (Markiplier, 2014d). Both the mechanic itself and the cynicism of the nurse endorse the negative stereotype of electroshock punishment in mental health facilities, and furthers both the public and self-stigma caused by negative depictions of people with mental health difficulties and those who treat it in video games (Chan & Mak, 2015, p.1; Smith, 2015, p. 1).

View of Oneself as an Enlightened Member of Society

In *The Evil Within*, the primary antagonist of the game, Ruben Victoriano (Ruvik), states “they lose who they are and become clay, completely reshapeable in my image... I have surpassed you in every way you can imagine” (Markiplier, 2014b). This feeds into Hyler, Gabbard, and Schneider’s (1991) analysis of the negative stereotype of people with mental health difficulties viewing themselves as “enlightened

members of society.” This often reflects negatively on people with mental health difficulties, which makes this stereotype particularly harmful.

Conclusion and Future Study

Video games like *The Evil Within*, *A Chair in a Room: Greenwater*, *Outlast*, and *The Park* portray negative stereotypes of people who experience and treat mental health difficulties through images of horrific asylums, portraying people with mental health difficulties and their caretakers as frightening, painting those with mental health difficulties as addicted to prescription drugs, and the idea that electroconvulsive therapy is used as punishment. Given each of the games evaluated presented at least one of the six stereotypes attributed with causing stigma (see Figure 1), a possible link may exist between horror video gaming and public and self-stigma surrounding people with mental health difficulties and their caretakers (Chan & Mak, 2015, p.1). At any rate, there is no research directly attributing the stigma caused by horror video games to a decrease in treatment seeking, or an increase in public and self-stigma. However, according to Brian Smith’s (2015) analysis of media representations, stigma is caused primarily by an abundance of media representing people with mental health difficulties negatively. Research by Maier, Kaplan, Vogel, and Gentile in 2014 also found the media is an extremely useful tool in shaping society’s perception of people with mental health difficulties. Therefore, with the combined efforts of Smith and Maier and associates, it can be concluded, given video games are a form of media, they have the potential to cause public and self-stigma.

Limitations of this study include a limited available space for evaluating additional video games and a shortage of time to look in-depth at each game to make definite plot and gameplay connections to directly identify stigma-causing elements of these titles. Additionally, a lack of funding prevented firsthand gameplay by the researcher, which limits the extent to which the VE and overall immersion present in the games could be evaluated to build a stronger case for stigma-causing elements inside of video games.

The collective assessment of these games was subjective to the researcher’s attention to detail, and view

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Mental Health Stereotypes in Video Games

Video Games	Stereotypes						Total: Stereotypes per game
	Images of Horrific Asylums	Fear of People with Mental Health Difficulties	Fear of Those Who Treat Mental Health Difficulties	People with Mental Health Difficulties as Drug Addicts	Electro- convulsive Therapy as Punishment	People with Mental Health Difficulties as Enlightened	
The Evil Within	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	5/6
A Chair in a Room: Greenwater	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	3/6
Outlast	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	3/6
The Park	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	3/6
Total: Games per stereotype	4/4	4/4	2/4	2/4	1/4	1/4	

Figure 1. Mental health stereotypes in video games. This figure illustrates the four games examined in this study, and the stereotypes each exhibit.

of necessity of inclusion in the final analysis. Additionally, the discernment and analysis process of this study was entirely subjective, and dependent solely upon the judgement of the researcher. This means the analysis present in this study was subject to the inherent bias of the researcher, which may have potentially trivialized or diminished the reliability of the results and ultimately hindered the impact and investigation into the extent of which stigma is prevalent inside these titles. This study would benefit greatly from the input of various researchers when evaluating the extent to which these stereotypes are present inside the chosen video games, and would provide coherent insight into the legitimate effects stigma may have on players. Further research should include the opinions of multiple researchers to ensure a more complete and objective analysis of data.

The inconclusiveness among researchers concerning the long-term effects of stigma, in terms of media, also serves as a limitation to this study. This lack of fluidity in the field leaves unanswered questions regarding the significance of this study, and its relevance to mental health communities. An extended look into the effects of stigma present in horror video games on people with mental health difficulties

should be completed in the future to put the possible impacts of this study into perspective.

To fully understand the extent to which stigma is portrayed in video games, however, a more in-depth investigation into video games of all styles is necessary, as well as an evaluation of smaller, independently developed video game titles. Stigma could be continued to be evaluated throughout other forms of media to raise awareness and elevate understanding of stigma in everyday society. In order to assess the impact this stigma may have, further research into the actual impact stigma has on individuals due to video games which depict people with mental health difficulties and their caretakers negatively is necessary, and should be evaluated to understand the collective impact, if any, this research has on people with mental health difficulties.

The research presented in this paper implies stigma has the ability to exist outside of conventional media platforms such as television and newsprint, and highlights the availability of stigma-causing horror video games inside of the gaming market. This research also brings to light the depictions inside of horror video games, specifically, and how the depictions of people with mental health difficulties inside

of both the storyline and environments of these games have the capacity to harm people with mental health difficulties. In the context of the academic field surrounding mental health stigma, this paper serves to confirm video games are a medium through which mental health stigma can be translated, but requires further research to evaluate the existing effects of this stigma.

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