But It's Only a Game:

Military-Themed First Person Shooters and Players' Attitudes About War

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

Playing war is big business, and the continued development and sale of military-themed first person shooters provides a substantial portion of revenue for the video game industry. These games provide an immersive experience that allows players to participate in the excitement of armed conflict through heroic, adrenaline soaked, high octane virtual gun battles. Players experience warfare vicariously through the eyes of an abstract soldier within a virtual world, an experience that may cultivate certain opinions, attitudes, and/or values in players. To best understand how military-themed first person shooters construct, reveal, and reinforce attitudes about the military and American foreign policy regarding the continued War on Terror, I conducted a two-pronged exploratory study analyzing the narrative thematic content of the popular Call of Duty series and the beliefs and preferences of its players measured in an online survey. The results are laid out in detail in the dissertation pages that follow. Key findings include: 1) Call of Duty games released since 9/11 promote the ideas that war is constant, war is clean, and War is Cold; 2) Call of Duty players think the greatest enemies of the United States today are China, North Korea, and Russia; 3) Most Call of Duty players would never consider joining the U.S. military; and 4) Most Call of Duty players have a positive attitude towards the U.S. military and its capabilities.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. **Background**

"In a militaristic society," according to Martin and Steuter (2010), "the dominant impression that citizens get about war from their culture is one of war as a noble and glorious endeavor" (p. 17). If this is true, then the United States is a militaristic society wherein popular culture plays a key role in establishing and maintaining the status quo. Paraphrasing Harold Lasswell's warning of the evolution of a garrison state, Patrick Regan (1994) asserts that the political use of symbols and the pro-military socialization of the public potentially results in the quiet acquiescence in the transfer of power from civil society to the military (p. 45), and he presents empirical evidence that war toys, war movies, and pro-military themes in the mass media encouraged such passivity in the USA from 1900-1985.

On January 17, 1961 President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the military-industrial complex (MIC), the institutionalization of the military, which would manipulate public attitudes towards the military. The development of a pro-military state is evident in the continued success of war movies, war toys, the partnership between Hollywood, commercial manufacturers and the military to produce technology for use in both commercial and military products, and the ubiquity of symbols throughout pop-culture normalizing war. Regan (1994) explains, "In a highly militarized society the symbols which help maintain this patriotic fervor should be evident in any number of media targeted at the general public" (p. 45).

Popular cultural products, such as commercial military-themed first person shooters, likely prepare the American people for the possibility of war, the decision to go to war, and the
continued maintenance of a seemingly endless war (Martin & Steuter, 2010, p. 119). Because these games are ubiquitous, immersive, and qualitatively different from any such example of popular entertainment in the past, the question arises whether they have any influence on perceptions of the military and players' attitudes about war. Examining the narrative thematic content of these games, then, helps us to understand how they potentially celebrate soldierly values and contribute to our cultural understanding of what it means to be a soldier and what it means to be a country in a constant state of military conflict as represented by the war on terror.

There continues to be a growing compatibility between the "entertainment industry and the military" (Burston, 2003, p. 164). The Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT) at the University of Southern California (USC), for example, was established in 1999 with a multi-year $45 million contract from the U.S. Army to facilitate collaboration between the creative, entertainment and video game industries and computer scientists to develop realistic "and sophisticated military training simulation scenarios" (Crogan, 2011 p. 17). We often think about video games as an entertainment medium meant for leisure, distraction, or release (Bogost, 2010, p. xi), and while entertainment industry insiders often reinforce the idea that one shouldn't read too much into cultural products that are "just entertainment," popular culture both consciously and unconsciously produces and reinforces ideology (p. 52).

Acceptance of the "mere entertainment" argument has led to both a continued glorification of military conflict and an apathetic feeling of disconnect between the brutal realities of war and its depiction within pop cultural forms of entertainment, like sports, films, and video games. Pop cultural forms of entertainment, for instance, have been criticized for conflating the terms sports and war. In one noteworthy instance, nine Nobel Peace Prize Laureates sent an open letter to the Chairman of NBC Entertainment Robert Greenblatt arguing
that the network's reality show "Stars Earn Stripes" glorifies war and military combat by presenting military training as a sporting event.\(^1\) Sports involve my team versus your team—obvious good guys and obvious bad guys (Scodari, 1993, p. 1). This is enhanced and exacerbated in military-themed first person shooters that reinforce the relationship between sportsmanlike competition (my team versus your team) and warlike violence where one team tries to rack up more kills than another. It is this black and white mentality that may mold young minds toward accepting a militaristic culture. Some video game journalists have even called developers to task for turning war into "a silly good time."\(^2\)

Yet it can be assumed that the creators of commercial military-themed first person shooters (outside of those like America's Army, which are developed and/or sponsored by the U.S. armed forces) do not consciously seek to produce military propaganda. But designers' fascination with the U.S. military and arsenal, combined with their attempts to create authentic environments, characters, and situations in a fun and exciting way, no doubt prompts them to produce games that contribute to the propagation of militarism in the United States. Bacevich (2005) defines militarism as "the misleading and dangerous conceptions of war, soldiers, and military institutions that have come to pervade the American consciousness and that have perverted present-day U.S. national security policy" (p. ix). In the pages that follow, I single out

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\(^1\) The open letter was signed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Jody Williams, Mairéad Maguire, Dr. Shirin Ebadi, President José Ramos-Horta, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, President Oscar Arias Sanchez, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, and Betty Williams. Story retrieved from <http://marquee.blogs.cnn.com/2012/08/14/nobel-peace-prize-winners-protest-nbcs-stars-earn-stripes/?hpt=hp_c2>.

commercial military-themed first person shooters as exemplars of how pop cultural forms of militainment (military-themed entertainment) build and maintain popular support for America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the use of drones, and its continued war on terror.

As noted in the October 5, 2011 Pew Research Center report, "The Military-Civilian Gap: War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era," "America’s post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are unique. Never before has this nation been engaged in conflicts for so long. And never before has it waged sustained warfare with so small a share of its population carrying the fight" (Preface, para. 1). Though the wars with Iraq and Afghanistan ended in 2011 and 2014 respectively, there are still approximately 10,000 American military personnel serving in training and advisory roles in Afghanistan and about 3,000 American soldiers in Iraq, according to Vox. Regarding troop levels in Afghanistan, Amy Belasco, a Specialist in U.S. Defense Policy and Budget for the Congressional Research Service (CRS), explains, "In late May 2014, the President announced that troop levels in Afghanistan would fall from 33,000 to 9,800 by January 1, 2015 with the U.S. role focusing on advising Afghan security forces and conducting counter-terror operations" (December 8, 2014, p. 1).

Regarding troop levels in Iraq, CRS Information Research Specialist Hannah Fisher explains that "Several thousand U.S. civilian personnel, contract personnel, and a limited number of U.S. military personnel remain in Iraq carrying out U.S. government business and cooperative

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Historians and cultural critics offer a number of explanations for the ready entry of the U.S. into protracted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq following the events of September 11, 2001. The explanations range from the substitution of voluntary service for the draft to a revival of military values as a response to the nation’s defeat in Vietnam (known as the Vietnam Syndrome). These cultural and structural explanations have recently been joined by individual-level accounts that point to the psychological effects of immersive technology on violence and identity. The latter accompany a change in the ways modern warfare is often conducted, using distancing technologies (like drones), which are said to increase the likelihood of popular assent to war. For example, a recent Gallup poll indicated approximately "two-thirds of Americans (65%) think the U.S. government should use drones to launch airstrikes in other countries against suspected terrorists" (Brown & Newport, 2013). I argue that popular support for the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is rooted in the revival of military values as a response to the nation's defeat in Vietnam and the substitution of voluntary service for the draft.

B. "Kicking" The Vietnam Syndrome

Every president acknowledges their indebtedness to the troops and that they stand "always and everywhere" with them (Bacevich, 2005, p. 121). Since President Ronald Reagan asserted that "soldiers were special people" (p. 106), Americans have maintained a favorable opinion of both the military as an organization and the soldiers who comprise it. According to The Pew Research Center (October 5, 2011), "When it comes to their armed forces, most Americans in the post-9/11 era have feelings of pride, gratitude and confidence. At the same
time, most Americans acknowledge they know little about the realities of military service. And, in increasing numbers, they disapprove of or do not pay attention to the wars the military is currently fighting" (p. 59). Yet more than eight-in-ten post 9/11 veterans and nearly three-quarters of the American public oppose reinstating the draft, and more than one half of Americans say they would not encourage young people to join the military (p. 3). Since 9/11, only about one half of one percent of the U.S. population – what Lewis (2007) calls a "military cluster" (p. 377) – has been on active military duty at any given time. Why?

In his book *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, Andrew Bacevich (2010) argues that Reagan's rhetoric set a new standard for civic responsibility after Vietnam. Support for the troops replaced actual service with them (p. 105). Implicit in Regan's phrasing was the promise that reconstituting military power "was not going to entail sacrifice on the part of the average American" (p. 108). Reagan, like every president since, rejected any suggestion of reviving the draft. "Military service was to remain strictly a matter of individual preference. To anyone making that choice Reagan granted the status of patriot, idealist, and hero; of citizens he asked only that they affirm that designation" (p. 108).

On March 1, 1991, the day after the U.S. declared victory and a ceasefire in the Persian Gulf War, President George H.W. Bush held a press conference and praised the "new, wonderful sense of patriotism that stems from pride in the men and women that went over there. And no question about it, the country’s solid. There isn’t any antiwar movement out there. There is pride in these forces." Earlier that same day, according to Roger Stahl (2010), Bush told state legislators, "It's a proud day for America. By God, we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all" (p. 21). The term *Vietnam Syndrome* was a metaphor for the public's malaise following

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America's defeat in Vietnam. The term referred to the public relations failure of the Vietnam conflict that resulted in both a lack of support for the war and for the troops.

The president's pronouncement essentially shifted combat away from the frontlines of the battlefield and to the public relations department of the home front (Stahl, 2010, p. 21). Between the end of Vietnam and Operation Desert Storm, the civic experience of war became one of spectacle. "This meant first the construction of a citizen progressively purged of political connection to the military, and second, a civic experience of war thoroughly choreographed for privatized consumption" (p. 22). When the U.S. abolished the draft in 1973 and converted its military to an all-volunteer force, the citizen was removed from his/her legal obligation to service. Three tropes—clean war, technofetishism, and support-the-troops rhetoric—make up the citizen's civic experience of war. The clean war, according to Stahl, "is a manner of presenting war that maximizes viewer alienation from the fact of death in order to maximize the war's capacity to be consumed" (p. 25). The term technofetishism refers to the worship of high tech weaponry. Support-the-troops rhetoric "functions to turn civic attention away from debates about legitimacy and toward the war machine itself" (p. 29). All three tropes appear front-and-center in popular military-themed first person shooters.

Americans are inundated with rhetoric that espouses military values, supports soldiers in word (not necessarily in deed), projects images of soldiers (and police) fighting in sophisticated gear and with state of the art weaponry, equates warfare with sports and, finally, cultivates the idea that civilians, both individually and together as a nation, should be indebted to soldiers for fighting the good fight so that they don't have to. War is no longer a national effort (Lewis, 2007, p. 377). Because individual citizens are not asked to sacrifice any part of themselves in the war
effort, they are able to accept military operations that seem to benefit the nation in some measurable or demonstrable way.

Advances in immersive technologies have changed both the ways modern warfare is conducted, but also the way that warfare is represented within popular culture (Crogan, 2011). Military-themed first person shooters rose to popularity in the United States post 9/11. Their story-lines likely help to cultivate in players a sense of what constitutes the justified and unjustified (the legitimate or illegitimate) use of military force against “enemies of freedom” (George W. Bush, September 20, 2001). Before moving on, it is necessary to explain what military-themed first person shooters are and to further illustrate their importance as cultural artifacts worthy of study.

C. **Defining the Term "Military-Themed First Person Shooters"**

Action games are a video game genre that emphasizes players’ reaction time and hand-eye coordination. They include—among others—sports games, fighting games, platform games, real time strategy games, and shooters. Shooters, according to game designer Scott Rogers (2010), "focus primarily on firing projectiles at enemies. While fast-paced and 'twitch' oriented, like [other] action games, this [type of action game] has evolved to include several sub-genres" (p. 9). One of these is the first-person shooter game. Most video game research about action games has focused on first-person shooters in one way or another (Ferguson 2010, p. 77).

First-person shooters comprise the video game sub-genre of action games that is perhaps most geared toward directing players to intentionally cause physical harm to in-game, animated (and often realistic-looking) characters. They focus the game-play around firearm and projectile

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weapon-based combat that is characterized by a three-dimensional view from the player’s perspective. In other words, the player fights off onslights of enemies with an arsenal of powerful weapons – escalating throughout the game to keep pace with the increasing power of the opposition (Klevjer 2006a) – and experiences it all through the eyes of his/her character. Klevjer identifies three major categories of first person shooters: linear and spectacular run-and-gun style adventure shooters – like *Quake* (1996); tactical first person shooters – like *Counter Strike* (2004); and first person shooter/role playing hybrids – like *Deus Ex* (2000). Any of these categories may include military-themed first person shooters. What distinguishes military-themed first person shooters from other first person shooters is that players experience combat through the eyes of a soldier.

D. **Problem Statement**

While early video games experimented with the first-person perspective—e.g., *Maze War* (1973), *Spasim* (1974), *3D Monster Maze* (1981), *Corporation* (1990)\(^7\) and *Hovertank* (1991)—the first-person shooter game that popularized direct armed conflict was *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992), wherein the player, assuming the role of an American soldier, navigates through the maze-like floors of the eponymous castle while killing any and all enemies along the way (Allison 2010, p. 185). *Wolfenstein 3D* was followed by *Doom* (1993), “the archetype of all first-person shooters” (Staude-Müller, Bliesener, & Luthman, 2008, p. 42). Since *Doom’s* release, video game technology has advanced such that the blocky, pixilated representations of violence of the early ‘90s have been replaced by high definition displays of realistic viscera and gore. In *Soldier of

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\(^7\) Van Zwieten (2011) explains that *Corporation* was an "action adventure game featuring role-playing, hacking and stealth elements, and one of the first to implement a human viewpoint and full 360 degree freedom of movement" (p. 2).
Fortune 3: Payback (2010), for example, players fire maelstroms of bullets that not only kill their opponents but also cut them into pieces.

Military-themed first person shooters provide an immersive experience that allows players to participate in the excitement of armed conflict in ways that mimic specific aspects of reality while ignoring others. Some, like Counter-Strike: Source (2004), are tactical. The games specifically mimic those aspects of reality that point towards the excitement of the event—the adrenaline soaked, high octane gun battles where the player occupies the role of a hero. Perhaps most importantly, though, designers of first person shooters “have begun to offer a more complete underlying narrative that provides a storyline and a justification for the actions taken during the game. The addition of a storyline provides a context for engaging in violent acts,” which are made to seem justified (Schneider, Lang, Shin, & Bradley 2004, p. 62).

Playing war has also become big business for the video game industry, which has a long standing relationship with both the military industrial complex and the American public (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, & de Peuter 2003, p. 248). "In North America," explains Burston (2003), "revenues from video and computer games have been matching or out-scoring conventional box office revenues for a few years now" (p. 164). According to the 2014 Entertainment Software Association’s sales, demographics, and usage data, 59 percent of Americans play video games (p. 2), and the computer and video game industry generated over $21 billion in annual revenue in 2013 (p. 13). Additionally, the industry employs more than 120,000 people (Siwek 2010, p. 1).

War, as depicted within military-themed first person shooters, is a substantial part of that revenue. For instance, Activision's Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare (2014), and Call of Duty: Ghosts (2013) were two of the top 10 best-selling video games in 2014 (in the number one and number ten spot, respectively) (Kain, 2015). Activision’s Call of Duty: Ghosts and Call of Duty:
Black Ops II (2012) along with Electronic Arts' Battlefield 4 (2013) were three of the top 10 best-selling video games in 2013 (Entertainment Software Association, 2014, p. 11). Black Ops II earned $1 billion in sales in just 15 days (Thier 2012, para. 1). Previously, according to PR Newswire, Activision’s Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (2011) debuted as "the biggest entertainment launch ever with an estimated sell-through of more than $400 million and more than 6.5 million units sold in North America and the United Kingdom alone in the first 24-hours of its release” (November 11, 2011)\(^8\). Practically every iteration of the franchise becomes more successful than the last.

Console-based games such as Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (2007), Battlefield: Bad Company (2008), Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (2009), Battlefield: Bad Company 2 (2010), Medal of Honor 3: Payback (2010) and Call of Duty: Black Ops (2010)—one of the best-selling video games in U.S. history—along with PC games like the downloadable tactical shooter series America’s Army, first developed by the United States Army in 2002, are cultural artifacts that point towards war as a constant within American culture, a population that accepts war as a form of entertainment (Tasker, 2009, p. 148), and the military as an institution in which one can participate vicariously. As Stahl (2010) observes, "The citizen has been progressively disarmed and dissociated from playing an active role in the actual military institution. Rather than reversing these trends, the interactive war intensifies them, encouraging the citizen to engage in a closed, constructed system that channels the civic urge through fantasies of military participation" (p. 68).

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Of vital importance is whether the experience of playing through the closed, constructed systems of military-themed first person shooters translates into learning (Sherry, 2001). Are players learning an enduring behavior, or are they simply engaging in transient reactions? Such questions are, of course, important for those looking to find direct behavioral effects, especially with regards to replicating virtual violence in the real world. The repetition of norms, of narrative structure, and of the type of game play within military-themed first person shooters might, in essence, aid players in learning enduring behaviors. There is, for example, a seemingly innate quality about having players pull the trigger of a controller with their right index finger to fire a gun (or utilize a weapon in general). The action of pulling a trigger is analogous to using a weapon in both the game space and the real world.

This action led Barlett, Harris, and Baldassaro (2007) to study whether the use of a controller versus that of an interactive light gun affected players' aggression while playing an arcade-style rail shooter, Time Crisis 3 for the Playstation 2 game console. The authors grounded their study in the General Aggression Model (GAM), which "posits that personal factors (attitudes toward violence, trait aggression) and situational factors (exposure to real-life violence or media violence) interact to influence the components of an individual’s internal state (physiological arousal, feelings, and thoughts)" (p. 487). The researchers hypothesized that increased play of a violent arcade-style shooter (which they mistakenly dubbed a first person shooter) could significantly increase aggression and tested this by allowing players to use either an interactive light gun or a standard controller to play the game. The researchers were testing for the presence of the “weapons effect” (Berkowitz and LePage, 1967). The weapons effect describes the increased aggression of provoked subjects when a weapon is in sight. Typically modeled after a hand gun, the video game light gun is used by the player to target objects on a
video screen. Some, like the Delta Six, contain force feedback, which is meant to simulate the recoil and kickback of the real thing. Barlett et al., found aggression (measured with a series of questionnaires and story stems) was higher for those who played the video game with the gun versus those who played with the controller, "lending support to the Weapons Effect" (p. 496).

Carnagey, Anderson, and Bushman (2007) studied desensitization in relation to violent video games and found that such games can cause players to be less physiologically aroused by real violence. Playing such games, then, may have even more pronounced effects than viewing violent television programs or films. Video game players are more actively involved in the material. They are not passively observing other characters onscreen, as television and filmgoers do. Players directly participate in the game world through the experience of play. Because players control the actions of characters within military-themed first person shooters and are experiencing the action through the eyes of their avatar, "they are more likely to identify with violent characters, more directly rewarded for violent acts, and more frequently exposed to violent scenes" (Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman , p. 495).

Klimmt, Hefner, Vorderer, Roth, and Blake (2010) describe identification as a temporary shift in players' self perception. "Enacting a character or role in a video game affects players’ identity state" (p. 333). Konijn, Nije Bijvank, and Bushman (2007) demonstrated that violent video games are likely to increase aggression when players "wishfully identify with violent game characters" (p. 1042). Many researchers assert that playing violent video games leads to real world aggression or desensitization to such aggression. Looking for behavioral effects, however, ignores the simple truth that most people who play video games, violent or otherwise, do not display aggression in socially unacceptable ways. To provide more insight into the link between violent video games and player behavior in the real world, it is imperative that researchers look
for the more subtle effects of video game play and examine the context of in-game acts of violence.

E. **Examining Context**

The crime rate for serious crimes in the United States – which includes murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault – has generally gone down since the '90s. Yet public perception about crime is often out of sync with reality. Why?

The amassed findings of cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1972; Gerbner, 1981; Gerbner, 1988; Gerbner, 1992; Gerbner 1998; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner & Gross, 1977; Gerbner & Gross, 1980; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli & Morgan, 1980; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 1994) show that people who watch a lot of television overestimate the prevalence of violence in society and are fearful of becoming victims themselves. In other words, people who watch a lot of television perceive social reality differently from those that do not. Like television, video games are a system of enculturation. Gerbner et al (1980) assert, "Socially constructed reality gives a coherent picture of what exists, what is important, how things are related, and what is right ... Television is today’s central agency of the established order and as such serves primarily to maintain, stabilize, and reinforce—not subvert—conventional values, beliefs, and behaviors" (pp. 706-7).

Cultivation analysis focuses specifically on television's contributions to viewers' conceptions of social reality, though video games are in many ways a logical extension of television. For one, video game worlds are symbolic environments that project social hierarchies of ideology and power. They also exist across recognizable genres and patterns of game play that often recycle or repeat themes, control schemes, missions, and goals, which "help players judge
their progress through a game (how close they are to winning), but also guide players in understanding the significance of their actions within a narrative context" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 385). Video games are also representations of culture.

From the perspective of game design, *culture* refers "to the environment or context within which a game takes place" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 508). Games depict, among other things, images of gender, portrayals of race and class, ideology, and patriotism. As Christoph, Dorothée, and Peter (2009) explain, "In contrast to non-interactive entertainment media such as novels or films, video games do not only display-mediated environments in which characters perform, but they also enable and invite users to act by themselves in the environment and to become an integral part of the mediated world. Many video games include voluminous narrative elements that assign a certain role to players" (p. 353). Seen in this light, military-themed first person shooters exist as one part of a culture that valorizes soldiers and armed combat. It stands to reason, then, that the in-game, embedded narratives of military-themed first person shooters likely affect players’ social reality and attitudes towards the military and the legitimacy or illegitimacy of war (generally) and onscreen acts of violence.

The term *embedded narrative* refers to the "pre-generated narrative content that exists prior to a player’s interaction with the game. Designed to provide motivation for the events and actions of the game, players experience embedded narrative as a story context" (Salen & Zimmerman, p. 383). Embedded narratives are experienced by the player through interaction with the game, but these narratives exist apart from it. Each player experiences embedded narratives in the same way in that they provide a major story arc for the game, "structuring a player's interaction and movement through the game world in a meaningful way" (p. 383). But narratives in video games can also be *emergent*. Emergent narratives "arise during play from the
complex system of the game." They are player-dependent. In other words, the exact narrative experience of a particular game "depends on player interaction" (p. 383).

F. **Military-Themed First Person Shooters and 9/11**

Because Activision's *Call of Duty* series is one of the most successful video game franchises in history, it is an exemplar of military-themed first person shooters. The continued financial success of the *Call of Duty* franchise, points to the public’s continued interest in playing at war. What is far less clear, though, according to Roger Stahl (2011), "is what these games are doing to users, our political culture, and our capacity to empathize with people directly affected by the actual trauma of war."

After 9/11, the Bush Administration adopted and justified a domestic and foreign policy that privileged national security over freedom and militarization over human rights (Giroux, 2005, p. 1). The Bush doctrine, which asserted that the administration would hold nations who supported terrorism accountable for terrorists' activities, was "a position that could nurture and legitimate military interventions for years to come" (Kellner, 2003, p. 61). The neoconservative worldview of the Bush Administration represented "the flowering of a new view of America's status and role in the world. The vision was that of an unchallengeable America, a United States whose military power was so awesome that it no longer needed to make compromises or accommodations (unless it chose to do so) with any other nation or group of countries" (Mann, 2004, p. xii). This worldview has five components: 1) a firm belief in the centrality and efficacy of American military power; 2) adherence to the post-Cold War strategy to increase military spending to build up military power to such an extent that it would be both fruitless and financially crippling for any other country to compete with it; 3) the willingness to engage in
preventive war and the adherence to unilateralism (if necessary); 4) a firm belief that American power and ideals are, on the whole, a global force for good; and 5) unyielding optimism about America's capabilities and its future as a world leader (Kellner, 2003; Mann, 2004).

Cultural critics assert that game play in military-themed first person shooters sanitizes war and may thereby promote support of real-world military action by reducing its moral cost. The broader context for evaluating the significance of game play is that the U.S. has a voluntary military force. Hardt-Landsberg and Negri (2000) argue that the separation of the citizen and the soldier in American culture reinforces the belief that wars waged with specific and clear goals are a thing of the past. Wars are instead waged to maintain order in areas where "there seem to be minor and elusive enemies everywhere" (p. 189). Civilians are far removed from the burdens of this kind of war. As Schiesel (2011) observes, "The generations to come of age since Vietnam are among the first never to be widely called to arms. The country has been at war now for years, and there are many veterans among us. Yet for a vast majority, armed conflict remains a concept, not a reality." The narrative and thematic content of military-themed first persons may influence or reinforce player attitudes about real life military culture and military action.

There is a wealth of public opinion data about Americans' attitudes toward war, terrorism, and related subject areas. The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy released a ten-year review on public opinion research on attitudes towards the War on Terror and the war in Afghanistan (Bowman & Rugg, 2011). Among the findings, the review found that while Americans believe there will be another terrorist attack on U.S. soil, they don't believe they will be the victims of it. It also found that Americans believe the country is safer on account of the government's efforts, that George W. Bush made us safer, and that Barack Obama has kept us safe. Americans continue to believe it was not a mistake for the country to send military forces to
Afghanistan. They want the country's efforts there to succeed. Finally, most Americans do not want to use torture. None of the polls addressed the issue of whether popular culture explained these attitudes.

Althaus and Coe (2011) used data on support trends and news coverage patterns for the American wars fought in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. They found that the largest increase in support for war happened "when wars were prominently featured in the news, while the largest decreases in support happened when wars slipped out of the headlines ... It seems that the more Americans are reminded that they are in conflict with another nation, the more they tend to support the use of military force" (p.80). Contemporary military-themed first person shooters remind and forewarn players about America's conflicts with other nations while simultaneously inviting them to participate through the act of play. Activision has released a new entry in the Call of Duty franchise every year since 2003. As post 9/11 iterations of the popular franchise present both real and imagined military scenarios, they continue to remind players about who America's real and imagined enemies are. They also potentially construct and reinforce attitudes in players about war, what it means to be a soldier, and what the experience of warfare is like. This dissertation, in part, seeks to better understand why people play military-themed first person shooters.

The immense popularity of the Call of Duty series' narrative and thematic content helps shed light on how the experience of and attitudes towards warfare are constructed in popular culture both at home and abroad. As shown in Table I, about half of the total number of Call of Duty games are sold in the United States. The embedded and emergent narratives within and stimulated by military-themed first person shooters may serve the twofold purpose of justifying the acts of violence on display and cultivating in players an acceptance of America’s sustained
TABLE I
CALL OF DUTY GAME SALES IN MILLIONS ACROSS CONSOLES AND PCS AS OF AUGUST 2014a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game Title</th>
<th>Copies Sold Worldwide</th>
<th>Copies Sold in North America</th>
<th>Copies Sold in U.S.</th>
<th>Percentage of Copies Sold in North America</th>
<th>Percentage of Copies Sold in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call of Duty: Modern Warfare (2007)</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>52.61</td>
<td>48.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of Duty: World at War (2008)</td>
<td>14.16</td>
<td>8.36</td>
<td>7.70</td>
<td>59.04</td>
<td>54.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (2009)</td>
<td>24.47</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>12.24</td>
<td>54.35</td>
<td>50.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of Duty: Black Ops (2010)</td>
<td>29.15</td>
<td>16.44</td>
<td>15.13</td>
<td>56.40</td>
<td>51.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (2011)</td>
<td>29.57</td>
<td>15.01</td>
<td>13.81</td>
<td>50.76</td>
<td>46.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of Duty: Black Ops 2 (2012)</td>
<td>27.17</td>
<td>13.01</td>
<td>11.97</td>
<td>47.88</td>
<td>44.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of Duty: Ghosts (2013)</td>
<td>22.26</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>11.32</td>
<td>55.26</td>
<td>50.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare (2014)</td>
<td>17.67</td>
<td>8.61</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>48.73</td>
<td>44.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

use of military force throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Iraq since 9/11. It is important, then, to examine 1) whether playing these games is associated with players' attitudes toward American foreign policy and war, and 2) whether or not players of military-themed first person shooters see the world differently from non-players.

Before doing so, however, it is necessary to examine how the act of playing military-themed first person shooters is both an extension and subversion of the act of play. In the next chapter I explain the characteristics of play along with the differences between simulators and commercial military-themed first person shooters like the *Battlefield* and *Call of Duty* franchises.
II. PLAYING WAR

In his seminal book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture*, Johan Huizinga (1944/1949) asserts, "Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game ... Language everywhere must have expressed matters in that way from the moment words for combat and play existed" (p. 89). As long as humans have waged war, they have played it as well. So what exactly is *play*, and what is going on when people *play* war? How is the general act of playing war with toys different from playing war in commercial video games? More specifically, what is it that's going on when people play war through the eyes of a virtual soldier in military-themed first person shooters? In what ways are players involved in the creation of meaning through their play? Finally, when people play a commercial military-themed first person shooter, to what extent are they moving about in self-determined ways or otherwise "managing" their own destiny, and when are they conforming to formations provided by others? Exploring the answers to these interrelated questions is necessary to understand how we might analyze the importance of military-themed first person shooters as cultural and communicative texts worthy of study.

A. What's Going on When People Play Games?

Through the act of play, games reinforce cultural values. Generally speaking, a *game* is "a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules that results in a quantifiable outcome" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 83). There is, in other words, an identifiable victor and loser once the game is over. Through the act of playing war games, the ritual of victorious warfare as a continual aspect of American culture is reinforced.
All human activity, according to Huizinga (1944/1949), is rooted in the act of play. All play, he asserts, means something. But what does play mean? At a basic level, play is any physical or mental activity engaged in for recreation or enjoyment. It is a voluntary, oftentimes aimless activity. It relies on and exists within the imagination. Play is a primitive, expressive and paradoxical form of communication learned from other members of a group. And play is limited; it has a duration. "Play begins, and then at a certain moment it is "over". It plays itself to an end" (p. 9). Yet at higher levels play exists as a contest for something or a representation of something (Huizinga 1944/49, p. 13).

Play is primitive in the sense that all animals, including humans, engage in it. Play is expressive in the sense that it is "more akin to caricature or pantomime than it is to ordinary theatre " (Sutton-Smith 1986, p. 138). Play is paradoxical in the sense that it unites contraries. "It is and is not a fight. It is and is not a chase" (p. 140). As explained by Gregory Bateson (1972/2000), "We face then two peculiarities of play: (a) that the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant; and (b) that which is denoted by these signals is nonexistent" (p. 183). Regarding (a), we know that the act of play is not to be taken literally. Regarding (b), we know that play engages the imagination.

Through the act of play, then, humans enter into a fictional, metaphorical space where they are free to engage in activities that might otherwise be socially or culturally unacceptable. It would, for instance, be wholly unacceptable to run around outside firing a real gun. However, during a game of cops and robbers, children may use toy guns or representative objects (like sticks) and pretend to do just that.

In one sense, Huizinga (1944/1949) explains, "play constitutes a training of the young creature for the serious work that life will demand later on" (p. 2). In another, "it serves as an
exercise in restraint needful to the individual. Some find the principle of play in an innate urge to exercise a certain faculty, or in the desire to dominate or compete. Yet others regard it as an "abreaction" – an outlet for harmful impulses, as the necessary restorer of energy wasted by one-sided activity, as "wish-fulfillment", as a fiction designed to keep up the feeling of personal value, etc." (p. 2). While play is typically understood as the opposite of seriousness, such a definition robs the term of its complexity. For some, after all, "play can be very serious indeed" (p. 5).

Any game takes place within a set of boundaries (i.e. rules) established by the act of play. According to psychologist Michael Apter (1991), "in the play-state you experience a protective frame which stands between you and the 'real' world and its problems, creating an enchanted zone in which, in the end, you are confident that no harm can come. Although this frame is psychological, interestingly it often has a perceptible physical representation: the proscenium arch of the theater, the railings around the park, the boundary line on the cricket pitch, and so on. But such a frame may also be abstract, such as the rules governing the game being played" (p. 15). Salen and Zimmerman (2004) refer to the metaphorical space where a game takes place as the magic circle. "The game simply begins when one or more players decide to play ... Within the magic circle, special meanings accrue and cluster around objects and behaviors. In effect, a new reality is created, defined by the rules of the game and inhabited by its players" (pp. 95-6).

Machin and Leeuwen (2009) observe that children and young people throughout the world "play with miniature soldiers, fire plastic machine guns, throw replica grenades, wear special operations’ play uniforms and participate vicariously in contemporary military conflicts through computer games" (p. 51). In military-themed first person shooters too, players often control virtual soldiers with intricate back-stories and lives, which appear to exist in a similar
(though exaggerated) reality from the players’ own. In a sense, then, video games are merely an extension of traditional toys, though they tweak characteristics of play in sometimes subtle ways.

Fleming (1996) argues that contemporary toys (including video games) interfere with how play functions and modifies the characteristics of play in distinct ways. First, he suggests that toys and video games have altered the aimlessness of play. The aimlessness of play and the discovery of goals, he says, are "now subject to a more readily available sense of direction – to re-enact with toys what one has read in a comic or seen on a television, for instance" (p. 69). Second, he argues that the realism of toys and video games revolves around the accuracy with which they reproduce appearances familiar from other media. "A plastic bottle" he asserts, "that might once have served as a spaceship won't do as a representation of the starship 'Enterprise'' (p. 69). A stick that might have once served as a rifle is a paltry substitute for the Barrett M82 sniper rifle players get to use in military-themed first person shooters. Third, contemporary toys and video games often act as referents to specific cultural artifacts. For example, in 2008, McFarlane Toys partnered with Activision to produce "highly detailed, game-accurate" action figures for Call of Duty.

Finally, ownership has become a more complex issue in that action figures often exist in a series and consumers are encouraged to collect them all for the ultimate play experience (or at least the one that bears the closest resemblance to the cultural artifact). The various levels of reality people move across when they play with a toy like an action figure are now structured around a given level of fictional narratives. One can hardly recreate the intense battles of the Call of Duty series, for example, without the Mega Bloks Call of Duty Collector Construction sets.10

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B. **What's Going on When People Play Military-Themed First Person Shooters?**

At the most basic level, video games are games played on a video screen that require at least one player, have rules, and have victory conditions (Rogers 2010 p. 3). Implicit within this definition is the idea that every aspect of the video game world (similar to that of a board game, but more expansive and with less left to the imagination) is designed. "The game designer," according to Salen and Zimmerman (2003), "creates a set of rules, which players inhabit, explore, and manipulate" (p. 316). Yet Rogers' definition omits one extremely important characteristic of video games (or any game for that matter): that the experience of play, that participation in the game, is not something that can be directly created by game designers. The play of a game is the experiential aspect of a game. Play "is an emergent property that arises from the game as a player engages with the system ...The game designer only indirectly designs the player's experience, by directly designing the rules" (Salen and Zimmerman, p. 316).

According to Kirkland (2010), "For a video game to become meaningful, it must be played" (p. 317). The meaning of any game, then, emerges from players' own experiences as they make choices in it. In this way, players and game designers "co-produce" video games.

Players make meaning in a video game by making choices. However, these choices are mediated by the game engine – "the code that controls the game world, defines its rules, [and] determines what can and cannot be done by the players and their character" (Deuze 2007, p. 218). The choices need not be complicated. For example, every video game has a core mechanic. A core mechanic is an essential activity players perform repeatedly in a game (Salen & Zimmerman, p. 316). Military-themed first person shooters have the core mechanic of shooting.

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10 Mega Brands, Inc., a Canadian children's toy company owned by Mattel, sells Mega Bloks Call of Duty Collector Construction Sets, which include detailed and articulated versions of popular Call of Duty characters and set pieces.
Quite often, the choice players repeatedly face while playing these games is not *whether* they should pull the trigger, but *when* to pull the trigger. No matter how complex the story, the answer – more often than not – is quite simple: any time you see an enemy.

Video games do not need to have stories, yet they always have stories (Rogers 2010, p. 37). Even video games or modes that don't progress within the bounds of traditional beginning/middle/end narrative structure still create an ordering of events within the game. For instance, players who ignore the single-player campaigns within military-themed first person shooters and engage in online matches are nevertheless both creating and experiencing narratives (i.e., series of connected events marked by beginnings, middles, and ends). In addition, the player's experience of participation *in* the game creates a narrative that exists *outside* the virtual world of the game. "It is common," according to Salen and Zimmerman (2003), "for players to construct stories out of game play experience, creating narratives that exist separately from the actual play in the game" (p. 412). Each and every time a person plays a video game s/he creates a narrative. And there are an infinite number of narratives that a player can create (Rogers 2010, p. 42).

When players experience a military-themed first person shooter they are, in essence, engaging in a sort of wish fulfillment. Do people play military-themed first person shooters because they wish to experience real life combat? Probably not. Video games, according to Rogers, should always make the player feel something "*that they aren't in the real world*: powerful, smart, sneaky, successful, rich, bad, or heroic" (p. 29). Absent from the list is perhaps the most important quality of being – in control. Playing military-themed first person shooters can, among other things, "provide a brief safe haven of a controlled universe, a momentary relief
from the anxieties of this everyday life and the uncertainty of one’s future" (Wright 2007, p. 27). But what is the cost of being "in control?"

Rogers (2010) claims players respond to video games best when the controls (the required button presses or motions on an accompanying controller) match a real world action (p.167). Console-based military themed first person shooters provide players with an "elegant feedback loop [which] allows for quick and frequent player-to-world interaction" (p. 244). First, the player uses his/her index finger to pull a trigger on the bottom of the controller to fire an onscreen weapon – most often a gun – at an enemy. Next, the player sees the immediate result of that action – the enemy is killed. Finally, the player receives some kind of reward. The reward might simply be continued survival within the game world, access to the fallen weapon of the vanquished foe, or passage to a previously inaccessible point in the game level. If the gamer is playing online, the reward could also come in the form of praise from friends or teammates.

Yet the "mere ability to move a joystick [or pull a trigger] or click on a mouse is not sufficient cause for agency, genuine embodied participation in an electronic environment" (Bogost 2007, p. 42). Continuing the example, the player’s real world action of pulling the trigger on the controller may translate into the firing of a weapon in the electronic environment of the game space, but it does not imply the existence of human agency. The player has no choice but to pull the trigger, in most cases. Otherwise, the game is over. In military-themed first person shooters, human agency gets replaced by feelings of involvement. Such feelings are evident in the distinctive mannerisms players display in their handling of playing devices. According to Henricks (2010), involved players "react physically in different ways to the ebb and flow of the action; and game makers for their part have added sensation-producing devices to the equipment to magnify those feelings of involvement“ (p. 35).
One such device is vibration feedback, otherwise known as rumble (Wesley & Barczak 2010). The tactile component of playing video games allows "us to interact with games and exert a tangible measure of control over them" (Kim 2010). In military-themed first person shooters, for instance, controllers with rumble may quiver when the player is too near an explosion, or tremble when the player fires his/her weapon. Such vibrations are meant to increase one's enjoyment of the game, and players interpret them as pleasurable sensations. The game engine dictates what actions a player can and cannot make within the game world. The software utilized by the player to interact with the game world produces sensations felt by the player (rumble, for example, or the sensation of literally pulling a trigger to fire a gun). Therefore, the creation of meaning in the video game reflects a shared understanding, where the designer, appreciating that a player’s enjoyment of the game means more than just pressing the trigger, builds features into the game that attempt to give it a more authentic feel. The player, meanwhile, interprets the meanings of his/her own sensations and choices in relation to the narrative, his/her characters' actions, and his/her own experiences of "combat" both real (in the sense that the player is actually feeling the sensations of the controller in his/her hand and the trigger on his/her fingertip) and imagined.

The game controller shapes the player's interaction with the video game world and enforces active participation (Henricks, p. 35). Controllers are, according to Aarseth (1997) ergodic. In other words, they enable work-like or instrumentally focused physical actions that need not coincide with their real world analogues. Pressing a button to make an in-game

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11 When Sony announced that it was going to release the Sixaxis PS3 controller without rumble, gamers cried foul. According to Wesley and Barczak (2010), "Rumble was a feature that most gamers had become accustomed to and therefore they expected it. Xbox had it. Playstation 2 had it. Even the GameCube had it. Without rumble, the gaming experience felt dead. To most gamers it felt like a step backwards" (p. 119).
character crouch certainly isn't the same as crouching oneself. However, the physical actions are necessary abstractions to help players focus on the game at hand.

But having players pull the trigger of a controller with their right index finger to fire a gun (or utilize a weapon in general) in the game space is analogous to the action of pulling a trigger to use a weapon in the real world. As such, it is naturalized as a way to resolve conflict. The gun, then, stands as a representation of the ultimate piece of technology. In fact, players can rarely be without a gun (or some other kind of weapon) in military-themed first person shooters. A weapon may be out of ammunition, but players can rarely, if ever, drop it and leave their characters empty-handed. Players must always be looking down the barrel of a gun as they navigate the game space. Combat is endless, and the repetition of shooting and killing, encouraged by a near endless supply of ammunition, reinforces the idea that in-game soldiers (and by extension, soldiers in real life) are more powerful than their enemies.

It is noteworthy how the last shot in most firefights needs to be delivered by the player. As Rogers (2010) explains, "It's very important psychologically for the player to feel that they have won" (p. 325), even if the victory is only short-lived. In Call of Duty: Black Ops, for example, the player fires the bullet that supposedly kills Fidel Castro. At the end of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, the player-character is stabbed in the chest by the villain who then begins pummeling a non-player character. The player slowly removes the knife from his/her character's chest by repeatedly pressing a button on the control pad before aiming it at and hurling it into the villain's eye. In Battlefield 3 (2011), the player is the one who successfully uses an RPG to kill a pesky sniper taking potshots at squad members.

Understanding military-themed first person shooters as simplistic point and shoot experiences encourages a deterministic interpretation of the material and robs players of their
abilities to parse out meaning and create their own meaning through play. Wright (2007b) observed students telling stories of their experiences playing *Counter-Strike* in much the same way a real soldier might tell war stories. This is not surprising, as "narrative play within game play emerges from a player's interaction with the game system. Narrative play outside of game play is the retelling of this experience in story form" (Salen & Zimmerman 2003, p. 412).

People play online games largely because of the social aspects of doing so (See, for example: Cole & Griffiths 2007; Griffiths, Davies & Chappell 2004; Jansz & Tanis 2007; Yee 2006). After all, "games are extensions, not of our private but of our social selves," (McLuhan 1964, p. 216). And Wright's (2007b) interviews with undergraduate and graduate students illustrate how the players of military-themed first person shooters enjoy interacting with their friends in a shared space. Wright's piece is an example of synthetic war as social interaction. However, his interviews leave nagging questions unanswered: What are players' attitudes concerning war, what it means to be a soldier, and the realism or authenticity of combat on display within video games?

Wright's interviews also illustrate how it is that "People’s experiences with game playing are quite diverse and thereby cannot be captured through controlled experiments, or even narrowly defined longitudinal studies. Human experience is simply too complex to accommodate simplistic notions of game meaning or game entry" (p. 10). Ducheneaut (2010) conducted a virtual ethnography of *Counter-Strike*, observing that players regarded the game's content as secondary to using the game space as a social sphere. "It is quite clear," he said, "that computer games are not simply about playing ... The purpose of the game has very little to do with the richness of the social activity it supports" (p. 219).
While games like *Counter-Strike* encourage sociality, scholars must not forget that players do not interact with video games on their own terms (Henricks 2010). Instead, they follow what Salen and Zimmerman (2003) call "designed" interaction – "interactivity situated within a specific context" (p. 61). These designed interactions are elements that everyone experiences when they play a game–namely, game play, in-game objectives, and the in-game narratives. As Allen (2011) observes, people playing the same game experience the same game world and fight the same enemy. The "same physical, repetitive experience of playing brings about a certain community among players" (p. 43).

By employing a mix of qualitative methods including researcher introspection, observation, and interviews, Frostling-Henningson (2009) found that players felt "online gaming gave them more experiences than real life" (p. 557). If we are the sum total of our experiences, then heavy game players must, in some way, be shaped by their virtual exploits. Because military-themed first person shooters provide like-minded players with a space to gather and socialize, it is important to understand what draws players to this type of game over others. At the same time, it is necessary to analyze how players interact with the content of these games to determine how the content shapes attitudes about politics and war. If people routinely play military-themed first person shooters, which produce and reproduce narratives of war and the vicarious experiences of combat more than any other industry, including Hollywood (Schubart 2009, p. 7), then they must be affected in some way.

C. **Military-Themed First Person Shooters as Cultural and Communicative Texts**

Huizinga (1944/1949) points out that play is an important part of culture, and American culture that loves to play war. I contend that military-themed first person shooters are playful at
the physical level and ritualistic at the social level. Through the act of play, these games reinforce the ritual of warfare as a continual aspect of American culture. Through the act of play, military-themed first person shooters construct and reinforce a particular worldview.

In addition to co-producing meaning, designers and players co-produce the demand for riskless risk. Wright (2007a) refers to riskless risk as "urban entertainment destinations [like Disneyland] that offer intense emotional experience without threat, accompanied by reference to an authentic experience" (p. 247). He explains, "The creation of faux authenticity is an attempt to mediate the desire for authenticity" (p. 247). Applying the notion of riskless risk to military-themed first person shooters, the games present false experiences of war under the pretense of authenticity. The claim to authenticity is one way such video games can produce a system of ideas and ideals (i.e., ideology).

Van Zwieten (2011) argues that the role of video games like military-themed first person shooters is to reproduce U.S. military ideology through cultural representations. To be effectively consumed, these games must be actively manipulated by players. Therefore, the game designers and players co-produce a system of ideas and ideals (i.e., ideology). "[I]n a player's agency, in the act of manipulating the game ... interpellation is most likely to occur, and most effectively so" (p. 3). Interpellation is the process by which someone who is unaware of a particular idea (or ideology) is convinced to believe, or insensible adopt, the idea (or ideology). I contend that the games encourage interpellation because designers script the actions required of players. For a player to proceed through the narrative of a military-themed first person shooter, s/he must accomplish certain tasks. And since the games are not about exploration, the creation of meaning becomes far more limited (Klevjer 2006b, p. 4). Agency is therefore illusory.
For Van Zwieten, games like *Medal of Honor* have become increasingly adept at rendering military action in a seemingly realistic fashion.\(^{12}\) He argues, however, that players are given a simplified, even glorified, account of military intervention (p. 1). The claim to realism supports a culture where patriotism is measured by support for the troops. By presenting a specific version of military life, free of controversy or negative portrayals of the armed forces, game designers of commercial military-themed first person shooters create games that celebrate U.S. military might.

Van Zwieten uses *Medal of Honor* to show how the player, the enemy, and the interaction between the two is framed to present a skewed experience of war (p. 2). Specifically, he claims that 1) the first person shooter is an ideological apparatus which serves to naturalize violent intervention as a means of conflict resolution; 2) that the role of the military is framed through the lens of the military entertainment complex, which presents a sanitized and glorified view of the military; and 3) the games generalize and oversimplify the construction of the enemy as terrorists (p. 2). As an extension of America's fascination with war as a form of entertainment, video games are uniquely positioned to illustrate how we, as a culture, are currently thinking about war.

Using the U.S. Armed forces’ *America's Army* as an example, Allen (2011) argues that military-themed first person shooters create an "unreal" enemy. "Nameless, elusive, and always just around the corner, the unreal enemy is not confined to any singular game or moment. He influences and precedes the production of real enemies of the United States Army" (pp. 55-6). For Allen, the enemies within military-themed first person shooters not only reflect current

\(^{12}\) A game's realistieness is measured by its ability to reproduce attributes of the physical world. A game’s realism is measured by its correspondence to realities of social life (Galloway, 2004).
enemy combatants but potential enemy combatants. For him, it's only a matter of time before we start perceiving imagined enemies as real threats.

Military-themed first person shooters like Medal of Honor: Warfighter (2012) offer verisimilitude in terms of their use of the first person perspective, their authentic presentation and recreation of weaponry, tools, uniforms, and their aural presentation of the diegetic sounds of combat. But such games do not accurately and/or realistically reflect the horrors of combat. As Warfighter's executive producer Greg Goodrich told GameSpot writer Tom McShea, "There is nothing real about a video game. Absolutely nothing. Combat is combat. Games are games. And we are an entertainment product." Yet the games sanitize the violence and thereby reduce the threshold for the sanction of its use.

Goodrich's comments downplay the power of video games to reflect and reinforce a particular political ideology. The rumbling of a controller may signify an explosion, a high pitched din from television speakers may simulate the ringing in a character's ears after a grenade blast occurs within close proximity, but these are abstractions for real-world referents. As Van Zwieten (2011) claims, if military-themed first person shooters accurately reflected reality "we would have to accept that the role of a soldier is that of aggressor, never peacekeeper or rebuild" (p. 5).

D. Analyzing Military-Themed First Person Shooters

Open source game-building tools like 3D world building packages and "mods" of commercial game engines for PCs are ways for players to join game designers in literally co-producing the game spaces of military-themed first person shooters. According to Castronova

such technology "has effectively turned the entire world into a giant military research lab" (p. 234). Players across the globe can utilize these easily accessible, sophisticated tools to potentially build simulations for training to commit acts of terror. Pulling a trigger on a controller may condition a player to pull the trigger on a gun, or naturalize the behavior of pulling the trigger on a gun, but it does not account for the weight of the gun, the kickback, wind resistance, aiming, or breathing. It simply normalizes the presence guns as problem-solving implements.

"The notable thing about the development of warfare is that it is, in the end, the development of ideas: practices, policies, tactics, knowledge. Military ideas are ideas about the application of force within a terrain that is populated by people, constructs, and features. But they are still ideas. Ideas are open-source." (p. 235). Anyone can use open source software to build upon military ideas and tactics, or subvert them in the virtual world.

To understand how video games construct, reveal, and reinforce ideology, scholars need to analyze video games through their procedural rhetoric. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that our conceptual systems are fundamentally shaped by cultural constructions. Game designer and media philosopher Ian Bogost (2007) asserts that understanding political rhetoric in video games intended to carry an ideological message requires a theory of framing as a procedural rather than a verbal strategy. Procedural rhetoric constructs this frame in tangible form, within the authored, structured rules of a game. "It seeks to reinforce or change opinions and attitudes. It seeks expression to convey ideas effectively. Its arguments are made not through the construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic models. In computation, those rules are authored in code, through the practice of programming" (p. 28). In other words, the regulative rules of the game encode a set of attitudes or opinions that are potentially reinforced through multiple encounters with the game. Procedural rhetoric limits
what a player can do and thereby influence's one's moral views, which may support an ideological point of view. The rules of a military-themed first person shooter, for example, force players to kill enemy combatants if they want to move the story (and the game) forward. Such actions may affect players' attitudes towards war and induce an acceptance of a neoconservative position on war and the U.S. military.

Any analysis of the procedural rhetoric of a video game begins with the simple question: What is it that players are allowed to do within the game world? As scholars have argued, video games often enforce moral values through ideology, and game designers can inscribe moral imperatives in the actions of their game's characters. Commercially released military-themed first person shooters may be less deliberate in their rhetoric than military-sponsored and military produced games, but they are not necessarily free from ideological framing; such games may display complex procedural rhetoric with or without the conscious intentions of the designers. Bogost (2007) argues, "On the one hand, the medium of the videogame has not (yet) become attached to a particular worldview, thus welcoming all varieties of ideological frames" (p. 120).

Bogost points out that many computational systems do not allow players to raise procedural objections. In other words, the player of a video game is not allowed to alter the rules of play, the rules of the game (p. 36). While players skilled in the art of programming can alter the game so it operates in a manner different from its original version, only a small fraction of players can and will actually do this. Most players will likely play through the games as programmed. Through their rules, then, video games reflect a worldview. Regarding the depiction of war presented in military-themed first person shooters, we could ask: How does war work in American popular culture? Answering this very important question requires taking a set of cultural systems apart to see what logics motivate their human actors. Procedural rhetoric
reveals specific patterns of cultural values. By unpacking the rules of a game in a particular context, we can make the invisible visible.

Military-themed first person shooters like *Call of Duty* differ from other war-themed entertainment because of their interactive nature. The games require players to actively engage in the scenarios presented and stimulate a high degree of immersion (also known as presence). According to digital media theorist Janet Murray (1997), "Immersion is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus" (pp. 98-99).

In media studies, the term *presence* is often used as a synonym for *immersion*. According to Ermi and Mäyrä (2005), the term *presence* "refers to a psychological experience of non-mediation, i.e. the sense of being in a world generated by the computer instead of just using a computer" (p. 4). In other words, *presence* describes a player's feeling that his/her experiences of the constructed reality of a video game are real (Ivory and Kalyanaraman, 2007, p. 534). These features (interactivity and immersion/presence) make the experience of playing military-themed first person shooters qualitatively different from engaging in passive entertainment like movies and television shows. To understand immersion, "we need to look not just at the attributes of games (such as how detailed the graphics are), but at the way games function in relation to the experience of the player" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 452). Actively controlling a soldier in a video game is different from merely watching one, and the interactive nature of video games is likely to have more of an impact on players than other, more passive forms of entertainment. Yet
no study has compared the effects of playing immersive video games to the effects of watching violent movies or television shows.

The only study to make the distinction between active play and passive viewing was conducted by Polman, de Castro, and van Aken (2008), who investigated the effects of playing versus watching the same violent video game on aggressive behavior. Fifty-seven children aged 10-13 either played a violent video game, watched the same violent video game, or played a non-violent video game. The researchers found that boys who played the violent video game displayed more aggression than those who merely watched.

Playing a first person shooter approximates human vision in ways no other medium ever has. Though the filmic use of “a subjective camera perspective, coupled with a weapon in the foreground” (Galloway, 2006, p. 57) predates and predicts the gamic way of seeing in first person shooters, "where film montage is fractured and discontinuous, game play is fluid and continuous” (p. 65). By examining the narrative and thematic content of military-themed first person shooters, we may better understand how they contribute to our cultural understanding of what it means to be a soldier and a country in a constant state of military conflict as represented by the War on Terror.

Media and critical scholars, like Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2007), Huntemann (2010), Martin and Steuter (2010), and van Zwieten (2011), argue that military-themed games 1) advance a worldview where war is a clean, inevitable, perpetual, and natural means of conflict resolution, 2) promote a glorified account of military intervention, 3) always present enemies who are unmistakably on the side of evil, and 4) reinforce cultural values that lessen resistance to war and make players more amenable to war as acceptable foreign policy. In short, the culture of the games articulate a neoconservative worldview and may increase the likelihood of popular
assent to war. As I argued earlier, popular support for the most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is rooted in the revival of military values as a response to the nation's defeat in Vietnam and the substitution of voluntary service for the draft. Military-themed first person shooters may have lowered the threshold of popular assent even more by cultivating attitudes towards war and the U.S. military through their narratives and procedural rhetoric.

Bohner and Dickel (2011) define an attitude as an "evaluation of an object of thought” (p. 392), and they assert that attitudes guide information processing and influence behavior. Attitudes influence what people see, hear, think, and do (Allport, 1935); they represent "likes and dislikes" (Bem, 1970, p. 14). Furthermore, research has "shown that judgments are rendered chronically more accessible after having been constructed many times in similar situations with the same results” (Bohner & Dickel, p. 394). Military-themed first person shooters are ubiquitous in American society and likely cultivate certain attitudes about war and the U.S. military. Because culture consists of man-made, patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting (Kluckhohn 1954), military-themed first person shooters can be viewed as cultural artifacts that reinforce specific attitudes about the military and the experience of warfare.
III. LEARNING ABOUT WAR THROUGH THE ACT OF PLAY

Most of us will never directly experience war, so our knowledge of war largely comes from the media we consume. The symbolic environment of military-themed first person shooters allows players to experience war from the comfort and safety of their homes. The games allow players to engage in multiple identical encounters with enemies in a virtual world. Albert Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism posits that learning – the accrual of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors – is dynamically influenced by the continual interaction of environmental, personal, and behavioral components. So video games are but one context through which society passes on its values (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 534). Since military-themed first person shooters are extensions of military socialization in popular culture, it is worth asking what exactly these games teach players.

In the following pages I present Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism, discuss three key constructs that impact learning (Observation, Imitation, and Reinforcement), illustrate how the characteristics of military-themed first person shooters potentially impact societal learning (knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors), and argue that previous media effects research on the consumption of violent media like military-themed first person shooters largely ignores the role of context, which is an important situational and environmental factor.

A. **Reciprocal Determinism**

Learning is dynamically influenced by the continual interaction of environmental, personal, and behavioral components. People learn not only through their own experiences, but also by observing the actions of others and the results of those actions. According to Bandura
(1977), "social learning theory approaches the explanation of human behavior in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants. Within the process of reciprocal determinism lies the opportunity for people to influence their destiny as well as the limits of self-direction" (p. vii). In other words, people are neither powerless objects controlled by elements within their environment or free to do whatever they choose outside of it. People are "self organizing, proactive, self-reflective, and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces" (Bandura, 1994, p. 121). Within the framework of social learning, "freedom is defined in terms of the number of options available to people and the right to exercise them. The more behavioral alternatives and prerogatives people have, the greater is their freedom of action" (Bandura, 1977, p. 201).

Reciprocal determinism was influenced by learning theory and the work of Miller and Dollard (1941), who identified four factors involved in learning: drive, response, cue, and reward. "Drive," according to the authors, "impels the person to make responses to cues in the stimulus situation. Whether these responses will be repeated depends on whether or not they are rewarded. If the response is non-rewarded, the tendency to repeat it to the same cues is weakened" (p. 28). Miller and Dollard called this process extinction. The strengthening of the cue-response connection is the essence of learning.

In Adolescent Aggression, Bandura and Walters (1959) declare that "the task of socialization would be extremely difficult if a child had to be taught appropriate behavior for every specific situation. Habits learned in one situation will, however, transfer, or generalize, to other situations to the extent that the new [ones] resemble the [original]" (p. 27). This is an
extension of Miller and Dollard's observation that "The effects of learning in one situation transfer to others. The less similar the situation, the less transfer occurs (p. 44).

We learn through the observation and imitation of models. Children do not often behave as adults tell them to. Rather, their behavior is often based on what they see adults doing in real life or role models doing on television or in a movie. By observing which actions are performed and rewarded/punished, we learn to discriminate between those circumstances where we can and cannot enact certain behaviors. Observational learning is governed by four processes: Attention, Retention, Production, and Motivation (Bandura, 1994, p. 128).

The roles of imitation and reinforcement patterns in the development of socially acceptable and socially censured patterns of behavior are of particular interest. Self-efficacy – a person’s confidence in his/her ability to take action and persist in that action despite obstacles or challenges – is especially relevant to the learning potential of video games.

Imitation plays an important role in the acquisition of both deviant and conforming behaviors (Bandura and Walters, 1964, p. 47) and occurs when a subject reproduces a model's patterns of behavior. According to Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961), "Imitative learning can be clearly demonstrated if a model performs sufficiently novel patterns of responses which are unlikely to occur independently of the observation of the behavior of a model and if a subject reproduces these behaviors in substantially identical form" (p. 576). According to Bandura and Walters (1964), elicitation and maintenance of imitative behaviors "are highly dependent on the response consequences to the model" (p. 4). Generally speaking, if a child watches a model bash an inflatable doll with a hammer and get punished, then the child is not likely to pick up the hammer and begin whaling on the doll. Witnessing the punishment produces an inhibitory effect. If, however, the child witnesses a model curse at, and kick, an inflatable doll without
punishment, then the child is likely to do the same. The lack of punishment produces a *disinhibitory* effect. Previous research indicates that "film-mediated models are as effective as real-life models in transmitting deviant patterns of behavior." (Bandura and Walters, 1964, p. 62). To understand what players learn from military-themed first person shooters teach players, we must first examine the contradictions that exist in media effects literature.

B. **Media Effects Research and Social Learning Theory**

Military-themed first person shooters are violent, and much of the media effects research related to the consumption of violent video games is rooted in social learning theory. The theory predicts that playing violent video games encourages violent acts and "can have a short-term impact on aggression by increasing arousal as well as the availability of aggressive thoughts and hostile feelings. Through repeated playing of violent video games, violent scripts for social problem solving are reinforced, over-learned, and thus automatized, resulting in biased attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about aggression" (Smith, Lachlan and Tamborini, 2003 p. 59).

Because violence is an inescapable characteristic of entertainment within American culture, many scholars continue to regard this readily available and omnipresent style of entertainment suspiciously and conclude that those exposed to filmic, televised, and video game representations of violence typically show an increase in a variety of aggressive outcomes (Schmierbach, 2010). But many of the stand-alone studies paint an incomplete picture about the effects of consuming violent entertainment. The relationship between consuming violent entertainment and committing real life acts of aggression is not simple or clear cut. Though there have been numerous studies linking the consumption of violent media with aggressive behavior, it is important to remember their correlation does not yield a direct causal relationship. There are
many other variable at play. The impact of violent media on individuals and society is likely more nuanced, and it is more likely that violent media help cultivate and reinforce certain attitudes, which in turn help motivate behavior surrounding a variety of issues. According to Trend (2007), such problems have to do with the complexity of human behavior and logic. Human behavior is influenced by many elements: brain chemistry, upbringing, environment and culture, just to name a few. As he explains, “People do not simply view a TV show or a deodorant advertisement and then robotically go out and act upon this experience” (p. 39). Similarly, people do not simply play a military-themed first person shooter and decide to become an Army Ranger. However, a game like *Call of Duty* helps construct and reinforce ideas already present in the culture regarding the American military, the ongoing War on Terror, American foreign policy, and the like.

It may not even be logical to assume that video games impact audiences in the same fashion as other mediated forms of entertainment, since the act of playing a video game is altogether different from watching a film, reading a comic book or listening to music. For example, watching televised and filmic representations of violence is a largely passive activity, whereas playing a video game is an interactive one. Researchers like Anderson and Dill (2000) argue that the participatory nature of video games is exactly what makes them so influential.

Unfortunately, literature reviews on the effects of violent video games present conflicting interpretations of the studies at hand. Sherry (2001) laments, "The literature on video game effects is littered with mixed findings from studies that use a wide range of games, treatment exposure times, and subject pools, obscuring clear conclusions" (p. 409). In his meta-analysis of 25 independent studies, he finds that there is rampant disagreement amongst researchers. For example, Sherry's own analysis suggests the longer players play a violent video game, the less
aggressive they feel. He argues, "playing even the most violent of games for extended times may not increase aggression ... Although the initial experience of the game might be highly stimulating, after 75 minutes arousal may be replaced by fatigue or boredom from repeating programmed sequences" (p. 425). Players experience desensitization to either the violence, the game play, or some other aspect of the gaming experience.

Most video game research about action games has focused on first person shooter games in one way or another (Ferguson, 2010 p. 77). Such research assumes that the first-person perspective allows players, who experience violence and aggression more directly than in other action games, to experience greater identification with their characters (Staude-Müller, et al, 2008 p. 42). As military-themed first person shooters regularly offer narratives based on real world and feared conflicts and scenarios, players potentially identify not just with the characters they embody but the narratives and actions they engage in. Rather than causing overt acts of aggression, it is more likely that the games cultivate political attitudes about war and about the legitimate or illegitimate use of military force in a given conflict against a well defined enemy. As Sherry explains, "Proponents of social learning theory for video games argue that video games should have particularly powerful effects due to the high attention levels of players and the active identification of players with characters on the screen. Some video game researchers also argue that game players are rewarded directly for enacting symbolic violence" (p. 412).

Even though Sherry’s meta-analysis indicates that persons who play even the most violent video games for lengthy periods of time may not experience an increase in aggression, other researchers, like Smith et al. (2003), contend that the growing body of experimental research links the playing of violent video games to aggressive thoughts, interpretations and/or
behaviors, and that playing violent video games is significantly and positively associated with aggressive behavior (p. 59).

Though previous research purportedly links playing video games with aggression, little research has been conducted that indicates how specific in-game characteristics, or types of games, contribute to such short and long term effects. For example, playing a first person shooter provides a different kind of experience from playing a third person action game. Nonetheless, almost all studies on the negative effects of video games have focused squarely on violence (Lee & Peng, 2006 p. 327), and many of these game studies over-simplify within-game actions as simply being “violent” or “non-violent” (e.g., Ferguson & Rueda, 2010).

As previously stated, the storylines of military-themed first-person shooters released since 9/11 may cultivate in players a sense of what constitutes the justified and unjustified use of military force. So, defining in-game actions as being simply violent or non-violent may disregard how narratives frame in-game actions as being legitimate or illegitimate. Researchers have been asking the wrong questions. For most players, it is likely that the long term effects of regularly playing military-themed first person shooters do not result in overt aggression; rather, they manifest themselves in more subtle ways – i.e., increased support for war and positive attitudes towards the U.S. military and American foreign policy with regards to the continued War on Terror.

C. The Context of Violence in Military-Themed First Person Shooters

Citing Pober, Thompson, Haninger and Yokota, (2008), Ferguson (2010) explains that video game researchers tend to define video game violence as “intentional acts within game play directed to cause physical harm to an animated character within the game” (p. 68). Consequently,
researchers report that 89 percent of video games studied have acts of violence in them (Glaubke, Miller, Parker & Espejo, 2001). The conclusion largely stems from an inclusive definition of violence that contains fantastical, cartoon and life-like portrayals. The assumption inherent in such a definition is that players, especially younger ones, learn to imitate violent or aggressive acts through the processes of observation or imitation. Yet it is possible that an all-encompassing definition of violence strips the term of its complexity.

The ESRB uses 30 different content descriptors for potentially inappropriate content in an attempt to address such complexity. Of these content descriptors, nine specifically categorize physical violence. These are: Animated Blood, Blood, Blood and Gore, Cartoon Violence, Fantasy Violence, Intense Violence, Sexual Violence, Violence and Violent References. In addition, according to the ESRB web site, “When a content descriptor is preceded by the term Mild, it is intended to convey low frequency, intensity or severity of the content it modifies.”

Walsh and Gentile (2001) tested the reliability of movie, television and the video-game ratings systems and found that “when an industry rates a product as unsuitable for children (R-rated films, TV-MA-rated shows, M-rated games), parents unanimously agree” (pp. 1304-05). However, such agreement wanes when the industry rates games below M (Mature). For example, when the ESRB rates a game suitable for all ages, parents and researchers will argue that such a rating is too lenient. Consequently, even though 85 percent of all games sold in 2007 were rated E (Everyone), E10+ (Everyone 10+) and T (Teen), researchers and parents maintain that violence within videogames still presents a legitimate threat to children and society.¹⁴

Like parents, researchers identify more specific acts of in-game violence than does the ESRB (see Thompson & Haninger, 2001; Haninger, Ryan & Thompson, 2004). Some

researchers – much like the ESRB – have attempted to provide an overall explanation of the style of violence contained within specific video games by quantifying in-game acts of violence (for examples, see: Braun & Giroux, 1989; Dietz, 1998; Thompson & Haninger, 2001; Smith et al., 2003). In addition, some researchers have examined specific contextual variables within violent video games. As such, they have begun raising questions that go beyond asking how the consumption of violent media causes aggressive behaviors and cognition to evaluate whether particular dimensions of games are relevant to such effects.

According to Smith et al. (2003), research into the effects of televised violence suggests that the context of violence, rather than the sheer amount, is more important in predicting its potential harmful effects. Accordingly, Smith et al. focused their content analysis of video games not only on contextual variables that have been previously linked to aggression, but also on the in-game characters involved in the violence as well as the graphic, realistic, justified, and humorous forms of physical aggression that are often presented in such interactive formats (p. 61). By adapting the framework for the National Television Violence Study (NTVS) from television programming to video games, their study explored not only the amount, but also the context of violence present in 60 popular video games.

Video games depict, among other things, images of gender, portrayals of race and class, ideology, and patriotism. Seen in this light, military-themed first person shooters exist as one part of a culture that valorizes soldiers and armed combat. It stands to reason, then, that the in-game, embedded narratives of military-themed first person shooters likely affect players’ attitudes towards the legitimacy of onscreen acts of violence and the values that support them.

Like the film industry, the video game industry “has adeptly transformed the horrors of warfare into vast commodified spectacles that help empower the U.S. war system” (Boggs &
Pollard, 2007, p. xi). Because the actual experiences of war are personally unknown to most Americans, the act of war is aestheticized, romanticized, and vicariously played out across movie screens and on virtual battlefields. After all, culture creates bonds between some people and barriers between others (Lewis, 2007, p. 6). By examining the possible relationship between thematic structures present around acts of in-game violence in military-themed first person shooters and players’ resulting conscious and unconscious attitudes towards war and the U.S. military, researchers can begin to unpack how such video games support a culture of militarism in the United States and perhaps shape the way we view specific out-groups as enemies to the nation.
IV. NARRATIVE THEORY AND MILITARY-THEMED FIRST PERSON SHOOTERS

All serious discourse expresses values. The following chapter focuses on two ways of thinking about narratives and their importance to understanding video games as influential discourse. First, it presents narrative as a way through which any culture might explain itself to itself. We construct narratives to make sense of the world around us. Second, it presents narrative as a way of both describing and analyzing the specific stories that a given culture might use as a way to further its own ends by fostering playfulness, improving "skills," and creating or reinforcing ideology. "Everybody may not know how to tell good stories but everybody, in human society known to history and anthropology, knows how to tell stories" (Prince 1973, p. 9).

As mentioned earlier, games reinforce cultural values through the act of play. Through the act of playing war games, for example, the ritual of warfare as a continual aspect of American culture is reinforced. Popular cultural products, like military-themed first person shooters, provide immersive experiences that allow players to participate in the excitement of armed conflict and help maintain cultural understandings of the conditions under which military conflict is legitimized. Such games most frequently imitate those aspects of reality that point toward the excitement of the event—the adrenaline soaked, high octane gun battles where the player occupies the role of a hero. Perhaps most importantly, though, designers of military-themed first person shooters “have begun to offer a more complete underlying narrative that provides a storyline and a justification for the actions taken during the game. The addition of a storyline provides a context for engaging in violent acts,” which are made to seem justified (Schneider, Lang, Shin, & Bradley 2004, p. 62).
The experiences of warfare presented within military-themed first person shooters – i.e., the narratives they tell about why the United States engages in combat and the way characters (heroes and villains alike) are presented – are significant because virtual reality (the worldview presented in the game space) likely affects heavy players’ social reality in the "real" world outside of the video game. After all, our conceptual systems are fundamentally shaped by cultural constructions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), such as video games.

The pages that follow are an inquiry into narrative theory and its relevance to the study of video games, beginning with Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm and its relationship to framing theory as a meaningful way to study the ideology at work within military-themed first person shooters. In this context, specific works by Kenneth Burke, Sonja Foss, Michel Foucault, and Fredric Jameson are also discussed.

A. **The Narrative Paradigm**

Walter Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm calls for the utmost attention to human values, and its primary function is to offer a way of interpreting and assessing human communication that leads to critique. For Fisher (1984), narration refers “to a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination” (p. 2). The narrative paradigm is a mode of social influence that approaches narrative rhetorically and meshes two elements of rhetorical theory: the argumentative, persuasive theme (i.e., the content and its potential to do something) and the literary, aesthetic theme (i.e., the look and feel of the content).
According to Fisher (1984), the narrative paradigm is related to E. G. Bormann’s conception of “fantasy themes,” and “rhetorical visions” (p. 7). Fantasy, for Bormann, consisted of those creative and imaginative interpretations of past happenings or predictions of future events. Bormann (1985) explains,

Fantasy is a technical term in the symbolic convergence theory and does not mean what it often does in ordinary usage, that is, something imaginary, not grounded in reality. The technical meaning for fantasy is the creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need … Rhetorical fantasies may include fanciful and fictitious scripts of imaginary characters, but they often deal with things that have actually happened to members of the community or that are reported in authenticated works of history, in the news media, or in the oral history and folklore of the group. The content of the dramatizing message that sparks the fantasy chain is called a fantasy theme (p. 5).

Commercial military-themed first person shooters extend, for example, fantasy themes of American military superiority, the glorification of military service, and post 9/11 fears of terrorism.

When such fantastical interpretations are known collectively, according to Bormann, they become rhetorical visions. Fisher (1980) takes this idea one step further and calls these rhetorical visions, “rhetorical fictions.” As he explains, "Fictions are symbolic forms that range from fragments and fabrications of the mind to invented constructs that cannot in and of themselves be verified but which do provide meaningful interpretations of how people and things exist and behave in the world" (pp. 120-21). Such fictions exist along a range beginning, on one end, with those that demand a willing suspension of disbelief to those that gain their assent through appearing to be true. Game designers’ fascination with the U.S. military and arsenal, combined with their attempts to create authentic environments, characters, and situations in a fun and exciting way, places them at the "true" end of the gradient.
In military-themed first person shooters, players focus their game-play around firearm and projectile weapon-based combat that is characterized by a three-dimensional view from the player’s perspective. These games provide an immersive experience that allows players to participate in the excitement of armed conflict in ways that mimic specific aspects of reality while ignoring others.

Fisher’s narrative paradigm – in addition to being influenced by Bormann – was also shaped by Frentz and Farrell’s (1976) language action paradigm and Kenneth Burke’s dramatism. The dramatistic method is concerned with locating motives for human action and treats language and thought as modes of that action. For Burke (1945), the quintessential question in the search for motive is: "What is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (p. xv). In Burke’s model any statement about motives can be broken down into the five terms of the dramatistic pentad: Act (what was done), Scene (when or where it was done), Agent (who did it?), Agency (how s/he did it), and Purpose (why did s/he do it?).

Games like Call of Duty ascribe motives to the mayhem through themes present within and across their narratives. The games force players to assume a first-person perspective through which they experience various Acts. These games provide players with Agents. They give players an Agency – i.e., weapon – and Purpose, and if the player fires enough bullets, then s/he will overcome obstacles to defeat the enemy.

While dramatism seems well suited to the study of video games like military-themed first person shooters, the standalone method is not without fault. How can we, for example, isolate the motives of game designers, especially when commercial blockbusters, like those that make up the Call of Duty series, are constructed by teams of hundreds of people spread out across the globe? Second, as "a game is a space of possible action that players activate, manipulate,
explore, and transform" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 378), how can we understand and isolate the motives of each and every player? Finally, how do we treat a construct like war within military themed first person shooters, which may be construed as any one of the five terms of the dramatistic pentad?

Burke admits locating motives in real life can be difficult. "We take it for granted," he explains, "that insofar as men cannot themselves create the universe, there must remain something essentially enigmatic about the problem of motives, and that this underlying enigma will manifest itself in inevitable ambiguities and inconsistencies among the terms for motives" (p. xviii). But designers and computer programmers build every aspect of game worlds through code. By searching for motives in the programming of the game, what Ian Bogost (2007) calls *procedural rhetoric*, we can see ideology at work. Ideology is expressed through the authorship of rules of behavior, "the construction of dynamic models. In computation, those rules are authored in code, through the practice of programming" (p. 28).

Any analysis of the procedural rhetoric of a video game begins with the simple question: What is it that players are allowed to do within the game world? For instance, we can potentially see how the programmed rules of a commercial military-themed first person shooter encourages players to adopt, support, or accept a neoconservative position on how best to fight the war on terror every single time they play. By examining the processes at work in the game, we can see played out before our eyes whether or not players have an option not to shoot a terrorist or enemy combatant. Or are the rules of engagement essentially shoot first and ask questions later?

Unlike Burke’s dramatism, Fisher’s paradigm is necessarily critical and concerns the precise part played by people in their interpretation and assessment of meanings in the world and in their choice of behavior in given situations (Fisher, 1985b, p. 87). People are not actors as
their parts and participation are not scripted.

Fisher conceived of the narrative paradigm largely because he was displeased with the prominence of experts within society. Within the traditional paradigm of the rational world, humans are assumed to be free, thinking beings who base their decisions on evidence and reason. Traditional rationality implies a hierarchical system, whereas the narrative rationality proposed by Fisher captures the role of the general public in making and assessing public moral arguments without formal training in logic or relying on technical experts.

While Burke’s dramatism refers to human beings as actors, Fisher’s narrative paradigm classifies human beings as homo narrans: humans as storytellers. According to Fisher (1984), the homo narrans metaphor is an extension of Burke’s definition of man as the symbol-making, symbol-misusing animal (p. 6). He explains, “The idea of human beings as storytellers indicates the generic form of all symbol composition; it holds that symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one’s life” (p. 6).

Furthermore, Fisher (1985b) asserts that human communication is full of ideas that cannot be verified or proven in any absolute way, “including metaphors, gestures, and values (p. 87),” and he wants human communication to include all forms of human expression. As such, Fisher proposes that the rational world paradigm be subsumed in his narrative paradigm as one story of human communication. Narration sets the plot of human experience, and when homo narrans becomes the master metaphor, it subsumes all others. Though Fisher’s narrative paradigm is broadly defined to subsume all theories of communication, I suggest that it is best suited for analyzing discourse that tells a story. Fisher extends Jameson's (2002) claim that
narration is the driving force of human communication. Though he does not do this explicitly, he says, "narration is the most appropriate, useful paradigm for understanding and assessing whatever is taking place as an instance of knowledge." (p. 169).

The term narration as it is used by Fisher (1995) designates a conceptual frame that accounts for every type of discourse "insofar as they lay claim to our reason." (p. 170). Fisher holds that life itself, both its interpretation and enactment, is to be understood in narrative terms. "When homo narrans is the master metaphor," he explains, "the other metaphors can be seen as various ways of informing how humans account for human choice and action" (p. 170). The stories that constitute these games present series of events that have precedent in our culture's history. Game play events highlight iconic historical moments and figures, allude to real world events, and propagate narrative themes relevant to Western audiences. In other words, we hold these fictional representations to be true because they satisfy what Fisher refers to as the two basic criteria of narrative rationality: coherence (aka narrative probability) and fidelity (p. 171).

Narrative probability "refers to formal features of a story ... whether or not a story coheres or 'hangs together,' whether or not the story is free of contradictions" (Fisher, 1985a, p. 349). Narrative fidelity "concerns the 'truth qualities' of the story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and of its values (pp. 349-350)."

Accepting Bormann’s conception of fantasy – which acknowledges that everyone possesses the ability to draw on past happenings to provide creative and imaginative interpretations of events – the narrative paradigm provides “logic to assess the stories

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In The Grammar of Stories Prince (1973) argues that a finite number of explicit rules account for the structure of the sets generally recognized as stories (p. 5). But he ignores both the substance (sounds, images, gestures, etc.) and the form of the expression side of a story. But we should not repeat this exclusion, especially when studying a visual form of storytelling like video games, which relays its stories through the experience of play.
constructed by humans” (Fisher, 1985a, p. 347). Fisher defines logic as “a systematic set of procedures designed to add in the analysis and the assessment of elements of reasoning in rhetorical interactions” (1978, p. 377). Here, humans decide how they should live and construct their worldview according to their own values. Fisher’s (1984) development of the “logic of good reasons” became a first step toward the development of his narrative paradigm.

The stories people tell can be evaluated on how well they relate to an audience's own individual and collective values. Human beings experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, each with their own conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends. For Fisher (1984), the world is composed of a set of stories that must be chosen from to live the good life in a process of continual re-creation. The production and practice of “good reasons” represent the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication. Fisher (1985b) admits good reasons may be subjective and incompletely understood, but he explains that their production is ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and those perceptions about the status and character of the other people involved (p. 75). Good reasons are “those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical [where warrant is defined as something that ‘authorizes, sanctions, or justifies belief, attitude, or action’]” (Fisher, 1978, p. 377).

As one might expect, the narrative paradigm is not free from criticism. Though it does propose “a precise perspective for critically reading texts” (Fisher 1985a, p. 357), it does not provide a specific method of analysis. Fisher (1984) merely asserts that “The ground for determining meaning, validity, reason, rationality, and truth [in understanding ordinary experience] must be a narrative context” (p. 03). One critic, Gring-Pemble (2001), challenges the liberatory and participatory functions of the narrative paradigm, implying that audiences do not
have that much control in the creation of meaning of the messages they receive. She argues that fact alone “discounts the power of discourse to shape and position audiences’ understanding of their world in particular ways” (359).

I argue that what we often believe to be fact, in many cases, is socially constructed interpretation of fact. Such criticisms against Fisher’s narrative paradigm can be blunted by combining it with Robert Entman’s conception of framing theory.

B. The Narrative Paradigm and Framing Theory

If narratives are stories about X, Y or Z, then frames are the structures within stories that get us to think a certain way about X, Y or Z. In Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (2009), for example, a player controls five different characters across the world to foil a terrorist plot. The player begins the single player campaign in Afghanistan and assists in taking a city from insurgents. The game's story is set in the year 2016. In the opening level American forces are presented as a liberating force, not an occupying one, in a future embroiled in an ongoing and seemingly endless war against terrorism. By having players experience combat through the eyes of multiple characters across the globe, the narrative also reinforces the conflict frame against terrorism as a "global war." I argue that the purposive element of post 9/11 military themed first person shooters – aside from their presumed entertainment value – is not only that they disseminate a specific ideology, but how they disseminate said ideology. It’s not what you say, after all, but how you say it, and our social reality is created through framing images of reality.

Framing theory posits that people’s perceptions of reality and values can be constructed or shaped through mediated discourse. Although the concept of framing existed prior to the 1990s (for examples, see Goffman, 1974; Iyengar, 1987; Iyengar, 1989), Robert Entman (1993)
parsimoniously defined and structured it: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality [or story] and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment and recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

Entman saw framing as a scattered conceptualization wherein previous studies lacked clear conceptual definitions and relied too heavily on context-specific operationalizations. By defining framing in this manner, he sought to bring together insights and theories that would otherwise remain dispersed over various disciplines. He acknowledged, “despite its omnipresence across the social sciences and humanities, nowhere is there a general statement of framing theory that shows exactly how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text, or how framing influences thinking” (p. 51). An ethnography of game design, for example, could potentially uncover how it is that designers embed frames in games that shape the way we think about war.

It is helpful to think of a “frame” as a particular angle or spin that shapes the way one thinks about specific elements within a story (Scheufele, 1999 p.115). According to Balaban (2008), different presentations of similar situations can decisively influence how individuals assess particular situations. Frames provide the lens through which to make that interpretation. In other words, frames are selective views on specific issues, stories or events that guide individuals’ interpretation of said issues, stories or events (p. 11).

Chong and Druckman (2007) explain, “A frame in a communication organizes everyday reality by providing meaning to an unfolding strip of events and promoting particular definitions and interpretations” (p. 110). Berger and Luckmann (1967) refer to frames as typifications. They observe that most of our day-to-day encounters with other people are typical. “The typifications
of social interaction become progressively anonymous the farther away they are from the face-to-face situation … If I typify my friend Harry as a member of category X (say, as an Englishman), I ipso facto interpret at least certain aspects of his conduct as resulting from this typification—for instance, his tastes in food are typical of Englishman, as are his manners, certain of his emotional reactions, and so on” (p. 31). If a heavy video game player routinely plays military-themed first person shooters, and s/he encounters an American soldier outside of the game world, s/he is likely to interpret at least certain aspects of the soldier's conduct or attributes as resulting from his/her own repeated experiences of playing as a soldier in a game world.

Framing ostensibly changes attitudes by altering the underlying considerations used in one’s evaluation of events over time. And frames can – and oftentimes do – build upon themselves or change over time to re-frame/reflect new or changed values. Frames, then, can be viewed as schemas for both presenting and comprehending information. The reason framing theory is commensurable with Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm is because a narrative is a frame, a part of our cultural stock of understanding the world. Different frames are used to illicit distinct reactions. Frames are embedded in the narratives we experience throughout our lives. These narratives bind facts and our experiences together in a coherent pattern (Goldberg, 1982, p. 242), and frames are those structures within narratives that shape how we think about those facts and experiences. As Lakoff (2008) explains, “Frames are among the cognitive structures we think with … so frames tend to structure a huge amount of our thought” (p. 22).

Fisher argues that humans experience and perceive life as a series of narratives constructed from personal experience, history, and rhetorical fictions. Similarly, the various modes of framing present logical puzzles for audiences to decipher. The most relevant aspect of
Fisher’s paradigm is relevant for this research since it takes into account the whole of human experience through the act of, and within the framework of, storytelling. The integration of framing theory within the narrative paradigm allows for a stronger understanding of how reality is both created and shaped through the act of storytelling.

Understanding the complexities of storytelling is no simple task. As Jameson (2002) explains, "Texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or – if the text is brand new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions." (p. 9). Jameson prioritizes a political interpretation of literary texts as one of the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. "There is nothing that is not social and historical, and thus political. (p. 20). For Fisher, the narrative paradigm subsumes all others. For Jameson, who acknowledges that narrative is the central instance of human consciousness, the master narrative that informs all others is the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. A Jamesonian analysis of military-themed first person shooters would trace Presidents Reagan's rhetoric and the neoconservative worldview of the Bush Administration through narratives in news and popular culture artifacts to examine how the role of the soldier has changed in the public consciousness. Such an analysis would likely produce a postmodern understanding of military conflict.

"It is safest," according to Jameson (1990), "to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think of the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place." (p. ix). Thus, military-themed first person shooters are fantastic historiographies that either (1) combine nostalgia, historical verisimilitude and elements of fiction to create "real sewer systems with imaginary crocodiles in them" (p. 368) or (2) create unreal stories that seek
to convey the real past (or possible future) better than any of the facts ever could. Military-themed first person shooters set during World War II largely belong to the first category, while those set in a post 9/11 world occupy the second as their storylines either exist as wishful thinking, revenge fantasies, or the outright rewriting of history. As the narratives in these games have evolved, so has the perception of the soldier in the minds of the American public.

C. Experiencing Narratives in Video Games

The video game narratives that players’ experience take many shapes and are thus challenging to study. The important question is how to analyze games as narratives (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, pp. 378-799). Foss (2008) provides a method of criticism that, when combined with Fisher's critical perspective, is a good base for doing so. Utilizing this narrative method of criticism, scholars first select an artifact and identify the objective of the narrative. As Foss (2008) explains, "as a story goes into the world, it performs an action of some kind, it produces outcomes or consequences, or it does certain kind of rhetorical work" (p. 310). People tell stories in order to do things. The rhetorical objective within military-themed first person shooters will likely be to defend or justify an act, to inculcate obedience, to formulate good relations and opinions with and about the armed forces and/or a specific course of impending or forthcoming military action, to convey truths and values about a culture, or to tell a specific story about oppressors and the oppressed. Such objectives are accessible through an analysis of the story's components (p. 315), which include narrative themes.

Stories are about sequences of events and attributions across a variety of genres. Story forms (genres) are frames which are ways of depicting reality, and which invite people to think about events that unfold in a specific way. Themes are central topics to a narrative which usually
explore culturally recognizable ideas that are usually implied rather than stated explicitly. Themes reflect the meaning or meanings revealed by a narrative. Themes are what the story is about. They tie everything together. Themes, then, create a story template, since every element of the story bolsters its thematic content. An important step in understanding how to assess or evaluate video game narratives, then, is to identify their themes.

One must remember, however, that video games are narrative experiences of play. Salen and Zimmerman (2003) identify two structural rubrics for understanding the narrative components of a game. They explain, "Players can experience a game narrative as a crafted story interactively told [...] or players can engage with narrative as an emergent experience that happens while the game is played" (p. 383).

Understanding the rhetoric of video games, and how and why we construct meaning from their narratives, particularly those within post 9/11 military-themed first person shooters, is important for understanding how popular culture may reinforce attitudes and values that support a particular world view. We must study both the embedded and emergent narratives within video games to completely understand their impact. To best understand how military-themed first person shooters construct, reveal, and reinforce attitudes about the military and American foreign policy regarding the War on Terror, in the next chapters I present a two-pronged study that 1) uses grounded theory to analyze the narrative thematic content across six games of the Call of Duty series and 2) examines the gaming habits, political preferences, and attitudes towards war and the U.S. military of random samples of a) undergraduate and graduate students at a state-funded Midwestern university and b) members of Activision's Official Call of Duty Twitter Community. This combined analysis of attitude content and cultural belief amounts to a distinct ideology – war is constant, war is clean, and war is Cold.
V. GROUNDED THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Because of its immense popularity the narrative thematic content of Call of Duty helps shed light on how the experience of and attitudes toward warfare are constructed in popular culture. To best understand how military-themed first person shooters construct, reveal, and reinforce attitudes about the military and American foreign policy regarding the continued War on Terror, I conducted a two-pronged study that analyzed the series' narrative thematic content along with the the political beliefs and preferences of players and non-players. In this chapter I begin with a grounded thematic analysis of the Call of Duty series rooted in the understanding of narrative/framing theory discussed earlier.

A. Method

In his analysis of Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare and Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (2009) Gagnon (2010) argues that digital war games elicit consent for the U.S. military, militarism, and the wars waged by the U.S. and its allies abroad through their narratives. His analysis focuses, in part, on how the games articulate a neoconservative vision of post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy. As such, he identifies three themes present in the games: those that (1) resonate with and reinforce a sensationalistic view of post-9/11 geopolitics (Debrix 2008); (2) glorify military power and elicit consent for the idea that state violence and wars are inevitable; and (3) depict a sanitized vision of war and downplay the negative consequences of state violence."

Gagnon's analysis is a good starting point for ascertaining how the narratives of contemporary military-themed first person shooters draw on neoconservative tenets that justify the post 9/11
U.S. military doctrine and a culture of militarism. As mentioned before, the neoconservative worldview has five components: 1) a firm belief in the centrality and efficacy of American military power; 2) adherence to the post-Cold War strategy to increase military; 3) the willingness to engage in preventive war; 4) a firm belief that America is a global force for good; and 5) unyielding optimism about America as a future world leader. Other relevant issues include those qualities that distinguish “good guys” from “bad guys,” the games’ representation of the life of a soldier and what it means to be a soldier, the military values stressed, how the narratives of these games contextualize the violence as legitimate or illegitimate, how players are rewarded for performing certain behaviors over others, and what kind of persona the players take on.

Gagnon limited his analysis to only two games: *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. I conducted two inter-related studies beginning with a grounded thematic analysis rooted in narrative/framing theory that expands Gagnon's sample to include the six games in the Call of Duty franchise released since 9/11 up-to-and-including *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2*. I examined the relevancy of Gagnon's themes across the games, whose storylines exist across two different universes. *Modern Warfare, Modern Warfare 2,* and *Modern Warfare 3* constitute the "Modern Warfare Universe." *World at War, Black Ops,* and *Black Ops II* constitute the "Black Ops Universe." The events in one universe do not cross over into the other. The storylines and character arcs present across my six-game sample wrap themselves up.

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17 The two most recent console-based *Call of Duty* games, *Call of Duty: Ghosts* and *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare,* were not included in the sample because they were released after my analysis had begun.
B. The "Modern Warfare" Universe

*Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* was released in 2007. Set in 2011, the game presents players with the opportunity to engage in virtual war in a contemporary setting steeped in Cold War rhetoric and post 9/11 fears of terrorism. At the start of the game, a civil war has broken out in Russia between its government and ultranationalists who seek to restore the country to its Soviet-era glamour. Meanwhile, a separatist group lead by Khaled Al-Asad, and aided by Russian ultranationalist Imran Zakhaev, seizes power in a "small but oil-rich" country in the Middle East through a coup d'état. Al-Asad harbors extreme anti-Western views and demonstrates his ruthlessness when he broadcasts his execution of President Yasir Al-Fulani on national television during the game's opening credits. Players progress through the game by jumping between the perspectives of a U.S. Force Reconnaissance Marine and a British SAS commando. By the time players get an opportunity to eliminate Zakhaev, the villain has already killed thousands by having ordered his protégé, Vladimir Makarov, to detonate a nuclear device in the "small but oil rich" country. Makarov, a minor character in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, is the secondary antagonist in the follow-up, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, and the main villain in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*. The three games in the "Modern Warfare" universe, then, are essentially about Makarov's rise and defeat.

Despite the efforts of the U.S. Marine Corps and British Special Air Service in the first game, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* begins by informing the player that the ultranationalists seized control of the Russian Federation, making puppet master Imran Zakhaev a martyr. Zakhaev's right-hand man, Makarov, begins his campaign of revenge against the West by committing acts of terrorism designed to spark a war between Russia and the United States. As such, he orchestrates what appears to be an American-sponsored terrorist attack against civilians
in a Russian airport. Russia retaliates by launching a surprise invasion on the East Coast of the United States. The game's central antagonist reveals himself to be General Shepherd, an American ideologue who lost 30,000 soldiers when Zhakaev detonated the nuclear bomb in *Modern Warfare 2*. His desire to be seen as a national hero and restore America to the mightiest force on the planet motivates him to betray the player.

In *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, players continue the hunt for Makarov who intends on derailing the Russian President's plans of making peace with the United States. Makarov's ultimate goal: to use Russia's nuclear arsenal as a show of force to control the whole of Europe.

C. **The "Black Ops" Universe**

*Call of Duty: World at War* begins on Makin Island on August 17, 1942. Players assume the role of Marine Private C. Miller as he watches the torture and execution of a fellow Marine, along with another Marine being beaten by a Japanese soldier. Miller is rescued by a squad of Marines, led by Corporal Roebuck and Sergeant Tom Sullivan. "We're gonna make them pay for what they've done," Roebuck explains as he frees Miller. From here, the player aids in the assault of the island, replicating the Makin Island raid and a series of battles that stretch across the years that follow. The game's story jumps between the campaign in the Pacific to the Russian push into Berlin, where the player embodies Private Dimitri Petrenko. The European campaign begins on the Eastern Front on September 17, 1942 during the Battle of Stalingrad. Petrenko meets and fights alongside Captain Viktor Reznov.

*Call of Duty: Black Ops* begins on February 25, 1968, with the player (as Alex Mason), strapped to a chair in an interrogation room. Mason is bombarded with questions by his unseen captors about the location of a numbers station (a shortwave radio station broadcasting unusual
numbers to Soviet sleeper agents). While attempting to answer their questions, Mason recalls trying to assassinate Fidel Castro in Cuba during the Bay of Pigs invasion, being captured and handed over to General Nikita Dragovich (who tortures and imprisons him in a gulag), and befriending Viktor Reznov.

In October 1945, Reznov and Dimitri Petrenko were sent to extract scientist Friedrich Steiner from a Nazi base in the Arctic. Dragovich betrayed them by testing Steiner's creation, a nerve agent known as "Nova-6", on the soldiers. Though Reznov destroyed the Nova-6 and escaped, the Soviets successfully recreated it. Back in the interrogation room, Mason explains how he escaped from the gulag and was recruited by President John F. Kennedy to assassinate Dragovich, whose ultimate goal is to activate communist sleeper cells across the U.S. and release Nova-6 gas on the unsuspecting population.

*Call of Duty: Black Ops II* begins in 2025, where U.S. Special Forces operatives led by David Mason (son of Alex Mason) arrive at "the Vault," a top-security location home to an elderly Frank Woods, whom they suspect possesses vital information on the whereabouts of Raul Menendez. Menendez, the leader of a massive populist movement Cordis Die, stages a cyber attack that cripples the Chinese Stock Exchange. In response, the Chinese government bans the export of rare earth elements which the entire infrastructure of the U.S. Army runs and relies on, fermenting the start of the Second Cold War between the United States and NATO, against the Chinese-led Strategic Defense Coalition. Menendez's end game is to bring the two superpowers to a full-blown war by inciting conflicts between the two.
D. **Thematic Analysis Explained**

Gagnon's rationale for limiting his analysis to only two games was that their narratives take place in the present, unlike *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010), whose narrative puts players in Vietnam and Cold War scenarios. Because modern military-themed first person shooters that take place during Vietnam and the Cold War may rewrite history according to present fears, it is worthwhile to examine how such fears manifest themselves within and across the Call of Duty games produced after 9/11. Wars fought in an earlier time are now being depicted through these video games in a post 9/11 political environment. Conducting a thorough analysis of the narrative thematic content within the single-player campaigns of these games is a necessary step to understanding how they contribute to players' worldviews and attitudes about war.

*Thematic analysis* "is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes a data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). *Grounded thematic analysis*, then, is a form of thematic analysis wherein the researcher uses induction\(^{18}\) to identify themes as they emerge from data under study rather than coming to the data with a priori expectations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). What the researcher learns is "always dependent on the interaction between investigator and context, and the interaction is also not fully predictable" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 208). Specific research questions (outside of the general research questions listed throughout) and hypotheses evolved throughout the coding process and, impacted the design of the questionnaire used in the second part of the study. In grounded thematic analysis, the analytic process is a progression from a

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\(^{18}\) Inductive analysis, as explained by Braun & Clarke, "is a process of coding the data *without* trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions" (p. 12).
description of patterns to their broader interpretation (Braun & Clarke, p. 13) and involves moving between and across the entire data set, the coded extracts of data, and the final data analysis (p. 15). The entire process is one of continuous data analysis, "so that every new act of investigation takes into account everything that has been learned so far" (Lincoln & Guba, p. 209).

Relevant narrative themes emerged throughout and across my multiple interactions with the embedded and emergent narratives of the single-player campaigns of each game. I compiled detailed notes during play about (1) the representation of the military, (2) representations of soldiers, (3) the experiences of war, and (4) how the post 9/11 worldview is both challenged and reinforced. I recorded the narrative situations that occurred, my involvement in them, and the choices that I as a player was allowed to make throughout the game play experience. I imported my data into the Text Analysis Markup System (TAMS) Analyzer, an open source qualitative research tool, to compare my notes alongside transcripts of each campaign downloaded from The Call of Duty Wiki.\textsuperscript{19} I paid special attention throughout to whether or not the emerging themes reflected or contradicted Gagnon's themes.

To organize data into thematically unified segments, the study utilized Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) constant comparative method of data analysis. First, I repeatedly played through the single-player campaigns of each of the six games in my sample in order to form a systematic analysis that produced themes that yielded redundancy. Themes were identified by playing and noting recurring incidents and the repetition of narrative elements. Detailed breakdowns of major set-pieces were created during repeated plays to compare representations of conflict, combat, and the U.S. military and foreign policy. Samples of these notes are included in the appendices. The

\textsuperscript{19} TAMS Analyzer for Macintosh OS X is available at <http://tamsys.sourceforge.net/>.
primary focus of this analysis, then, is to evaluate the relationship between several themes identified by Gagnon (as well as others) in relation to my own game play experiences.

E. **Grounded Thematic Analysis In Practice**

Three dominant themes emerged across the series through the 100-plus hours I spent with the games: 1) war is constant; 2) war is clean; and 3) war is Cold (i.e., Cold War fears are alive and well in popular culture). Each theme extends one or more of the five components of the neoconservative worldview described earlier — i.e., 1) a firm belief in American military might; 2) adherence to post-Cold War military strategy and spending; 3) a willingness to engage in preventive war; 4) A firm belief that America is a global force for good; and 5) Unending optimism about America's future as a world leader. In the pages that follow, I discuss how themes manifest themselves across the series and extend a neoconservative worldview.

1. **War is Constant**

Not only do the storylines and experiences of play across the six Call of Duty games in my sample support Gagnon's assertion that military-themed first person shooters glorify military power and present war as an inevitability, they present war as a constant. The events of one game directly lead into (and bleed into) the events of another. Though battles end and individual villains, dictators, and terrorists are ultimately thwarted, there will always be war. There will always another threat looming on the horizon, another enemy who needs to be defeated to ensure safety and the American way of life. Each new enemy is simply a new face of the multi-headed hydra threatening the West. It is worth noting that threats are never solved diplomatically; at least players are not privy to this aspect of foreign policy. Players are ultimately only tasked with shooting in some form or another. When one firefight ends, another
begins. Problems are solved through military superiority, which adheres to the neoconservative belief in American military might. This is a commercial necessity.

When one character's journey reaches an endpoint, players embody someone else embroiled in race against the clock, chase, gunfight, or large-scale assault. Players, who almost always get to perform rather than simply witness acts of heroism, are never tasked with making difficult decisions. Players never have to make distinctions between enemy combatants and civilians, for example. Players never have to worry about collateral damage. Players never have to ruminate on the number of soldiers and enemies killed. Players, generally speaking, do not have the ability to alter the crafted, programmed trajectory of storylines in the games. I say "generally" because Call of Duty: World at War offers a handful of different story outcomes, which depend on in-game decisions, and the storyline in Call of Duty: Black Ops II offers several possible endings, which depend on decisions and tasks completed over the course of the game.

By shifting players from one character to another, by moving players across countries and campaigns, the games also present the idea that wars are not rooted to one place. War is global, and threats are everywhere, at home and abroad. So players, and by extension America, act as a global force for good. At the same time, by giving players the opportunity to play as multiple soldiers spanning the globe, the games present the idea that wars are fought and won through the cooperation of multiple coalition forces. Having a strong military, then, ultimately ensures peace.
2. **War is Clean**

Only bad guys kill civilians. Since players usually play as one of the good guys, the games rarely make them consider collateral damage and the toll war takes on civilians. For example, when players scan, take aim, and launch missiles from a Predator drone hovering far above the game world in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, they guide the projectile to its target with clinical precision, an effort which proves thoroughly rewarding in the game world and suggests, through repetition, of the accuracy, precision, and indispensable value such weapons are on the battlefield. Such precision is pointless, though, since there are never any civilians to worry about. Players don't ever have to decide between legitimate and illegitimate targets. Every target acquired and fired upon is a legitimate enemy combatant, insurgent, or terrorist. This creates a fantasy of a "virtuous war" (Power, 2007, p. 2010), extends the neoconservative beliefs in American military might, a firm belief in America as a global force for good, and optimism about America's future as a world leader. The American military, after all, does not ever kill civilians.

Consider how this differs from real life. The civil rights organization Reprieve recently released a study titled "You Never Die Twice: Multiple Kills in the U.S. Drone Program" (n.d.), which found, in part, "Twenty-four men were reported killed or targeted multiple times in Pakistan. Missed strikes on these men killed 874 other people, and account for the 35% of all confirmed civilian casualties in Pakistani drone strikes. They also resulted in the deaths of 142 children" (p. 6).

Unintentional civilian deaths and friendly fire do not exist on the virtual battlefield; the games' programming typically removes them from it. *Call of Duty* always presents civilian

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20 I say usually, since players see one level through the eyes of the villain, *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*. 
casualties as being intentionally perpetrated by the enemy, so players are motivated to engage with the enemy to save, or in retaliation for the taking of, innocent lives. In *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, for example, Sgt. Kamarov asks for help in defeating a band of ultranationalists assaulting a Russian village, because their rockets have killed hundreds of civilians. In *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*, players engage in a firefight in a crowded, upscale nightclub called Club Solar. The firefight begins after one of the villains storms the club, kills the DJ and executes a hostage. By the time the player procures a weapon and engages with enemy combatants, all the civilians have fled the dance floor, so players don't have to worry about navigating around them. In his 2009 book *The Ethics of Computer Games*, Miguel Sicart argues, "The way games are designed, and how that design encourages players to make certain choices, is relevant for the understanding of the ethics of computer games" (p. 17). The elimination of choice on the virtual battlefield – removing the complex decision-making processes soldiers undertake when trying to decide if someone is an enemy combatant or a civilian – is less ethical than allowing players to explore moral choice through decisions made on the battlefield. No choice requires no active engagement with moral conundrums. Because I, as the player, never have to decide between legitimate or illegitimate targets, never have to deal with the moral uncertainty that exists on the battlefield, I never have to consider the consequences of my actions, even if those consequences simply result in a momentary feeling of guilt.

In *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, players embody an American soldier undercover in Russia for the CIA during the level, "No Russian." Players are invited to participate in the massacre of civilians and security guards at an airport in Moscow. Though players may choose whether or not to participate in the slaughter while making their way through the panicked crowd, the participation has no bearing on the end result – that the civilians are slaughtered by
Makarov (the game's overarching bad guy) and his men. Makarov, incidentally, is aware of the protagonist's true identity and kills him during extraction, leaving his body behind to spark a war between the Russian Federation and the United States. In other words, the game's embedded narrative remains the same no matter what the player does. Players who opt to shoot Makarov or any of his men at any time during "No Russian" are gunned down and forced to restart the level from the last checkpoint. The same also happens if players lag behind in the beginning in an attempt to avoid the slaughter. In such instances, Makarov announces, "I have no patience for cowards," before he and his men open fire. The procedural rhetoric of the game makes players live through the experience of either joining in the slaughter or helplessly watching as men and women (interestingly, no children) are indiscriminately gunned down. The game presents the death of civilians as an atrocious act perpetrated by bad guys.

Another example: in call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, players watch the "The Davis Family Vacation." At the beginning of this level, Mr. Davis turns on his video camera to film his wife and daughter on a London sidewalk. Big Ben looms in the background. As players watch the wife and daughter talk about visiting the landmark, a truck stops around the corner and two Russians in gas masks hurriedly exit. Moments later, the truck explodes, killing the family, and releasing poison gas into the air. In each of the above instances, the death of civilians is used to move the story forward and provide a justification for the player to stop the villains. After all, good guys don't kill civilians.

Every now and again, though, the games' programming is inconsistent. For example, at one point in Call of Duty: Black Ops II, I tested the game's procedural rhetoric by shooting a security guard. Moments prior, my character told the guard, "Listen, you need to open the armory, get your guys armed and ready to fight." After the guard opened the door I decided to
shoot him in the back. The guard crumpled to the floor, deceased. The game did not kick me back to the last checkpoint. I did not see a message telling me that friendly fire will not be tolerated. Instead, the game's narrative proceeded unabated. Friendly fire is occasionally tolerated.

3. **War is Cold**

The single-player campaigns across both the "Modern Warfare" universe and the "Black Ops" universe span the globe and situate game play in contemporary and/or future conflicts steeped in Cold War rhetoric and neoconservative fears. *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2*, for example, takes place in 2025 and presents a United States under siege by its own technology. Both the "Modern Warfare" universe and "Black Ops" universe ultimately rewrite post 9/11 fears and insecurities to present Russians (and by extension Communists) as villains. In the "Modern Warfare" universe, terrorism and communism become intertwined, as ultranationalists (a revolutionary political party and armed organization in Russia who wish to return the country back to what it was during the days of the Soviet Union) act as puppet masters over "Middle Eastern" ideologues. In the "Black Ops" universe Russia colludes with Nazis and Cuba. The "Black Ops" universe is unique, though. *Call of Duty: World at War* follows U.S. Marines fighting in the Pacific and Russian soldiers as they move to assault Berlin. As members of the Allied forces, the Russians are presented as protagonists. Interestingly, though, the game provides important characterization for the events of *Black Ops* and *Black Ops II*. Dimitri Petrenko and Sgt. Viktor Reznov became vital characters who help drive events in the other two games, and their relationship to one another and the rest of the story begins here. Reznov, for example, recounts valuable information to the player about the identities of his enemies: Nikita
Dragovich, Lev Kravchenko, and ex-Nazi scientist Friedrich Steiner, who defected to the Soviet Union after World War II.

Russia is, at best, presented as a tenuous ally. In *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, players gather with Cpt. Price and Gaz in the Caucasus Mountains. Price says, "The Loyalists are expecting us half a click to the north. Move out." Gaz responds, "Loyalists, eh? Are those the good Russians or the bad Russians?" Price retorts, "Well, they won't shoot us on sight, if that's what you're asking," which implies that the good/bad dichotomy doesn't really apply. All Russians, it seems, are likely to mistrust westerners, and vice versa.

That the Cold War theme extends into the War on Terror is noteworthy for three reasons. First, it allows the producers to provide players with an acceptable, recognizable, and uncontroversial enemy with historical precedent. Second, it situates the War on Terror in a specific geographic region, rather than treating it as a tactic or ideology. Third, it ignores the factors that correlate with high levels of terrorism, such as religious tensions. According to the 2014 Global Terrorism Index, four organizations were responsible for the majority of claimed deaths by terrorist attacks in 2013: ISIL, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and al-Qa'ida and its affiliates. "Variations of religious ideologies based on extreme interpretations of Wahhabi Islam are the key commonality for all four groups" (p. 2). The producers of the *Call of Duty* series have removed practically all religious connotations and iconography from the War on Terror. Conflicts are never driven by, or discussed in terms of, religious ideologies, which ensures that the War on Terror is not presented as a war against radical Islam. An inoffensive representation of war prevents the games from being labeled Islamophobic, and increases the appeal of these games for a larger audience.
F. **Possible Impact on Players**

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault traces the history of "the soldier" from the seventeenth century to the present in order to show how the designation is no longer based on class. Soldiers are not born, they're constructed. The inapt body of a would-be soldier "is a formless clay" that can be constructed into a working part of the military machine (p. 135). As both an "object and target of power" (p. 136), the body is both acted upon by, and an instrument of, those with authority. For Foucault, there was a question pertaining to the soldier of submission and use (on the one hand) and of functioning and explanation (on the other). In other words, within the soldier "there was a useful body and an intelligible body" (p. 136). The powers that be need to break down both bodies to create an ideal soldier. As described on GoArmy.com, "Basic Combat Training (BCT) is a training course that transforms civilians into Soldiers." The military first breaks a would-be soldier down by stripping him/her of control before building him/her back up again. As such, Basic Training includes examples of the spatial and visual arrangement of bodies as a way to dominate and maintain uniformity. Basic Training, as a method of control, includes control of activity (soldiers adhere to a strict timetable of when to sleep, when to wake, and when to eat), temporal elaboration of the act, and the correlation of the body and gesture (soldiers standing and marching in formation). Marching is a collective and obligatory rhythm imposed from the outside. It is a program. Foucault's notion of docility is important here, which "joins the analysable body to the manipulable body. A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved." (p. 136).

Military-themed first person shooters, just like Basic Training, seek to create docile bodies. Once a player begins a video game, s/he has no choice but to submit to its governing rules (its procedural rhetoric) to participate. The player, in other words, is subjected, used,
transformed, and improved by and through the experience of playing through the embedded and emergent narratives of the game. Unlike Basic Training, however, which seeks to create bodies that may be molded into soldiers, military-themed first person shooters (un)consciously seek to separate the citizenry from soldiers.

The process of playing as a soldier in a fantastic historiography of the War on Terror is an ironic perversion of Basic Training. Military-themed first person shooters seek to create docile bodies that can be molded into passive consumers of war as a form of entertainment. The games, through the repetition of narratives, frames, and game play, exercise a subtle coercion over the body. Unlike Basic Training, however, which seeks control over a person's movements, gestures, attitudes, and rapidity to create an active body, commercial military-themed first person shooters create an ironic state of mind where soldiers become a grotesque simulacra. Soldiers become something more than individual human beings. They become something other than the everyday citizens who are not themselves serving in the armed forces. They become Hollywood action stars capable of superhuman feats of strength and heroism in the face of certain doom.

What military-themed first person shooters accomplish is not physical training. The act of looking down a barrel of a gun in the virtual world is not the same as looking down the barrel of a gun in the real world. Through the repetition of point, click, and shoot-to-kill – of pointing a gun at an opponent and pulling a trigger to eliminate him/her – players become indoctrinated into a military mindset of who the enemies are, who the friendlies are, and what the best way to engage with the enemy is – namely, by looking at them down the barrel of a gun. The games are not training people to kill, per se. But their embedded narratives are showing players who the country has a right to kill under certain circumstances through the use of military force.
Borrowing a phrase from Walkerdine (2007), video games offer sites for performance where players learn when to fight and what to fight for (p. 75). Military-themed first person shooters provide players with an illusory opportunity to practice and manage the work of being a soldier in America's evolving and continued War on Terror without suffering any of the hardships or drawbacks. As mentioned before, they also reinforce a Cold War era fear of Russia as an enemy of the United States.

Increased aptitude equals increased domination. Military-themed first person shooters indeed produce increased aptitude for something, which in turn produce increased domination. And that something, articulated in the pages that follow, is likely a capacity for apathy. Foucault talks about the correlation of body and gesture. He says, "Disciplinary control does not consist simply in teaching or imposing a series of particular gestures; it imposes the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed. In the correct use of the body, which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless" (p. 152). This idea is helpful to understand how pop cultural artifacts like military-themed first person shooters promote and/or reinforce political passivity and help build support for the military machine.

First, the correlation of body and gesture in military-themed first person shooters suggests that warfare itself is becoming impersonal. Players sit in front of a video screen engaging in virtual combat, both remotely and abstractly. There is a spatial and emotional distance between a soldier utilizing a targeting screen to operate weaponry that is absent from a soldier who engages with the enemy face-to-face.

Consider the various levels of disconnect involved within the act of killing in a virtual world. A player is assumedly far away from the country at the heart of conflict. S/he is safe,
engaging in an act of riskless risk. S/he is engaging with the material through a television screen, which moves the act another step away from being personal. Finally, the player is inhabiting the body of another character whose actions, while controlled by the player, are not his/her own. As warfare itself is becoming more computerized and digital, the military themed first person shooter is not preparing players for combat, but for the acceptance of certain types of combat and media coverage of combat.

If we accept that commercial military-themed first person shooters do not train players to become soldiers but encourage, through their narratives and the interactive experience of play, a separation of citizens and soldiers, then there is a correlation of the (in)active body of the player and the abstract gestures input through the mechanism of the controller. The controller itself is an object that further distances the player from the experiences of the soldier. In military-themed first person shooters, players pretend to be soldiers. They do not become soldiers themselves through the act of play. Game players play simulacra of soldiers (exaggerated representations of soldiers) and actively engage with the game mentally and emotionally. But they are physically immobile save for the feverish hand-eye coordination on display.

The posture of a gamer – sitting, perhaps leaning forward with rapt attention towards the goings on in front of him/her – is one of physical (though not mental) inactivity. Not only does the game's narrative physically distance players from the real activities of soldiers outside of the game space, their participation in the narrative as someone other than themselves removes the physical connection between the citizen at home and the soldier abroad. The citizen at home is not the soldier abroad. S/he is only pretending to be one for the duration of the game. The powerless can become powerful in a video game.
Military-themed first person shooters afford everyday citizens the chance to make the impossible possible – to engage in America's continued War on Terror without sacrifice – at least for the duration of the game. The games, then, likely discourage players from physically joining the military themselves. Why put yourself through the physical and emotional hardship of being in the military when you can vicariously live the life of one? The players remain citizens. Soldiers remain the distant others. The activities soldiers undertake as an extension of foreign policy become something that doesn't directly affect the lives of players/citizens/consumers.

The games across the sample, then, simultaneously accomplish three things. First, military-themed games advance a worldview that war is constant. Second, like other forms of media, they "play a central role in the projection of enemy images, a vital pre-requisite to war' (Carruthers 2000, p. 24). Third, such games reinforce in players a sense that they have vicariously experienced warfare through the eyes of soldiers, which contributes to both apathy and a misunderstanding of war itself. The term presence "describes a media user’s feeling that mediated representations are real" (Ivory & Kalyanaraman, 2007, p. 534). In addition, "Newer games feature more realistic and vivid representations, suggesting that advancements in video game technology may similarly contribute to a higher sense of presence in players" (p. 534).

Interestingly, video game depictions of war seem to have influenced media representations of real war. In almost cyclical fashion, technofetishism of real war then feeds into depictions of war in video games. For example, the Persian Gulf War was referred to as the Nintendo War. The designation refers to the high tech precision and sterile calculation and presentation of warfare via video displays, which resemble video games (Scodari, 1993, p. 1). More recently, the AC-130 received significant news exposure during the U.S. invasions of Iraq
and Afghanistan, because the Pentagon released infrared gun-sight footage to the networks. The military-themed first person shooter *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* replicates the footage in a level called "Death from Above," where the player looks through an authentic reproduction of the gunship's targeting sight and controls the large caliber machine gun and mounted canons on an AC-130 Spectre (Stahl, 2010, pp. 102-3).

In such instances, the video game world and the real world become indistinguishable from one another. In fact, the virtual seems more real, since the level of detail approximates what players assume real world pilots see when piloting their drones, and staring through targeting goggles thousands of feet above the earth. "With this bleeding between reality and virtuality, it is hard to know whether video games are becoming more like war, or war is becoming more like video games. Certainly, for millions of players across the globe, war is a video game" (Shaw 2010, p. 790).

For millions of players across the globe, players who do not have military experience and do not intend on enlisting for military service, their ideas about war are in-part shaped by their in-game interactions with war. For those that do become inspired to join the military after playing such games, then their attitudes towards war and the military are shaped, at least in part, by their excitement at the possibility of experiencing the fun and excitement of war presented in these games. Whether controlling a Predator drone,\(^{21}\) or determining which of the white silhouettes illuminated in night-vision are friendly or foe from a bomber in the clouds, the on-screen game interface approximates actual mechanics in a believable way. The sensory overload entertains while simultaneously normalizing the action. During "Death from Above," firing on your compatriots results in having to restart the mission, since "Friendly fire will not be

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\(^{21}\) It is worth noting that many systems used to control drones utilize console controllers for targeting (Hambling, 2008).
tolerated." However, there are no civilians on the streets or in the houses. There are only your team members and the enemy soldiers. Mistakes do not cost the player anything other than having to redo part of the mission to get it right.

For example, perhaps one reason why the public continues to support America's use of drones is the belief that they allow the country to fight wars with fewer soldiers. According to the Pew Research Center (July, 2014), 52 percent of Americans support the use of drones against suspected terrorists (p. 20). Yet drones, according to Jacobson (2013), are best understood as an "evolution in military technology, not a revolution in warfare" (para. 1).

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), the formal term for drones, are remotely-operated aircraft used for a wide variety of short and long-range military missions, including intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Usually equipped with a camera, drones can also be modified to carry weapons (Gertler 2012, p. 8). Weaponized drones, however, only represent a tiny fraction of the total number under US control. Such drones are typically used for covert strikes on militant leaders, counter-insurgency operations and to provide close air support to soldiers engaged in combat (Cummings, 2014, para. 4).

Yet popular understanding of drones is an oversimplification. Verge writer Joshua Kopstein (2013) explains, "We still don't know when they can kill us or where they can spy on us. And we’ve barely scratched the surface of what they'll be doing aside from killing and spying" (para. 1). Yet media all too-often present drones as well-armed, infallible, remote-controlled all-seeing eyes in the sky that allow the U.S. Armed Forces to avoid putting boots on the ground in conflicts across the globe.

According to journalist Josh Levs (2013), "Until 2004, drones were used primarily for surveillance in Pakistan. But that year, the CIA fired the first missile from a drone at a terrorist
target in Waziristan," (para. 7). Now, U.S. forces have become so dependent on drone strikes to fight insurgents across ongoing and resurgent conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Iraq that it’s difficult to imagine a military conflict (both real or virtual) without them.

The *Call of Duty* series has played at least a small part in reinforcing and normalizing the use of drones in the collective imaginations of players. The separation of the citizen and the soldier further reinforces the idea that wars waged to resolve disputes between states are a thing of the past (Hardt-Landsberg & Negri 2000). Instead, wars are waged to maintain order in areas where "there seem to be minor and elusive enemies everywhere" (p. 189). Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2007) extend this thesis to the perpetual War on Terror and contend that "War organizes not just military forces abroad but civilian forces at home" (p. 100).

As my analysis shows, the procedural logic and narrative themes reinforce the neoconservative ideology by 1) showcasing military superiority and implicitly supporting the need to have a strong, technologically advanced force to combat threats across the globe and keep us safe at home, and 2) presenting America as a global force for good.

American civilians are far removed from the burdens of war, and post 9/11 military-themed first person shooters reflect these conditions in distinct ways.

First, save points in games (aka benchmarks) usually mark the last point a player died and serve to merely bring him/her one step closer to the next level, which takes him/her one step closer to the end of the game, which takes him/her one step closer to the next installment in the series' parade of sequels, downloadable map-packs and online campaigns, or the sub-genre's ever-growing catalog of shooters. No matter how many terrorists, or insurgents, or enemy combatants players kill, there is always another looming threat to America on the horizon. Also, military-themed first person shooters help stifle dissent at home by giving the idea that the war
on terror, while seemingly endless, is winnable in small steps. "If the Long War is to survive in its infinitude," according to Stahl (2008), "it must find a balancing principle. The logic is simple if paradoxical: the infinite war must also be the infinitesimal war. The rhetoric of the infinitesimal war is a preemptive strike on the possibility of quagmire in public discourse" (p. 84).

Second, the settings for military-themed first person shooters since 9/11 have become more global in scope than their predecessors. The focus of the sub-genre, according to Van Zwieten (2010) "has almost entirely shifted from situating gameplay in past conflicts like World War II, to situating them in more contemporary conflicts, with some recent games even going so far as to present players with a digital version of actual conflicts that are still being fought" (p. 1). In addition, some games present possible future conflicts steeped in neo-conservative fears.

Third, military-themed first person shooters extend the notion that the continued War on Terror requires sacrificing the moral high ground. In Call of Duty: Black Ops, for example, players control the protagonist as he puts a shard of glass inside a prisoner's mouth before punching him in the face to extract actionable intelligence. Such presentations seem to trivialize and rationalize the act of torture.

Finally, one need look no further than Activision's decision to release a new Call of Duty every year since 2003 to see the normalization of war in popular culture, and the reinforcement of the idea that the United States is in a state of perpetual war. Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009) use the term banalized war to refer to the state where "war becomes part of the culture of everyday life" (p. 100). The fantastic scenarios, however, give players the impression that they have somehow been a part of the event, when they have only participated in the commodification of the war on terror.
As stated earlier, when players experience a military-themed first person shooter, they are, in essence, engaging in a sort of wish fulfillment that includes the act of being in control. Playing military-themed first person shooters may, among other things, give players a sense that the War on Terror is winnable through military force.

So how do players think about war? When is it justifiable to go to war with another country? How do players think about using torture to gain information? Is there, ultimately, a relationship between military-themed first person shooters and players' attitudes about war? In the next chapter, I examine how the themes present in and across the *Call of Duty* series match respondents' own attitudes and opinions regarding the U.S. military and American foreign policy.
VI. SURVEY ANALYSES

In this chapter I pursue an untapped area of public opinion research. To examine how the narrative themes present in and across the *Call of Duty* series match respondents' own attitudes and opinions regarding the U.S. military and American foreign policy, I constructed and administered an online survey using the online survey system Qualtrics. I used two samples: 1) registered undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), and 2) members of Activision's Official *Call of Duty* Twitter Community. The survey asked respondents open and closed-ended questions about their video game play, what it means to be a soldier, and under what circumstances it is justifiable to go to war.

The purpose of the survey was to assess participants' gaming habits as well as their opinions and attitudes about the military and U.S. foreign policy. With respect to question design, I sought variables thought to influence public support for war that are communicated through and reinforced by mass media like video games: gender, the number of casualties, the ostensible goals of the conflict, its eventual chances of success, major war-related events, the intensity of news coverage regarding the war, and the degree of elite consensus about the merits of war (Althaus & Coe, 2011; Eckles & Schaffner, 2011). My dissertation looks at game play over and above these other variables. By "game play," I mean exposure to the game series, where exposure is measured in whether participants self-report that they play military-themed first person shooters like Call of Duty along with the number of hours they play per session and per week (on average).

In their book *Asking Questions: A Practical Guide to Questionnaire Design*, Sudman and Bradburn (1982) advise those looking to write attitude questions to plagiarize. They explain,
"While plagiarism is regarded as a vice in most matters, it is a virtue in questionnaire writing—assuming, that you plagiarize good-quality questions. By using questions that have been used before, you can spare yourself much agony over the formulation of the questions and extensive pretesting. if the questions have been used frequently before, most of the bugs will have been ironed out of them" (pp. 119-120).

With this in mind, many of the survey questions were adapted from the American Enterprise Institute's (AEI) ten-year review of attitudes towards the War on Terror and the war in Afghanistan (Bowman & Rugg, 2011), the American National Election Studies Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior, the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, and the 2002 Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) report, "Youth Attitudes Toward the Military: Poll One." The various iterations of the survey instrument appear in the appendices. The survey instrument contains three sections – a section of open-ended questions, a section of attitudinal questions, and a section of demographic questions.

A. **Pilot-Testing the Survey Instrument**

According to Sudman and Bradburn (1982), "The pilot study can be used to indicate questions that need revision because they are difficult to understand, and it can also be used to indicate questions that may be eliminated" (p. 284.). Before submitting the online survey via Qualtrics, I pilot-tested a paper-and-pencil version of it (see appendix) by administering it to a convenience sample of college students 18 and older (N = 179) from two Midwestern universities (97 undergraduates attended a private university, while 82 attended a state-funded, public research university).

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Students were members of various communication classes and voluntarily completed the surveys during class time. The pilot study was meant to assess the quality of open-ended responses I could expect to receive in the official implementation of the study and to identify problem areas in question wording along with redundancies in question types. Consequently, two versions of the survey were used. Approximately 50 percent of respondents (n = 89) received a version of the survey than began with the open-ended questions (see Appendices). The other half of participants (n = 90) received a version of the survey that began with demographics. The open-ended responses appeared in this version of the survey as Section III.

It was clear that participants were more likely to provide detailed responses to the open-ended questions when such questions were asked first, rather than last. This supports the work of Galesic and Bosnjak (2009), who examined the effects of questionnaire length (aka burden) on quality of response and found: “Answers to questions positioned later in the questionnaire were [given] faster, shorter, and more uniform than answers to questions positioned in the beginning” (p. 349). Their results “suggest that questions asked later in the questionnaire bear the risk of producing lower quality data, especially if they are open format or in long grids. As fatigue and boredom accumulate throughout the survey, the respondents may be less likely and less willing to invest in the effort needed for good quality answers” (p. 358). Because of this, the final version of my survey begins with open-ended questions. These are followed by 18 close-ended game and attitude questions, 17 of which are scale-items. The survey ends with demographic and control questions.

While reading through participants' open-ended responses, it was also clear there was some confusion surrounding the words "image" and "feeling." When asked about the images and feelings that come to mind when thinking a) about the U.S. Military in general, b) about people
who stay in the U.S. Military as a career, and c) about the people who join the U.S. Military, many participants expressed concern that "Images" and "Feelings" are different, so they were unsure about how exactly they should respond. The revised, final version of the survey reflected these concerns in the re-wording of open-ended questions.

Many of the attitudinal questions along with their accompanying choice-options were also re-worded in the final version of the survey to reduce survey bias by avoiding potentially confusing or leading questions. To reduce this bias, I conducted secondary research to ensure a thorough understanding of the topic under study and had a mentor provide constructive criticism and feedback. Finally, seemingly redundant questions were removed from the survey instrument to reduce length and, in turn, participants' potential fatigue and boredom. The final survey instrument appears in the Appendices.

B. Survey I

1. Defining the Population and Describing the Sample

The first population under study was UIC students. After receiving approval from both the registrar and the The Office for the Protection of Research Subjects, the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at UIC agreed to create a random sample\(^\text{23}\) of student email addresses selected from the complete list of registered UIC graduate and undergraduate students in Fall 2013 and Spring 2014. Initially, 1263 student email addresses were randomly selected from the Fall 2013 UIC Total Tenth Day Enrollment list. I assumed a 40% response rate (the

\(^{23}\) As Groves (2006) explains, "A simple random sample assigns equal probabilities of selection to each element in the frame population" (p. 257).
average response rate for surveys administered via email, according to the University of Texas at Austin's Instructional Resources Assessment web site).

I used the random sample size calculator at Custom Insight to determine the number of survey respondents needed for a population size of approximately 28,000 (which is the approximate size of the UIC student population) with a 95 percent confidence interval and a 5 percent confidence level. Due to a low response rate (< 10%), the sample size was increased, and an additional 5000 student email addresses were randomly selected from the UIC Spring 2014 student enrollment list. Students from the Fall 2013 list were excluded so as to not oversample. In addition to receiving an initial email invitation to participate in the online survey, members of the random sample also received reminder emails approximately two weeks before the survey went offline and then one week before the survey became inactive.

Of the 6263 students who received email invitations, approximately 14% (n = 851) accessed the online survey, and approximately 7% (n = 460) elected to complete it. The sample (N) ultimately consisted of 460 participants, though they did not all answer every question in the survey. In such instances, their surveys were dropped only from the statistical test for questions which addressed the missing variable.

The majority of participants, approximately 84% (n = 386) said they have never been members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Exactly 60% (n = 276) do not have family members who have ever been, or are currently a member of, the U.S. Armed Forces. And approximately 58%
(n = 266) indicated that they have close friends who have either been, or are currently, members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

The majority of participants, approximately 56% (n = 234), self-identified as "White."

Table II shows the frequencies and valid percentages associated with ethnic identities. "Valid percent" is when missing data are excluded from the calculations. In this instance, 9.6% of participants did not indicate ethnic identity.

Table III reports the valid frequencies and percentages associated with political views. Table IV reports the valid frequencies and percentages associated with political affiliation. And Table V reports the valid frequencies and percentages associated with year in school.

### Table II
**Frequencies and Valid Percentages of Ethnic Identities (N = 460)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table III
**Frequencies and Valid Percentages of Political Views (N = 460)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political View</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Conservative</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate, Middle of the Road</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The age of participants ranged from 16-67 years old. Almost 40% of participants (n = 163) fell between the ages of 16-22. Table VI shows the distribution of participants' ages clustered into meaningful groups.

Table IV
FREQUENCIES AND VALID PERCENTAGES OF POLITICAL AFFILIATION (N = 460)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Democrat</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Democrat</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Republican</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table V
FREQUENCIES AND VALID PERCENTAGES OF YEAR IN SCHOOL (N = 460)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate-Student</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VI
FREQUENCIES AND VALID PERCENTAGES OF AGE (N = 460)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 and younger</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-29</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and older</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of participants, approximately 58.5%, were female (n = 241). This makes sense, as 53.9% of the university's student population is made up of women, according to Section B of the university's Fall 2013 Student Data Book (p. 2). Approximately 62% (n = 283) of participants said they do not play military-themed first person shooters. Table VII illustrates the valid percentages related to gender and game play.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plays Military-Themed First Person Shooters</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (n = 171)</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 241)</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately 51% of players, though (n = 90), play between 2-3 consecutive hours per session. Interestingly, male players (n = 118) in the sample reported having shorter play sessions on average than females (n = 39). Male players reported playing an average of 2.53 hours per session, while female players reported playing an average of 2.71 hours per session.

Regarding the representativeness of the sample with respect to gamers at large, the 2014 Entertainment Software Association's sales, demographics, and usage data states that the average age of video game players (broadly speaking) is 31 and that men and women enjoy playing video games in almost equal measure. However, some genres tend to attract one gender over another and likely appeal to different age groups as well. Unfortunately, I was unable to

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26 Available at: <http://www.oir.uic.edu/students/pdfs/sdb/SDBF13SectB.pdf>.
find reliable demographic information pertaining to people who primarily play first person shooters (or Call of Duty specifically), so I cannot say whether the age range of players across my sample is representative of the total population of people who play these games. I can, however, make a claim regarding gender. SuperData Research, which provides market research data and insight on digital games and playable media, recently reported that men make up 66 percent of first person shooter players and 63 percent of digital console players.\textsuperscript{27} Approximately 75\% of participants in this study who said they play military-themed first person shooters are male (n = 118). So the sample is representative in the sense that male gamers are more likely than female gamers to play first person shooters.

2. **Data Analysis**

a. **Chi-Square Test for Independence**

It was hypothesized that because military-themed first person shooters afford everyday citizens the chance to engage in America’s continued War on Terror without sacrifice, they would discourage players from physically joining the military themselves. However, players are more likely than non-players to express willingness to join the U.S. military.

A chi-square test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between players and non-players in their willingness to consider joining the U.S. Armed Forces. Approximately 20\% (n = 57) of non-players indicated they would consider joining the military, whereas 33\% (n = 58) of players said they would consider joining. These tests indicated a significant association between game play and a willingness to join the U.S. Armed Forces, $\chi^2 (1, n = 456) = 8.44, p = .00$, phi $= .141$. The

phi coefficient value is .141, which is considered a small effect using Cohen's (1988) criteria of .10 for small effect, .30 for medium effect and .50 for large effect.

**b. Factor Analysis**

It is important for researchers to evaluate questions to find out if they are well understood and if the answers are meaningful (Fowler Jr., 2009, p. 5). With this in mind, the 17 scale questions that make up Section II of the questionnaire were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA) with orthogonal rotation (varimax) using SPSS Version 18. These questions assess participants' attitudes about the military and U.S. foreign policy. However, the items were not all coded using the same 1-5 scale. Some were coded on a 1-4 scale, while others were coded on a 1-3 scale. Prior to performing PCA, all the scale-items were re-coded such that their values all existed along a 0-1 scale. In addition, four items were reverse coded. These were: 1. What grade would you give the United States on avoiding civilian casualties in recent operations? 2. How worried are you that U.S. forces might sustain a lot of casualties in current and future operations? 3. How often do you believe that using torture to gain important information from suspected terrorists is justifiable? 4. How much confidence do you have in the ability of the U.S. government to protect its citizens from future terrorist attacks?

Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy of the analysis, KMO = .90 ("great" according to Field, 2009). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett 1954) $\chi^2 (136) = 2687.57, p < .001$, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Four components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1, explaining 37.40%, 8.84%, 6.67%, and 6.63% of the
variance respectively. In combination the 4 components explained 59.55% of the variance. All but 4 of the KMO values for individual items were above the minimum of 0.5.

The scree plot below shows inflections that justify retaining components 1-4. Given the sample size, and the convergence of the scree plot and Kaiser's criterion on four components, this is the number of components that were retained in the final analysis. The table below shows the factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same component suggest that factors 1-4 represent different dimensions. Table VIII presents the rotated factor loadings for each factor. Items that cluster around factor 1 represent personal benefits provided by the military (Military Benefits). Items that cluster around factor 2 represent the military's role in protecting the state and its citizens (Military Protects). Items that cluster around factor 3 represent approval and support of the military's current mission (Military Approval). Items that cluster around factor 4.
Table VIII
SUMMARY OF EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR SECTION II (N = 460)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Military Benefits</th>
<th>Military Protects</th>
<th>Military Approval</th>
<th>Contentious Matters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military provides education</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military has qualified personnel</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military offers good benefits</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military offers an honorable job</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military has qualified leaders</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military deserves your trust</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military is prepared to defend the country</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military keeps the country safe</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. government protects its citizens</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well is the terror campaign going</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military prevents conflicts with other countries</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you increase or decrease defense spending</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is the war on terror</td>
<td></td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you approve or disapprove of U.S. Military attacks on countries where it believes terrorists are hiding?</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried U.S. will sustain a lot of casualties in the future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you believe using torture to gain important information from suspected terrorists is warranted?</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.413</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding civilian casualties grade</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.402</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of variance</td>
<td>37.40</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>6.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

represent contentious military matters, such as the worry that the U.S. will sustain a lot of casualties in the future and using torture to obtain information from suspected terrorists (Contentious Matters). However, as the cumulative proportion of variance explained by the retained factors, in total, was less than 70%, it is likely that the questionnaire needs refinement for future studies.
c. **Cronbach's Alpha**

Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency, the degree to which the items are correlated with each other. It is most commonly used when using multiple Likert questions in a survey/questionnaire that form a scale and you wish to determine if the scale is reliable. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ($\alpha$) were computed in SPSS to check the reliability of four factors identified above as well as the combination of all of them into a single scale. George and Mallery (2003) provide the following guidelines for evaluating Cronbach's alpha: "$\_ > .9$ − Excellent, $\_ > .8$ − Good, $\_ > .7$ − Acceptable, $\_ > .6$ − Questionable, $\_ > .5$ − Poor, and $\_ < .5$ − Unacceptable" (p. 231). Factors 1 and 2 were found to be reliable, while Factors 3 and 4 were found to be "Poor." The combined 17 questions, taken together, were found to be highly reliable. This suggests that the complete 17-item scale is multi-dimensional. Table IX reports the reliability coefficients for the 4 Factors and their combination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table IX</th>
<th>RELIABILITY COEFFICIENT FOR THE 4 FACTORS AND THEIR COMBINATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valid N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Benefits</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Protects</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Approval</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contentious Matters</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Factors</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
d. **Correlation Coefficients**

How does the amount of time someone spends playing military-themed first person shooters impact his/her attitude towards war and the U.S. military? Correlation coefficients were computed for the variables "Hours played per session," "Days played per week," and each of the four factors. Table X presents the resulting Pearson Correlations obtained from this analysis.

The more days per week a person plays military-themed first person shooters, the higher his/her score will be on questions revolving around the military's role in protecting the state and its citizens and questions revolving around contentious military matters. The number of hours spent playing these games per session likewise impacts peoples' scores on questions revolving around contentious military matters (like the use of torture to gain important information from suspected terrorists). The more days per week someone plays military-themed first person shooters, the more likely they are to have a positive attitude towards the U.S. military, think the U.S. is doing a good job avoiding civilian casualties, think that using torture to obtain information is an acceptable means of getting information, and that the U.S. might sustain a lot of casualties in current and future operations.
Table X
*Pearson Correlations between whether or not people play the games and each of the four scales (N = 460)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Military Benefits</th>
<th>Military Protects</th>
<th>Military Approval</th>
<th>Contentious Matters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days per week spent playing FPS</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>p</em>-value</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent playing FPS</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>p</em>-value</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Independent Samples t-tests

As I was interested in comparing the mean scores of two different conditions, I next conducted an independent samples t-test to evaluate game play differences in scores for each of the 4 factors. The results are presented in Table XI below.

On average, players (M = 1.53, SD = .66) had higher scores on questions pertaining to factor 4. Players were more likely to endorse, for example, contentious military matters. In other words, they were more likely than non-players (M = 1.22, SD = .63) to think the U.S. is doing a good job avoiding civilian casualties, think that using torture to obtain information is an acceptable means of getting information, and that the U.S. might sustain a lot of casualties in current and future operations. This difference was significant \( t(413) = 4.86, p < .01 \), though the effect size was small, \( r = .054 \). The guidelines (proposed by Cohen, 1988, pp. 284-7) for interpreting this value are: \( .01 = \) small effect, \( .06 = \) moderate effect, \( .14 = \) large effect. Given our eta squared value of .054, we can conclude that there was a small effect, with a significant difference in the factor 4 scores of players and non-players.
Table XI
MEAN DIFFERENCES IN ANSWERS FOR EACH FACTOR FOR PLAYERS AND NON-PLAYERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Play Games</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Benefits Score</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Protects Score</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Approval Score</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contentious Matters Score</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>4.86**</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** test is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)
*test is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

As I was interested in comparing the mean scores of two different groups of conditions, I next conducted an independent samples t-test to evaluate gender differences in scores for each of the four scales. The results are presented in Table XII below. On average, males (M =3.02, SD = 1.03) had higher factor 2 scores than females (M = 2.80, SD = 2.80). This difference was significant t(408) = 2.06, p < .05, though the effect size was very small, r = .01. Men, it appears, are more likely to feel that the military and government do a good job protecting the country and preventing conflicts.

On average, males (M = 1.48, SD = 0.70) had higher factor 4 scores than females (M = 1.25, SD = 0.61). This difference was significant t(402) = 3.41, p < .01, though the effect size was small, r = .03. Men, it appears, are more likely to worry the U.S. will sustain a lot of casualties in future operations, approve that using torture to gain important information from suspected terrorists is acceptable, and that the U.S. does a good job avoiding civilian casualties.
Table XII

MEAN DIFFERENCES IN ANSWERS FOR EACH FACTOR FOR MEN AND WOMEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Benefits Score</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>-.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Protects Score</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Approval Score</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>.351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contentious Matters Score</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.41**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*test is significant at .05 level (2-tailed)
**test is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

f. **Multiple Linear Regression Analysis**

Finally, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to determine if the variables "Gender," "Game play," and the "Number of days spent per week (on average) playing military-themed first person shooters" predicted a participant's score on each of the factors. The results are presented in Table XIII below.
The linear combination of Gender, Game Play, and the #Days Played was not significantly related to one's score on the Military Benefits factor, $F(3, 403) = .45, p = .72$.

The linear combination of Gender, Game Play, and the #Days Played was not significantly related to one's score on the Military Protects factor, $F(3, 404) = 2.60, p = .05$.

The linear combination of Gender, Game Play, and the #Days Played was not significantly related to one's score on the Military Approval factor, $F(3, 401) = .81, p = .49$.

The linear combination of Gender, Game Play, and the #Days Played was significantly related to one's score on factor 4, $F(3, 398) = 9.38, p < .01$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient was .06, indicating that approximately 6% of the variance of one's score on factor 4 was accounted for by the combination of Gender, Game Play, and the number of days per week spent playing military-themed first person shooters (on average). Interestingly, however, none of the individual predictors were statistically significant. Once all three independent variables were
entered into the model, none significantly predicted one's score on the Contentious Matters factor. This suggests that there are other variables at play that are, at present, unaccounted for. Nevertheless, the fact that the relationship detailed above exists and accounts for 6% of the variance of one's score on the Contentious Matters factor suggests that playing military-themed first person shooters impacts how people think about military and civilian casualties in times of war in addition to matters surrounding the use of torture to gain actionable intelligence.

C. Summary of Findings for the UIC Population

- UIC students who play military-themed first person shooters are more likely than UIC student non-players to express a willingness to join the U.S. military.
- The more days per week UIC students plays military-themed first person shooters, the more likely they are to have a positive attitude towards the U.S. military, think the U.S. is doing a good job avoiding civilian casualties, think that using torture to obtain information is an acceptable means of getting information, and worry that the U.S. might sustain a lot of casualties in current and future operations.
- Male students are more likely than female students to feel that the military and government do a good job protecting the country and preventing conflicts. Male students are also more likely than female students to worry the U.S. will sustain a lot of casualties in future operations, approve of using torture to gain important information from suspected terrorists, and think that the U.S. does a good job avoiding civilian casualties.
D. **Survey II**

1. **Defining the Population and Describing the Sample**\(^{28}\)

   The second population under study is *Call of Duty players* with Twitter accounts. Participants were randomly selected from the complete Follower ID list of Activision's Official *Call of Duty* Twitter Account. Using Version 1.1 of Twitter's application programming interface (API), I requested the user IDs for the collection of Twitter users following the handle @CallofDuty. Results were given in groups of 5,000 user IDs at a time. The number of obtained user IDs was 1,676,144 – the entire population at the time (that number has since increased to well over 2.5 million).\(^{29}\) A total of 6,000 followers were randomly selected from the 1,676,144 members. In addition to receiving an initial tweet inviting them to participate in the online survey, members of the random sample also received reminder tweets approximately two weeks before the survey went offline and then one week before the survey became inactive.

   Of the 6000 Twitter users who received tweets inviting them to participate, approximately 7% (n = 426) accessed the online survey, and approximately 3% (n = 152) elected to complete it. The final sample (N) ultimately consisted of 152 participants, though they did not all answer every question in the survey. In such instances, their surveys were dropped only from the statistical test for questions which addressed the missing variable.

   Approximately 99.2% (n = 122) of participants said they have never been members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Approximately 75.4% (n = 92) do not have family members who have ever

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\(^{28}\) The variable "Year in School" was removed from the analysis here because it proved irrelevant, thanks to the number of people who self-identified as being under the age of 18. Also, the question wording implied that participants were currently attending college as either an undergraduate or graduate student, which is likely not the case for everyone.

\(^{29}\) Carol Haney, Senior Vice President of Marketing at Toluna, provided invaluable assistance converting the user IDs into individual usernames.
been, or are currently a member of, the U.S. Armed Forces. Approximately 66.7% (n = 82) indicated that they do not have close friends who have either been, or are currently, members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Thus, game players are utterly divorced from actual military duty, either directly or through family members and/or close friends.

The majority of participants, approximately 63.1% (n = 77), self-identified as "White."

Table XIV shows the frequencies and valid percentages of ethnic identities.

Table XV reports the frequencies and valid percentages associated with political views. Table XVI reports the frequencies and percentages associated with political affiliation.

The age of participants ranged from 12-64 years old. Almost 54% of participants (n = 65) fell between the ages of 13 and 17. The Twitter sample, then, skewed considerably younger than the UIC sample. It certainly appears that Call of Duty appeals to younger gamers. Table XVII shows the distribution of participants' ages clustered into meaningful groups.

Table XIV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American or American Indian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table XV
FREQUENCIES AND VALID PERCENTAGES OF POLITICAL VIEWS (N = 152)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political View</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Conservative</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate, Middle of the Road</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table XVI
FREQUENCIES AND VALID PERCENTAGES OF POLITICAL AFFILIATION (N = 152)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Democrat</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Democrat</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Republican</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table XVII
FREQUENCIES AND VALID PERCENTAGES OF AGE (N = 152)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 and younger</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and older</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of participants, approximately 93%, were male (n = 113). While it was expected there would be far more male players than female, this number was surprisingly high. Though market research indicates the 34% of first person shooter players are female, it is likely
that military-themed first person shooters like *Call of Duty* predominantly target and appeal more to men. Nevertheless, it is possible that the Twitter sample is skewed.

Approximately 95% of participants (n = 144) said they play military-themed first person shooters like *Call of Duty*. While one would expect this number to be 100%, it is likely that some followers of Activision's official *Call of Duty* page on Twitter do so primarily out of interest, not game play habits. As is evident, the Twitter sample specifically reflects *Call of Duty* players, while the previous sample represented both players and non-players.

2. Data Analysis

a. Chi-Square Test for Independence and Fisher's Exact Test

As in the UIC analysis, I conducted a chi-square test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) to determine whether there was a significant difference between players and non-players in their willingness to consider joining the U.S. Armed Forces. However, after computing the statistic, it was clear I had violated the "minimum expected cell frequency" assumption. According to Pallant (2007), "The lowest expected frequency in any cell should be 5 or more" (p. 214). As explained by UCLA's Institute for Digital Research and Education, "The Fisher's exact test is used when you want to conduct a chi-square test but one or more of your cells has an expected frequency of five or less."30 31

One does not get a test statistic with Fisher's exact test, though. Instead, SPSS simply calculates and presents probabilities. For the current analysis, the 2-sided probability of getting a table where the observed frequencies differed as much or more from the expected frequencies if


31 In addition, the site explains, "Remember that the chi-square test assumes that each cell has an expected frequency of five or more, but the Fisher's exact test has no such assumption and can be used regardless of how small the expected frequency is."
the model of independence is true is 1.00; the one-sided probability is .55. So even though 61.5% (n = 88) of players indicated they would not consider joining the military, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that there is no association between game play and a willingness to join the U.S. Armed Forces.

Next, I conducted a chi-square test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) to determine whether there was a significant difference between males and females players in their willingness to consider joining the U.S. Armed Forces. Once again, though, after computing the statistic, it was clear I had violated the "minimum expected cell frequency" assumption. For the current analysis, the 2-sided probability of getting a table where the observed frequencies differed as much or more from the expected frequencies if the model of independence is true is .73; the one-sided probability is 45. So even though 63.1% (n = 70) of men indicated they would not consider joining the U.S. Armed Forces, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that there is no association between game play and a willingness to join the U.S. Armed Forces. Though the data suggest there is no association between game play and willingness to join, this might be because the sample was too small or skewed.

b. **Factor Analysis**

The 17 scale-items of Section II of the questionnaire were once again subjected to principal component analysis (PCA) with orthogonal rotation (varimax) using SPSS Version 18. However, the items were not all coded using the same 1-5 scale. Some were coded on a 1-4 scale, while others were coded on a 1-3 scale. So prior to performing PCA, all the scale-items were re-coded such that their values all existed along a 0-1 scale.

Prior to performing PCA, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above.
The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy of the analysis, KMO = .89 ("great" according to Field, 2009). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett 1954) $\chi^2 (136) = 780.38$, $p < .001$, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Three components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1, explaining 40.07%, 8.2%, 6.78%, of the variance respectively. In combination the 3 components explained 55.05% of the variance. All but 6 of the KMO values for individual items were above the minimum of 0.5.

The scree plot below shows inflections that justify retaining components 1-3. Given the sample size, and the convergence of the scree plot and Kaiser's criterion on three components, this is the number of components that were retained in the final analysis.

Table XVIII shows rotated factor loadings for each Factor. The items that cluster on the same components suggest that components 1-3 represent different dimensions. This supports the previous study, which shows many of the individual variables clustering in similar ways.
Table XVIII
SUMMARY OF EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR SECTION II (N = 152)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Military Benefits</th>
<th>Military Approval</th>
<th>Military Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military provides education</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military has qualified personnel</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military offers good benefits</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military offers an honorable job</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military has qualified leaders</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military deserves your trust</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military is prepared to defend the country</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military keeps the country safe</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. government protects its citizens</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well is the terror campaign going</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military prevents conflicts with other countries</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you increase or decrease defense spending</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is the war on terror</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you approve or disapprove of U.S. Military attacks on countries where it believes terrorists are hiding?</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried U.S. will sustain a lot of casualties in the future</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you believe using torture to gain important information from suspected terrorists is warranted?</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding civilian casualties grade</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of variance</td>
<td>40.07</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Items that cluster around factor 1 represent personal and national benefits, including national defense and avoiding casualties (Military Benefits). Items that cluster around factor 2 represent approval and support of the military's current mission and methods (Military Approval). Items that cluster around factor 3 represent concern surrounding future military conflicts (Military Concern). However, as factor 4 drops off here and the cumulative proportion of variance explained by the retained factors, in total, was less that 70%, it is likely that these
questions have multiple dimensions. As such, the questionnaire should be refined in future studies.

c. Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients (α) were computed in SPSS to check the reliability of the three Factors identified above as well as the combination of all of them into a single scale. Please refer to the prior discussion to review guidelines for evaluating Cronbach's alpha. Factor 1 and factor 2 were found to be reliable, while factor 3 was found to be "Questionable." The combined 17 questions, taken together, were found to be highly reliable. Table XIX presents reliability coefficients for each of the three factors as well as their combination. The computed reliability coefficients suggest these factors are more reliable than those for the UIC sample. However, as the questions likely represent multiple dimensions, future research should take care to refine the survey instrument.

d. Correlation Coefficients

First, I computed a new variable in SPSS: "Hours Spent Playing Military-Themed FS per Week." The variable was computed using the following formula:

\[ \text{Hours Played Per Week} = \text{Days Played Per Week (on Average)} \times \text{Hours Played (on Average) per Session}^{32} \]

Next, correlation coefficients were computed for the variables "Hours played (on average) per session," "Days played per week (on average)," "Hours played per week," and each of the three factors. Table XX presents the resulting Pearson Correlations obtained from this analysis.

\[ ^{32} \text{The calculation makes the assumption that people only play one session per day, which might not always be accurate. Game play might be spread out across multiple sessions throughout the day.} \]
### Table XIX
**RELIABILITY COEFFICIENT FOR THE 3 FACTORS AND THEIR COMBINATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military Benefits</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>No. Items</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Approval</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Concern</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Factors</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table XX
**PEARSON CORRELATIONS BETWEEN WHETHER OR NOT PEOPLE PLAY THE GAMES AND EACH OF THE THREE FACTORS (N = 152).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Military Benefits</th>
<th>Military Approval</th>
<th>Military Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days per week spent playing FPS</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent playing FPS</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent playing per week</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)**

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

The more days per week someone plays military-themed first person shooters, the more likely they are to have a positive attitude towards the U.S. military, think the U.S. is doing a good job avoiding civilian casualties, think that the federal defense spending should be increased, think that using torture to obtain information from suspected terrorists is acceptable, think the war on terror is important, and approve of U.S. military attacks against countries where it believes
terrorists are hiding. The more hours someone plays these games per session and per week increases their approval and support of the military's current mission and methods.

e. **Independent Samples t-tests**

Next, an independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate game play differences in scores for each of the three factors. The results are presented in Table XXI below. The differences between players and non-players were not significant, but this is likely because the number of non-players in the sample was so small. The sample consisted mainly of players.

An independent samples t-test was also conducted to evaluate gender differences in scores for each of the three factors. The results are presented in Table XXII below. The differences between males and females were not significant, but this is likely because the majority of participants were male.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table XXI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>MEAN DIFFERENCES IN ANSWERS FOR EACH FACTOR FOR PLAYERS AND NON-PLAYERS</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Approval Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Concern Score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table XXII
MEAN DIFFERENCES IN ANSWERS FOR EACH SCALE FOR MEN AND WOMEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Benefits Score</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>-.81</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Approval Score</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Concern Score</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

f. **Multiple Linear Regression Analysis**

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine if the variables "Gender," "Game play," and the "Number of hours spent playing military-themed FPS per week (on average)" predicted a participant's score on each of the three factors. The results are presented in Table XXIII.

The linear combination of "Gender," "Game Play," and the "Number of hours spent playing military-themed FPS per week" was significantly related to one's score on questions pertaining to the approval and support of the military's current mission and methods (i.e., Military Approval), $F(3, 112) = 4.07, p < .01$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient was .31, indicating that approximately 7% of the variance of one's Military Approval score was accounted for by the combination of "Gender," "Game Play," and the "Number of hours spent playing military-themed FPS per week." Only two of the predictors, however, were significant ($p < .05$). It was found that, once all three independent variables were entered into the model, only "Game Play" ($\beta = .19, p < .05$) and "Number of hours spent playing military-themed FPS per week" ($\beta = .007, p < .05$) significantly predicted one's Military Approval score. This makes sense, as participants here are heavy players.
Table XXIII
SUMMARY OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSES FOR VARIABLES PREDICTING SCORES ON EACH FACTOR (N = 152)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Military Benefits</th>
<th></th>
<th>Military Approval</th>
<th></th>
<th>Military Concern</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Play</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#hoursplayedperweek</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

Finally, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine if the variables "Gender," "Game play," and the "Number of days spent playing military-themed FPS per week (on average)" predicted a participant's score on each of the three factors. The results are presented in Table XXIV.

The linear combination of "Gender," "Game Play," and the "Number of days spent playing military-themed FPS per week" was significantly related to one's Military Approval score, $F(3, 112) = 5.54, p < .01$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient was .36, indicating that approximately 11% of the variance of one's Military Approval score was accounted for by the combination of "Gender," "Game Play," and the "Number of days spent playing military-themed FPS per week." Only two of the predictors, however, were significant ($p < .05$). It was found that, once all three independent variables were entered into the model, only "Game Play" ($\beta = .22, p < .05$) and "Number of days spent playing military-themed FPS per week" ($\beta = .33, p < .05$) significantly predicted one's Military Approval score.
Table XXIV
SUMMARY OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSES FOR VARIABLES PREDICTING SCORES ON EACH FACTOR (N = 152)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Military Benefits</th>
<th>Military Approval</th>
<th>Military Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Play</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.33*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>#daysplayedperweek</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

E. Summary of findings for the Twitter population

• Followers of Activision's Official Call of Duty Twitter Account are divorced from actual military duty, either directly or through family members and/or close friends. The majority of players (61.5%) said they would not ever consider joining the U.S. military, if given the opportunity.

• The more hours per session and days per week people play military-themed first person shooters, the more likely they are to have a positive attitude towards the U.S. military, think the U.S. is doing a good job avoiding civilian casualties, think that the federal defense spending should be increased, think that using torture to obtain information from suspected terrorists is acceptable, think the war on terror is important, and approve of U.S. military attacks against countries where it believes terrorists are hiding.
F. Analyzing the Open-Ended Responses for Both Surveys

The previous section of this chapter presented statistical analyses of quantitative data. In the pages that follow, I present an analysis of the open-ended responses obtained by both samples, question by question.

1. Question: What Image Comes to Mind When You Think About the United States (U.S.) Military in General?

Approximately 39% of responses from UIC students (n = 178) were descriptions of soldiers. Such responses included any reference to uniforms, camouflage, or haircuts. They also included references to soldiers as veterans, soldiers participating in a current conflict, or soldiers returning from combat with PTSD. Practically all the descriptions of soldiers were positive. Though there was mention of soldiers as “pawns,” and “cogs in the machine,” the military is typically described as “accountable,” “honorable,” and “strong.” Interestingly, though the soldiers are often presented in positive terms, they (and the military, by extension) are often seen as the tools of a “corrupt government” filled with “old white men” or ordered around by “dusty old generals.”

Some standout responses from UIC students include a description of sheep dogs (i.e. soldiers) protecting the sheep (us) from the wolves. Responses often acknowledged a difference between enlisted soldiers and officers, noting that enlisted soldiers are often poor (“poor men fighting rich men's wars”). Other responses included graphic depictions of battle with specific references to historic moments, like "marines raising the American flag in Japan" and "the girl on fire in the famous Vietnam photo; people's skin falling off as their bowels evacuate in Hiroshima after they dropped the bomb on it; dead Iraqis." It is clear that images from World War II and
Vietnam, both positive and negative, remain iconic symbols and help construct how young people think about war and the U.S. military.

Responses from the Twitter Community were a bit different. Recognition of pop-cultural icons (like John Rambo), references to specific iconography like the official Eagle, Globe, and Anchor emblem and insignia of the U.S. Marine Corps, or photographer Joe Rosenthal's historic February 23, 1945 photograph depicting five U.S. Marines and a U.S. Navy corpsman raising the U.S. flag atop Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima and references to "Brave soldiers risking their lives to save others," and "Our nation's finest protecting our freedom" were more pronounced. Approximately 23% of responses (n = 35) were descriptions of soldiers, though the descriptions were not always complimentary. While some referred to soldiers as "Very respectful and amazing guys," others referred to them as "assholes," "abusers," and "domesticated dogs." This is possibly correlated to the fact that the Twitter community was not only comprised of U.S. citizens (so negative criticism of soldiers is more likely).

2. **Question: What Image Comes to Mind When You Think About the People Who Join the U.S. Military?**

Approximately 65% (n = 297) of UIC responses primarily described people who join the U.S. Military in either demographic or psychographic terms. An example of a demographic description is a *low-income, uneducated male*. Psychographic descriptions cover personality, values, opinions, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles. Examples include *patriotic, violent, immoral*. Responses were almost evenly split between the two. Approximately 32% (n = 148) focused on demographic characteristics. Approximately 32% (n = 149) focused on psychographic ones. Twitter respondents, however, were more likely to discuss people who join
the military in psychographic terms. Approximately 45% (n = 68) of Twitter responses fell into this category.

This question provoked strong responses from many respondents. Many described soldiers in terms of dichotomies. As one respondent explained, people who join the military are either "Poor Americans who have been promised access to education and benefits after their service OR racists that are obsessed with American nationalism to the point that they masturbate to the idea of exerting our imperialist/colonialist power over other people." According to another, people who join the military are "Either young men from small rural towns or young men from the inner city. Both groups of people who don't have a lot going for them after/around high school age." UIC students described soldiers as "Aggressive morons," who are "hopeful but uneducated," "violent and immoral," "likely to suffer PTSD," but also "physically fit" and "without options." Soldiers may be "proud and strong," "mean and strong," or "scary and strong." Soldiers are typically imagined as enlisted personnel, looking for something to do or "broke, or have lots of loans they want paid." As one respondent said, "Find me the rich person that joins the military." Respondents also highlighted the fact that they have friends and relatives in the military.

3. **Question: What Thought Comes to Mind When You Think About the U.S. Military in General?**

This question, while seemingly similar to the first, prompted different responses from participants. In the pilot version of the survey, people were originally asked "What thought or image comes to mind when you think of the U.S. Military in general?" Yet responses indicated confusion between the terms "image" and "thought," which is why it was separated into two distinct questions. This additional question also prompted additional insight from
respondents who often referred to the military as a "necessary evil," or "honorable watchdogs."
Still, many referred to soldiers as "murderers," "losers," and "crazy."

While many of the responses across the samples indicated that the military "protects" the country in one way or another, others argued it is comprised of "Over-glorified higher ups with a lot of money sending good, brave people to fights they don't necessarily want to fight or even understand." There is a sense across many of the responses that the military is only as good as the government in power, that soldiers are over-funded "pawns" who have all the equipment in the world and no sense of how to use it. At the same time, though, responses from both Twitter and UIC participants indicate an appreciation for people who serve in the military. The majority of UIC responses, approximately 37% (n = 172), and the majority of Twitter responses, approximately 44%, described the U.S. military and/or its soldiers as a hardworking, proud, patriotic, or superior force which protects the country.

4. **Question: What Thought Comes to Mind When You Think About the People Who Join the U.S. Military?**

The majority of answers, approximately 46% of UIC responses (n = 212) and 47% of Twitter responses (n = 71) were primarily description of psychographic characteristics. However, respondents across both samples had very diverse, oftentimes conflicting and contradictory thoughts about people who join the military. People who join the military are either "brave, selfless" individuals or young men who "mostly join because lack of direction rather than a sense of duty or bravery," "have no other option," come from poor backgrounds or want to hurt or kill others. Few respondents mentioned women joining the military. The military is clearly seen as a male-dominated space. And while some respondents said young men join the military
may need money to go to college, others are said to join because they have no interest in attending college or receiving a higher education.

Respondents also said they are sad for people who join the military. They feel pity for young men "who don't know what they're getting into." At the same time, many respondents are proud of the people who join the military – proud that there are people out there who so love the country that they are willing to potentially fight and die for it, and proud that there are people willing to join and fight so others (like themselves) don't have to. Twitter respondents appeared to be more likely to admit feeling a sense of pride in people who join the military than UIC students. However, this interpretation could be related to the small size of the Twitter sample.

5. **Question: Would You Ever Join the U.S. Military? Why or Why Not?**

The majority of UIC students who also play military-themed first person shooters, approximately 67% (n = 118), said they would never consider joining the U.S. military. Only 33% of players here (n = 58) acknowledged they would consider the possibility. So the majority of players at UIC would not join the U.S. military. Regarding the Twitter sample, only 39% (n = 58) said they would consider joining the U.S. Military.

One striking response from a UIC student was "This country's government isn't worth serving." Women across both samples who do not wish to join the military often say they are afraid of being sexually assaulted or raped. There is, it seems, an understanding amongst respondents that the military is unsafe for women. Interestingly, many people across both samples admit they are too afraid to join the military, saying it is too dangerous. Contrary to the many ways to serve that are presented in commercials and recruitment literature, there is a general understanding that being in the military is a dangerous endeavor that will ultimately
result in having to fight and die in the desert. This reinforces the point that attitudes are disconnected from the possibility of serving in the military.

6. **Question: For What Reasons Do You Think it Might be Justifiable For a Country to Go to War with Another Country?**

   Approximately 65% of UIC respondents (n = 300) said it is justifiable to go to war in response to an active attack/assault on a country or its people. Responses here include the protection and maintenance of peace, the assassination of a head of state, retaliation for invading another country's land, retaliation for engaging in war or acts of war with the United States or its allies, and/or as a response to violating human rights.

   Whether or not the lives of citizens/allies are at stake seems to be the arbiter of justice here. Unjustified attacks on individuals who can't defend themselves provide clear motivation to go to war with another country. But this is where it gets tricky, as the person/country engaging in the initial attack likely has at least some form of justification for the assault to begin with. Certain phrases popular in our lexicon appear again and again in the open-ended responses. "To protect citizens," "To protect those who cannot help themselves," etc. When one respondent says "To protect citizens" and another states, "To protect citizens from direct attack," it is quite possible that both mean the same thing. But pre-emption can take many forms. How do we justify the existence of an "imminent" threat, for example? If a country attacks another because it feels threatened, how does that threat specifically have to manifest itself? Does war only become an option after an attack?

   The pre-emptive doctrine so ubiquitous in political speech certainly seems to have impacted how respondents think about war. This is most evident in the Twitter responses, where approximately 41% of participants (n = 63) answered that it is justifiable to go to war in response
to direct attack, and approximately 30% (n = 46) used pre-emptive language. Such language included mentions of "terrorism," a "clear consensus amongst an international group of allies" or acts of war in response to "imminent threats." Interestingly, approximately 19% (n = 27) of players in the Twitter sample said that war is never justifiable. Only 3% of UIC players (n = 6) answered similarly. However, Twitter participants who answered in this fashion are not heavy players. As such, they self-reported playing the game between 0-0.5 hours per game play session.

The qualitative responses point to complex and sometimes contradictory reasons under which a country should and should not go to war. Under which circumstances should one country care about the humanity of another? If one "country is ostensibly attacked by another country, then it is permissible to go to war." Yet the phrase, "If a country is a threat to another country or ally," is vague. While the word "direct" is certainly implied, as our political environment shows, pre-emptive action is based around the perception of threats.

Twitter respondents were divided here. Many responses were peppered with pre-emptive language, saying it is appropriate to go to war when threatened, though specifics about the "threat" were typically absent. People seem to think there are justifiable reasons to go to war, but they are not sure how to express those circumstances when asked about them directly. Finally, responses across both samples mention "Genocide" as a deciding factor.

7. **Question: What is it about the experience of playing military-themed first person shooters do you find appealing/attractive?**

Approximately 57% of UIC players (n = 96) primarily indicate they enjoy experiencing realistic combat without the threat of getting killed (or firing a weapon without hurting anyone). The verbiage here is interesting, as it implies as assumption about the achieved level of realism in the games. It seemingly supports the notions that our cultural understanding of
war is in part constructed by pop-cultural images of war. As these games are played by millions of people (most of whom do not belong to the U.S. military), players' conceptions of war (what it looks like, for example) are in part constructed by their actions in and engagement with the game worlds. So game designers (knowingly or not, consciously or unconsciously) are both constructing and reinforcing the mainstream understanding of what modern warfare and contemporary battlefields look like. Players also enjoy triumphing over evil, a sentiment that supports the idea that players may feel a sense of control over things and events outside their direct control.

Twitter respondents were vocal here. Many echoed the sentiment from a respondent who said he enjoyed "Being someone honorable and being against terrorism." The general assessment is that it is "fun" to play war, because the aspect of "playing war" is strikingly different from participating in a real war. That said, approximately 51% of players here (n = 78) indicated they enjoy experiencing realistic combat without the threat of getting killed. As one respondent said, "It feels like I'm in the war." As another said, the games approximate "1st hand combat experience." Some, though, admitted to feeling anxiety while playing the games or understanding that the games themselves approximate certain elements of war in a fun way (this oxymoronic idea created dissonance in many of the respondents, whose responses were apologetic in the way they justified enjoying the carnage on screen). As one said, "I like pretending to be in a war and killing the bad guys. Also I specially enjoy the online modes." This same respondent said there was never a good justification for war, arguing "I don't think war is an option for anything. Countries should find a way to get well together without having to kill each other."
Since players re-spawn (as there is no actual death) players allow themselves to experience something utterly taboo in the real world - the enjoyment of participating in aggression. Playing the game is "like going to a shooting range." It is the chance for a player to "experience something so different to my everyday life." As one person said, "I don't know some people just like the fact that you can do things you can't in real life. But for me, I like to leave the real world for a bit and go to a world of make believe.

Players across both samples, then, enjoy the games because they approximate war in a believable way, unlike other forms of pop culture. As one Twitter respondent explained, "It's as close to what an actual war experience is like. There are too many movies out there which just give a fictional action or war scene. COD is real" Players, it seems, want "to know what real war is without" experiencing actual danger. Others say the games teach them "too much about war." Players also like the simplicity of the games. There is a clear mission, a clear goal, a clear path to victory or at least finishing the game.

8. **Question: What Aspects of War Feel Realistic in Military-Themed First Person Shooters?**

The fact that UIC students regularly referred to *enemies* as *opponents* highlights the continued gamification of war in the popular consciousness. Military-themed first person shooters reinforce the war as game metaphor in society. That said, many UIC respondents, approximately 26% (n = 100) said the games do not present the experience of combat in a realistic way. This includes references to having to kill opponents or watch others die, descriptions of the chaos of battle, the "sounds" of war, and the like. Approximately 14% (n = 62) of respondents argued that the games themselves are not realistic in any way, which suggests that players and non-players do not likely believe the games have any conscious impact on their
politics, attitudes towards war, etc. Even so, respondents routinely said the games capture the chaotic feel of war, the "fact that you can die at any time," and "people die all around you at any moment."

Twitter responses echoed such sentiments, though they were often far more descriptive. One person, for example, said there are "waves of people dying and shooting themselves still no one's alive except the last man that suicides by loneliness." Many participants acknowledged "That everyone is fighting for survival and a common goal." Many asserted that the games captured the chaotic experience of combat, the weapons and sound effects of battle. Many highlighted the locations themselves, the fact that the firefights seemed realistic, etc. Even so, heavy players drew a line in the sand here, saying statements like, "None. It is a video game" or distinguishing the fidelity of one game series over another. "COD [Call of Duty] is not realistic, Battlefield is, but the story is boring." Approximately 20% of Twitter respondents, (n = 31), said the games do not present the experience of combat in a realistic way. Approximately 26% (n = 40) of respondents argued that the games themselves are not realistic in any way, shape, or form.

9. Question: What Aspects of War Feel Unrealistic in Military-Themed First Person Shooters?

Respondents across both samples distinguish between simulators and mainstream blockbuster games like Call of Duty and Battlefield. They argue the games are not trying to be realistic; rather, they are trying to be fun. "Real war is not fun." "I see him on a TV in my house ... I'm not in a real war." "There is no real loss or consequence. It doesn't feel like war at all." Most responses highlight how difficult it is to actually die in the virtual world. Approximately 59% of UIC players (n = 104) highlight specific game play elements (like being able to pause the game, having regenerating health and/or re-spawning and/or being able to run without
experiencing any sort of fatigue) as being unrealistic. And 19% (n = 34) assert that every aspect of the game is unrealistic.

Approximately 56% of Twitter players (n = 85) highlight various game play elements as being unrealistic, and 17% (n = 26) argue that every aspect of the games are unrealistic. The majority of players across both samples, then, view the games as entertainment and argue (both implicitly and explicitly) that they are merely entertainment and should not be taken seriously. As one Twitter respondent asserted, "All of it [is unrealistic]. Was is brutal. You see it on the news. You cannot compare the 2. If you blur the lines between war and games then you are truly naive."

10. **Question: What One Country Do You Consider to be the Greatest Enemy of the United States Today?**

Table XXV presents the frequencies and valid percents from both UIC and Twitter participants. Table XXVI presents the frequencies and valid percents for players from both UIC and Twitter samples.
Table XXV
FREQUENCIES AND VALID PERCENTAGES OF UIC (N = 460) AND TWITTER (N = 152) RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, "WHAT ONE COUNTRY DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE GREATEST ENEMY OF THE UNITED STATES TODAY?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Though many UIC students asserted the United States was its own greatest enemy, the three countries respondents presented as being the greatest enemies of the United States were China, Russia, and North Korea. The Cold War may be over, but its legacy is perpetuated through pop culture. The Communist as villain trope, after all, has been an enduring part of American pop culture since the start of the Cold War in 1947. In much the same way as nobody bats an eyelash when they see Nazis as villains, Americans are used to seeing Russians presented as bad guys. By extending the Cold War theme into the War on Terror, producers are able to pit players against villains driven by a time-tested and well-worn ideology disconnected from
religion and geographically fixed. As such, producers “avoid narratives that could possibly interfere with the ability to freely consume the pure experience of battle” (Stahl, 2010, p. 98).

Table XXVI
FREQUENCIES AND VALID PERCENTAGES OF PLAYERS FROM UIC (N = 177) AND TWITTER (N = 144) RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, "WHAT ONE COUNTRY DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE GREATEST ENEMY OF THE UNITED STATES TODAY?"

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VII. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND LIMITATIONS

A. Key Findings

- *Call of Duty* games released since 9/11 promote the ideas that 1) war is constant, 2) war is clean, and 3) war is Cold.
- *Call of Duty* players think the greatest enemies of the United States today are China, North Korea, and Russia.
- Most *Call of Duty* players would never consider joining the U.S. military. They are divorced from actual military duty, either directly or through family members and/or close friends.
- The more someone plays *Call of Duty*, or by extension popular military-themed first person shooters, the more likely they are to have a positive attitude towards the U.S. military, think the U.S. is doing a good job avoiding civilian casualties, think that using torture to obtain information is an acceptable means of getting information, and that the U.S. might sustain a lot of casualties in current and future operations.

B. Discussion

Most studies that examine the complex relationship between mass media, their audiences, the military, and political elites to construct representations of war do not include video games. Games like *Call of Duty* reach a large audience, have power in their images, have immediacy, and are interactive. Mass media like military-themed first person shooters do not simply reflect what is already in the world. They exaggerate it, construct it, mold it. So to best understand how these games help construct and maintain ideas about war and attitudes towards the U.S. military
and foreign policy, it was necessary to examine the themes present across the *Call of Duty* games released since 9/11 and then pursue an untapped area of public opinion research – asking video game players their opinions about both the games and their attitudes about war. The studies that make up this dissertation illuminate 1) the ways military-themed first person shooters like the *Call of Duty* series construct and reinforce images of war in popular culture and 2) the ways players of military-themed first-person shooters think about the experience of play and the experience of war.

Generally speaking, the narratives in post 9/11 military-themed first person shooters like the *Call of Duty* series are often inspired by or mirror real life conflicts. Some rewrite history. Some are set in the future and present imagined, potential conflicts for the United States. But all are grounded in real or imagined fears, are simultaneously born out of and become situated in the lexicon of pop culture, and extend a neoconservative worldview rooted in a firm belief in American military might, a post-Cold War military mindset, a willingness to engage in and/or justify preventive war, a firm belief in America as a global force for good, and spending, and a belief in America's future as a world leader.

For example, the advertising campaign for *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* involved a short investigative-style documentary featuring Oliver North and *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (2009) author P.W. Singer discussing the future of warfare. The documentary begins with North warning the viewer, "I don't think the average American grasps how violent war is about to become." Singer explains, "The next few years are going to see a wide array of technology that allows you to blow things up, to kill, in a way we've never seen before in history." The provocative advertorial plays off of contemporary fears of technology run amok while simultaneously titillating consumers with the promise of being able
to utilize the aforementioned technologies in the game space to blow things up, to kill, in ways they've never been able to do before in a *Call of Duty* game, in order to fight the good fight.

Games like *Call of Duty* are blockbusters − multi-million dollar products designed to present war as entertainment and be consumed by a mass, global audience. In the 100-plus hours I played through the games, the actions became repetitive, mindless, thoughtless, dull. Their storylines seemed to bleed into one another, such that no matter which character I embodied, it seemed like I was simply going through the motions. Taken together, the six games in my sample all contained the themes highlighted by Gagnon (among other scholars). Since Gagnon's analysis only examined two games in the series (*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*), I expected the themes he discovered to be challenged or undermined when applied across the more recent iterations of the series. Interestingly, though, the themes became more amplified. Played back to back, the games collectively promoted the ideas that 1) war is constant, 2) war (as enacted by the United States and its allies) is clean, and 3) war is Cold (i.e., that we cannot trust Russia and that Cold War fears of Russia and Communism are alive and well in popular culture). Players, at least in their self-reports, picked up on the second. Their open-ended responses to the questionnaire acknowledged the distinct lack of civilians in battle zones. But these answers missed an interesting characteristic of this lack of civilians − namely, that when civilians are killed, they are always killed by the villains. Even the provocative *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* level explained earlier, "No Russian," operates along this premise. The player (as an undercover U.S. soldier) accompanies villain Vladimir Makarov and three other gunmen as they slowly walk through the Zakhaev International Airport executing hundreds of helpless civilians. Though the player can choose whether or not s/he wants to participate in the killings, the decision in no way alters the outcome of the level.
While the games often present a modern, contemporary representation of war, their storylines are divorced from the realities of today's current conflicts. Why not, for instance, design levels where players have to determine whether or not someone in their crosshairs is a civilian or enemy combatant? The complexities of American foreign policy, acknowledgment of radical Islamic terrorism as at least one aspect of the continued War on Terror, and moral ambiguities surrounding civilian casualties and America's continued use of drones, are ignored in favor of clichéd, and culturally acceptable, Russian and/or Communist villains. In this way, the games maximize war's capacity to be consumed. It is easier to market war to today's consumer if it is political (i.e., Communism versus Democracy) or geographical (i.e., Russia versus the United States) rather than religious (i.e., Christianity versus Islam). By skirting the relationship between the War on Terror and its more complex aspects, the games maintain the status quo and create an oversimplified version of contemporary warfare where there are clear winners and losers.

Ultimately, players aren't given much agency in the games to make decisions or alter the course of events, so the narratives conflate entrenched cultural memories of the Cold War and Cold War politics with the continued War on Terror. Decisions, outside of those made in Call of Duty: World at War and, to a greater extent, Call of Duty: Black Ops II, don't really impact the outcome of these narratives. So the games, taken together, extend the idea that the War on Terror is, in part, an extension of the Cold War.

It seems self evident that what happens on television (and by extension in video games) isn't always accurate and true to life. Yet research examining, for instance, occupational portrayals of television and real life suggest that superficial occupational portrayals might encourage positive and negative stereotypes (Jones 2003). So it was (and still is) worth asking
how the representation of war, American soldiers, and the American military in military-themed first person shooters get interpreted by players. This is particularly relevant because the United States appears to be locked in a series of endless, global armed conflicts. When one ends (or at least looks like it is about to end), another appears.

It bears repeating that players always assume a pre-conceived role when they sit down to play a military-themed first person shooter. But when gamers play they do not simply read and reflect upon the qualities of characters. "Rather, they take on the identity of a particular on-screen character and [seemingly] direct its fate" (Henricks 2010, p. 28). I added the word "seemingly" to the previous quote, because if the gamer plays the single-player campaign, then s/he has little direct control over the ultimate outcome of the character's destiny. The player merely guides the character through a series of set pieces similar to those found in Hollywood blockbusters and actively follows along until the credits roll.\(^{33}\) In fact, many parts of the games are so scripted they can be played without ever firing a single bullet. Additionally, killing friendly non-player characters sometimes results in the player being reprimanded with the phrase, "Friendly fire will not be tolerated," before being forced to restart from a previous checkpoint – an interesting attempt to instill the idea that players needs to be careful where and whom they shoot. At the same time, though, there were numerous instances where, in the heat of the firefight, I accidentally shot and killed fellow friendly soldiers, and the game just kept on going as though I hadn't violated the rule.

Players' actions within the single-player campaign, no matter what (good or bad, right or wrong) are not their own. They are not themselves going out and performing the actions of a soldier on the battlefield. They are, rather, merely experiencing the actions vicariously through

\(^{33}\) If, however, the gamer is playing multiplayer online, then his/her decisions during game play have direct impact over the outcome of the "story."
the eyes of an abstract soldier within a virtual world. The experience of seeing war first hand is a qualitatively different experience from playing at war or watching war films. Nevertheless, as my analysis shows, the experience of warfare through the eyes of a virtual soldier likely cultivates positive attitudes towards the American military, war, soldiers, and the use of torture to gain information from suspected terrorists. Playing these games certainly doesn't counter them.

Frostling-Henningson (2009) noticed some video game players were motivated by escapism. Military-themed first person shooters often possess a high level of authenticity, and their narratives often mirror real world scenarios or fears. So what does it mean for someone to escape real world problems and concerns by jumping head first into a virtual world where those same fears are multiplied? It's true the games may provide a sense of control over such fears. And the riskless risk involved in "participating" in the war on terror, for example, perhaps gives people a means to cope with real world fears (a cathartic effect). However, the successful completion of each mission or level, rescue of each hostage, or victory in each game of ‘capture the flag’ provides no respite from the next onslaught of enemy soldiers pouring out from a spawn point, or the next death match, or the next terrorist attack. Success is fleeting and momentary. Success is but a single benchmark in a series of never-ending benchmarks. If online gaming is merely a "hallucination of the real" (Baudrillard 1995), where players can engage in wish fulfillment and perform actions they are physically unable to perform in the real world, or perform actions that are socially unacceptable in the real world (like committing acts of violence), then we must ask what it is that is being hallucinated. Is it, in the case of military-themed first person shooters, success in the War on Terror?
While the impact of video game play on attitudes towards war produced small, inconsistent effects, we must consider the many other variables at play that impact a person's decision-making in the real world. I am reminded of something George Gerbner asserted throughout his career regarding the effects of the mass media – even a small effect is massive when you consider the size of the population impacted. Millions of people play these games across the globe. And while it is likely that the games do not directly cause most people to ultimately decide whether or not they want to join the military, or whether or not they support a particular foreign policy decision, they do reinforce certain ideas and values in these millions. These games, then, are but one pillar of popular culture supporting the idea that the military is a noble institution. After all, according to a June 2014 Gallup poll, 73 percent of Americans have either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the military. 34 Though my analysis suggests that Call of Duty players think the U.S. might sustain a lot of casualties in current and future operations, the reasons behind this remain ambiguous. Are players indifferent because they are unlikely to serve? And are they unlikely to serve because of their interest in playing Call of Duty?

C. Dissertation Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

It is important to remember that all video games act within a process of cultural production that is much broader than any single game (Allen 2011) or even series of games. People who play Call of Duty likely also play other first person shooters, other military shooters, and/or other genres of games as well. In addition, many people who play these games also play them for different reasons. Some are attracted to the single-player campaigns, to be sure. Others

prefer multi-player experiences online. And playing online is a far different experience than playing through the single-player campaign. In fact, many players in both samples self-reported that they preferred playing online with friends. According to Wright (2007b), a major reason gamers prefer multi-player experiences over single-player ones "is the assumption that computer avatars are ultimately predictable and therefore boring, while human players are consistently doing something surprising or interesting" (p. 15). Such a practice turns a commercial game into a more realistic simulation. Playing a tactical shooter against a human opponent rather than Artificial Intelligence (AI) mimics real-life combat in a way playing a single-player campaign of a commercial shooter might not.

Wright also found that players of tactical shooters enjoyed cooperative elements of the game and the organized social interactions it afforded. "Teamwork," he observed, "requires trust between players to pull off effective tactical moves" (p. 16). Frostling-Henningson (2009) similarly observed that players of tactical shooters valued teamwork, cooperation, and ability to unite for a common cause. "This purpose was most explicit in the killing of terrorists or disarming a bomb" (p. 559).

Thus, it would be worthwhile to administer a revised version of the survey instrument used in this dissertation to players who prefer playing the single player campaign versus players who prefer playing online with others to see how their answers compare. According to Fowler, Jr. (2009), "How well a sample represents a population depends on the sample frame, the sample size, and the specific selection procedures" (p. 19). A researcher should evaluate three characteristics of a sample frame: comprehensiveness, probability of selection, and efficiency. Comprehensiveness is how completely the sample frame covers the target population. Probability of selection examines whether each person in the sample has an equal chance of
being selected. Efficiency refers to the rate at which members of the target population can be found among those in the frame (p. 21). Regarding the first survey, administered to students at UIC, the sample was comprehensive, efficient, and each member had the same probability of being selected. Regarding the second survey, administered to members of Activision's Official Call of Duty Twitter Community, the sample was comprehensive at the time of sampling (the number has since grown), and each member had the same probability of being selected from the list. However, the sample was not efficient – though there was little to be done about that.

Members of the Activision's Official Call of Duty Twitter Community are not all real people. Many of them are social bots. A social bot is a Twitter account that mimics human behavior. In Peter Coy's September 25, 2013 Bloomberg article "Could Bots and Spam Smother the twitter IPO?" it is reported that "Some 24 percent of tweets are created by automated bots." It is likely, then, that almost one-quarter of my random sample was comprised of bots, which potentially explains why so few people elected to take the online survey.

In addition, many of the randomly selected members responded to my invitations in a hostile fashion. This likely happened for one of two reasons. First, many thought I was a social bot. Second, many felt the academic study of video games like Call of Duty was worthy of ridicule. In between tweets telling me to get AIDS or kill myself, one reply I received a lot was "Nope. It's only a game." The sentiment is perhaps best encapsulated in the following tweet: "Haha lol, Gamers don't have interests in politics. They just want to play a game. I don't see any relation. Because it's only a game." While it is probably safe to say that most Call of Duty players do not consciously care about what the game is or is not trying to say about the nature of war, such responses undermine the power of mass media. It is clear, then, that sending invitation  

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tweets wasn't a very efficient means of soliciting participants, since many assumed I was simply trying to give them a computer virus. As one person tweeted, "Yes, I answer every survey on a weird link sent by everyone I don't know. Oh wait, no I don't. Try to hack someone else."

Also, to have a Twitter account without parental consent, users have to be at least 13 years old. Since the age range of Twitter respondents was 12-64 years old, some of the questions produced data that was unreliable. Perhaps the reason so many participants did not specify their political views or affiliation, for example, is because the Twitter sample was global, rather than national, and younger respondents might not have been as politically active or engaged as older participants.

Finally, the results of the factor analyses were inconsistent, which points to a limitation of the 17-point scale. Survey I scale data clustered around 4 factors. Survey II scale data clustered around 3 factors. This suggests that there are differences in the sample dimensions, so the scale needs to be further refined through additional testing. As mine is the first study to ask such questions of military-themed first person shooter players, there are likely other questions worth noting to include in and refine these scales. Further research should examine how levels of realism impact players' attitudes about and conceptions of war. How much do these games, for instance, contribute to our conscious and unconscious understanding of war, foreign policy, and the U.S. military? While the series is but one example of how misleading and dangerous conceptions of war, soldiers, and military institutions are constructed and reinforced in society, it is worth remembering that millions of people across the world play these games. Yes, the games are meant as entertainment. And yes, the games give players the opportunity to socialize with friends, engage in taboo behaviors, and be in control. At the same time, though, they present war as a game, normalizing it and stripping it of its oft devastating impact. With Activision
confirming that it will release another installment of *Call of Duty* in 2015, the series is set to continue as an annual tradition. For research that seeks to understand the interplay between video games of this kind and the military industrial complex, the future certainly looks promising.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample Play Through Notes

Play Through Note 1
Game: Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
Campaign Level: Prologue Part II: Crew Expendable

I rappel to the freighter landing on the main deck and follow Cpt. Price and other SAS members as they approach the bridge. There are crew members inside. Cpt. Price says, "Weapons free," and I decide to test the game's procedural rhetoric by not engaging. I commit to simply watching the events unfold. A startled crew members sees me through the window as the team opens fire on the otherwise unsuspecting targets. As we move inside and down a flight of stairs, I see a drunken soldier stumbling through the halls. Someone shoots him. Cpt. Price quips, "Last call." I see two soldiers sleeping on bunks, and my compatriots kill them with silenced gunshots. Someone says, "Sweet dreams." Teammates acknowledge stealth kills with scripted lines: "Tango down," "Target neutralized." Gaz draws a shotgun and says he likes to keep it for close encounters. Someone replies, "Too right mate." A firefight erupts in the bowels of the ship. I still haven't fired a single shot. Sgt. Carver engages enemies below deck. Gaz and Cpt. Price follow suit, firing their weapons. I watch team members engage in the fire fight. If I do nothing, I assume Carver will be killed but am wrong. The sound of gunfire echoes in the halls, stray bullets hit pipes which spew steam. Eventually, the melee ends, and Gaz says "Tango down." We press on. By the end of the mission I still haven't fired a single shot, which leaves me with the distinct impression that my actions have little to nothing to do with the outcomes of the game.

Play Through Note 2
Game: Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
Campaign Level: Act I Level I: Blackout

I gather with Cpt. Price and Gaz in the Caucasus Mountains. As we move out we come upon two guards. Price says, "weapons free," implying that I, as the player, am allowed to engage with the enemy. But I refuse to do so. I'm sticking to my guns, so to speak, and decide to let events play out as they must without my active participation. As expected, Price and Gaz kill the guards, and we move up to a guard house. Inside, two guards watch a newscast − "Marines are already set to invade this small but oil rich nation in the Persian Gulf." The country is not named directly, but the implication is clear. They are invading Iraq. Price and Gaz take out the guards in the house, and we move under a bridge to two more houses. Gaz orders me to plant some claymore mines in front of the door and get the attention of the guards inside. I wait to see if my teammates will do something without me instigating, but they won't. I have to do something. I can walk into the room and get their attention, or I can shoot them, or I can knife them, or I can do as I am told. I choose to see if I can maintain my current course and walk into the house to get their attention but then back off without firing a shot. Cpt. Price and Gaz take out the two soldiers who rush out of the door to try and kill me. Through such set ups, the game tries to force me to pull the trigger. We meet up with Sgt. Kamarov (one of the good Russians, who won't shoot us on sight) who asks us to help him defeat a band of ultranationalists assaulting a village on the other side of the hill. Kamarov leads us to a place atop a hill so we can cover his men with sniper rifles.
Price orders me to switch to my M21 suppressed sniper rifle and I comply. As Kamarov's men engage with the enemy, I'm supposed to pick off enemy soldiers one at a time. Price orders me to take out a nest of machine gunners so Kamarov's men can start the assault. I look through my sniper scope at the targets but choose not to fire. This is the second time the game is trying to goad me into participating in the combat. Cpt. Price tells me again and again to take out the machine gunners, ten o'clock low. Then, someone else does it for me. I'm told to hit the other machine gunner through the wall. But I've realized something: I don't really have to fight (at least not in these early levels). I can maintain a neutral position, observing the combat without directly participating in it. Everything seems so scripted.

Eventually, we move positions to protect Kamarov's men from helicopter troops, and the game prompts me to use the grenade attachment on my weapon. I refuse, choosing once again to wait and watch. I move forward, taking cover and my non-player characters (my teammates) follow me, advancing our position. After some time, though, I start to take heavy fire, and grenades fall at my feet (I promptly throw them back). But it becomes obvious that the programming of the game will not let us move ahead unless I carve the path myself, with bullets and bloodshed. I shoot two ultranationalists, and the enemy threat dissipates so we can move ahead. We're tasked with helping Kamarov's men by supporting them from the hilltop. I simply wait and watch with my sniper rifle, choosing not to fire, choosing not to participate because the game doesn't require that I do so to move on. The game tries to trick players into firing. But once I trigger the enemies, it is easy to retreat behind the non-player characters and let them do all the work — an interesting bit of protest in a game that forces you to always be holding a gun. Eventually, the game decides I can move on because the non-player characters have cleaned up the rest of the enemies. Once the troops are eliminated, Price demands Kamarov tell him where the informant is. Earlier, Gaz suggested simply beating the location out of him, but Price kept him at bay. Now, as Kamarov tries to swindle us into helping his men yet again, Gaz threatens to push him off a cliff. We eventually rescue Nikolai. Price asks him if he can walk on his own. He responds, "Yes, and I can still fight," answering the question (sort of). For the game, fighting and continuing to fight are the mark of true heroes.
Appendix B: Pilot Survey Instrument

The first section of the questionnaire contains open-ended questions. Some of the questions have multiple parts. Please answer each question completely. You are free to make your answers as detailed as possible.

Section I

1. What image or feeling that comes to mind when you think about the U.S. Military in general?

2. What is the image or feeling that comes to mind when you think about the people who join the U.S. Military?

3. What is the image or feeling that comes to mind when you think about the people who stay in the U.S. Military as a career?36

4. Forgetting any issues of age or health, would you join the U.S. Military? Why or why not?

5. To the extent that you are optimistic about the goals, when is it justifiable for a country to go to war with another country?

6. Do you play military-themed video games like the Call of Duty series, Medal of Honor, or Battlefield? If "No," skip to section II.
   
   Yes _____
   No _____

7. How realistic or unrealistic do you think games like the Call of Duty series are at depicting the experiences of war? What aspect(s) of these games are unrealistic? What aspects are unrealistic?

8. What about the experiences of playing military-themed first person shooters appeals to you? Why are you attracted to games like those that make up to Call of Duty franchise?

36 First three questions taken from the 2002 Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) Report, "Youth Attitudes Toward the Military: Poll One."
9. How many of the following Call of Duty games have you played? Please check all that apply.37

   a. Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare _____
   b. Call of Duty: World at War _____
   c. Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 _____
   d. Call of Duty: Black Ops _____
   e. Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 _____
   f. Call of Duty: Black Ops 2 _____

10. How many days weekly do you play military-themed first person shooters like Call of Duty on average? _____

11. When you play, about how many hours do you play military-themed first person shooters like Call of Duty? _____

The next section of the questionnaire asks your opinion about current events.

Section II

1. Some people think that we should spend much less money for defense. others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Where would you place yourself on this scale?38

   1. (Greatly decrease)
   2. (Moderately decrease)
   3. (Neither increase or decrease)
   4. (Moderately increase)
   5. (Greatly increase)

37 These military-themed first person shooters comprised my sample for the grounded thematic analysis. Taken together, these games represent how the experience of war has been constructed within popular culture since 9/11.

2. How do you think that the U.S. campaign against terrorism is going?[^39]

1. (Very poorly)
2. (Poorly)
3. (Fairly well)
4. (Well)
5. (Very well)

3. Would you approve or disapprove of U.S. Military attacks on countries where it believes terrorists are hiding?

1. (Greatly disapprove)
2. (Somewhat disapprove)
3. (Neither approve nor disapprove)
4. (Somewhat approve)
5. (Greatly approve)

4. Using a 5-point scale, where 1 means *does not describe at all* and 5 means *describes perfectly*, please indicate how well the following statements describe the United States Military[^40]

a) Offers educational and training opportunities _____

b) Keeps the country from being attacked _____

c) Keeps the country protected and safe _____

d) Is prepared to defend the country _____

e) Has up-to-date technology _____

f) Provides a job/occupation that is honorable _____

g) Protects freedom and peace through strength _____

h) Keeps the U.S. strong _____

i) Makes you feel safe _____

j) Deserves your trust _____

k) Offers good benefits for military members _____

l) Has well-qualified military leaders _____

m) Has well-qualified personnel _____

n) Avoids problems and conflicts with other countries _____

[^39]: "In a CBS News/New York Times question asked after Osama bin Laden was killed in May 2011, 44 percent said the U.S. and its allies were winning and 45 percent said neither side was. Only 5 percent believed the terrorists were winning" (Bowman & Rugg, 2011, p. 17).

[^40]: Question taken from the 2002 Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) Report, "Youth Attitudes Toward the Military: Poll One."
5. In general, how would you rate the job the U.S. (United States) forces have done in avoiding civilian casualties in recent military operations?

   Excellent _____
   Good _____
   Fair _____
   Poor _____

6. How worried are you that U.S. (United States) forces might sustain a lot of casualties in current and future operations?

   A Great Deal _____
   A Fair Amount _____
   Not Much _____

7. Torture to gain important information from suspected terrorists is justified _____.

   Often _____
   Sometimes _____
   Rarely _____
   Never _____
   Don't Know _____

The final section of this questionnaire asks you for some basic demographic information.

Section III

1. What was your age on your last birthday? _____

2. What is your gender?

   Male _____
   Female _____

3. In general, how would you describe your political views?

   Very Conservative _____
   Conservative _____
   Moderate, Middle of the Road _____
   Liberal _____
   Very liberal _____
   Don't know, haven't thought about it _____
4. In general, how would you describe your political affiliation?

   Strong Democrat _____
   Weak Democrat _____
   Independent _____
   Weak Republican _____
   Strong Republican _____

5. Have you ever been, or are you currently, a member of the U.S. Armed Forces?

   Yes _____
   No _____

6. Do you have members of your immediate family who have ever been, or are currently, a member of the U.S. Armed Forces?

   Yes _____
   No _____

7. Do you have close friends who have ever been, or are currently, a member of the U.S. Armed Forces?

   Yes _____
   No _____

8. What is your ethnicity?

   White _____
   Hispanic or Latino _____
   Black or African American _____
   Native American or American Indian _____
   Asian/Pacific Islander _____
   Other (Please specify) _____

9. What year are you in school?

   Freshman _____
   Sophomore _____
   Junior _____
   Senior _____
   Graduate Student _____
Appendix C: Final Online Survey Instrument (Administered via Qualtrics)

The first section of the questionnaire contains open-ended questions. Some of the questions have multiple parts. Please answer each question completely. You are free to make your answers as detailed as possible.

1. What image comes to mind when you think about the U.S. Military in general?

2. What image comes to mind when you think about the people who join the U.S. Military?

3. What thought comes to mind when you think about the U.S. Military in general?

4. What thought comes to mind when you think about the people who join the U.S. Military?

5. If you could, would you ever consider joining the U.S. Military?
   _____ Yes (Please indicate "why" in the space below)
   _____ No (Please indicate "why not" in the space below)

6. For what reasons do you think it might be justifiable for a country to go to war with another country?

7. Do you ever play video games like the Call of Duty series, Medal of Honor, or Battlefield (i.e., military-themed first person shooters)?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No

   If participants answered "Yes" to Question 7, they were asked Questions 8-11. If participants answered "No" to Question 7, they were taken directly to Question 12.

8. Do you ever play through the single-player campaigns?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No

9. How many days per week (on average) do you play military-themed first person shooters (like Call of Duty, Medal of Honor, or Battlefield)?

10. When you play, about how many consecutive hours do you play for at a given time?

11. What is it about the experience of playing military-themed first person shooters (like Call of Duty, Medal of Honor, or Battlefield) that appeals to you?
12. What aspects of war feel realistic in military-themed first person shooters (like Call of Duty, Medal of Honor, or Battlefield)?

13. What aspects feel unrealistic?

14. What one country do you consider to be the greatest enemy of the United States today?

The next section of the questionnaire asks your opinion about current events.

Section II

1. If you were making up the budget for the federal government this year, would you increase spending, decrease spending or keep spending the same for military defense?
   _____ Decrease spending
   _____ Keep spending the same
   _____ Increase spending

2. How successful do you feel the U.S. campaign against terrorism has been?
   _____ Very unsuccessful
   _____ Somewhat unsuccessful
   _____ Neither successful nor unsuccessful
   _____ Somewhat successful
   _____ Very successful

3. Thinking about the war on terror, would you say that it is more important, equally important, or less important than it was in the months just after September 11, 2001 (the date of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon)?
   _____ Less important
   _____ Equally important
   _____ More important

4. Would you approve or disapprove of U.S. military attacks on countries where it believes terrorists are hiding?
   _____ (Strongly disapprove)
   _____ (Somewhat disapprove)
   _____ (Neither approve nor disapprove)
   _____ (Somewhat approve)
   _____ (Strongly approve)
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means *does not describe at all* and 5 means *describes perfectly*, how well do the following statements describe the U.S. military?

   a. Offers educational and training opportunities _____
   b. Keeps the country from being attacked _____
   c. Has up-to-date technology _____
   d. Provides a job/occupation that is honorable _____
   e. Deserves your trust _____
   f. Offers good benefits for military members _____
   g. Has well-qualified military leaders _____
   h. Has well-qualified personnel _____
   i. Prevents conflicts with other countries _____

6. What grade would you give the United States on avoiding civilian casualties in recent operations?

   _____ A
   _____ B
   _____ C
   _____ D
   _____ F

7. How worried are you that U.S. forces might sustain a lot of casualties in current and future operations?

   _____ Not at all
   _____ A little
   _____ A fair amount
   _____ A great deal

8. How often do you believe that using torture to gain important information from suspected terrorists is justifiable?

   _____ Often
   _____ Sometimes
   _____ Rarely
   _____ Never

9. How much confidence do you have in the ability of the U.S. government to protect its citizens from future terrorist attacks?

   _____ A great deal
   _____ A fair amount
   _____ Not very much
   _____ None at all
10. Which of the following statements comes closer to your view on how the United States should use military force to achieve its foreign policy goals?

_____ American military force should only be used as a last resort, after diplomatic and economic efforts have failed.
_____ American military force should be used as readily as diplomatic and economic pressure and should not be held back only as a last resort.
_____ Undecided/Unsure

The final section of this questionnaire asks you for some basic demographic information.

**Section III**

1. What was your age on your last birthday? _____

2. What is your gender?
   
   _____ Male
   _____ Female

3. What are your political views?

   _____ Very conservative
   _____ Conservative
   _____ Moderate, middle of the road
   _____ Liberal
   _____ Very liberal

4. What is your political affiliation?

   _____ Strong Democrat
   _____ Weak Democrat
   _____ Independent
   _____ Weak Republican
   _____ Strong Republican

5. Have you ever been, or are you currently, a member of the U.S. Armed Forces?

   _____ Yes
   _____ No

6. Do you have members of your immediate family who have ever been, or are currently, a member of the U.S. Armed Forces?

   _____ Yes
   _____ No
7. Do you have close friends who have ever been, or are currently, a member of the U.S. Armed Forces?

_____ Yes
_____ No

8. Which of the following groups do you most closely identify with?

_____ White
_____ Hispanic or Latino
_____ Black or African American
_____ Native American or American Indian
_____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ Other (Please specify)

9. What year are you in school?

_____ Freshman
_____ Sophomore
_____ Junior
_____ Senior
_____ Graduate student

Thank you for taking time out to participate in this survey. We truly appreciate it.
CITED LITERATURE


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