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## Response 2 to “Toward a gerontoludic manifesto”

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### Abstract

Responses to commentary, “Toward a gerontoludic manifesto,” by Bob De Schutter and Vero Abeele in *Anthropology & Aging* Vol36, no.2, the special issue on “Aging the Technoscape,” followed by a reply by the commentary authors

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## Response 2 to “Toward a gerontoludic manifesto”

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The authors note that there are two themes found in the technoscape of electronic play by the “silver-hair gamer”: usefulness and accessibility. Both in some sense are related to the meta-theme of skill. Some electronic games may be used to improve certain cognitive and physical skills and other games represent reflect age-related inabilities that constrain accessing and using certain electronic games. Another point made by this paper is that the gaming industry finds older adults somehow toxic and does not develop games or market specifically to them, reflecting widespread cultural values that stigmatize and denigrate older adults. Despite the fact that one-fourth of older adults may utilize electronic games, it is difficult for older adults to “out” themselves as gamers.

We can add to this discussion in three ways. First, it is also the case that many older adults who own computers will also use the games that come with the computers or are available for free or little cost through the operating systems’ store and websites like AARP.org. Although, by and large, these are likely to be a solitary endeavors, since computers are often used as a quotidian object in solitary ways. The number of older gamers may then be both underestimated and solitary. Second, the privacy of gaming and the industry disinterest in this slice of the market may reflect, unfortunately, a condition similar to the public view of sexuality among older adults: that it should not be public or known about and that it is, to the young at least, somehow shameful and stigmatized as inappropriate. Third, in our work in assisted living (AL) settings (an element of long term care for impaired and infirm older adults in the US), electronic game platforms such as Wii are pervasive in AL settings that are well heeled enough to afford them. Colleagues have observed other electronic games in such settings as well.

Another avenue of research for older adults may exist in the use of massively multiplayer online gaming and its effects on social isolation. The research on young adults is mixed in nature, suggesting that social isolation in young adults may be helped through their playing of online gaming. Participating in these games may negatively affect a person’s degree of social isolation. It is possible, however, that older adults who are already at risk of increasing social isolation could benefit from such games.

A more “age-typical” assessment of appropriate games for older adults may be things like chess, checkers and playing cards, although in some settings chess may be too complex for cognitively impaired persons of any age. It would be interesting to know how the use of electronic games layers on, in terms of layers of active memory, to games that were played in the past or older games that continue to be played at the present time. A related question concerns the sheer enjoyment gained from game playing of all sorts and whether there is also a layering effect in these terms of old and new games. Finally, it is important to know whether games are better played alone or with others. Games may be useful to fill the space that is developed when older adults live alone or are socially isolated.