



The Meaning of Video Gameplay: A Case Study of Three Black African Immigrant Students in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Research on African immigrant students' video gameplay is still in its infancy. Yet, the popularity of video games among college students in the United States suggests that African immigrant students may be video game players. This article explores the video gameplay of three Black African immigrant students at an institution of higher education. This study draws on research on immigrants' use of media and on video game literature to analyze the participants' experiences. This exploratory qualitative case study of three students uses semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection technique. The findings show that gameplay was a means to adjust to the new environment, a way to preserve identity, and ensure cultural continuity.

Keywords: Black African immigrant students, video games, media, video gameplay

INTRODUCTION

The most recent report of the Pew Research Center on gamers' demographics shows an increase in players' diversity. The data demonstrate that 47% of men and 39% of women play video games in the United States (Brown, 2017). In terms of race and ethnicity, 41% of Whites, 44% of Blacks, and 48% of Hispanics play video games (Brown, 2017). Although this report illustrates the diversity of video game players, and despite the growing interest in racial and ethnic diversity in the game literature (Bayeck et al., 2018), Black players are still seen as a homogenous group of people with common experience and history. Yet, as Dei (1994) put it, this assumed homogeneity of Black players "should be interrogated and investigated" (p. 34). Blacks are a heterogeneous group of people with "vast ethnic, language, religious, and geographic diversity" (Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017, p. 282). Yet, amid increasing interest in the experiences of diverse groups in game studies, research on Black African immigrant players is still emerging. The experiences and stories of Black African immigrant video game players are likely to be lost in the larger story of Black gamers (Sanchez & Gilbert, 2016). In this article, "Black African immigrants" refer to Black immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, and differs from the term "Blacks," which includes any Black person from African descent in the United States. This article purposefully focuses on Black African immigrant use of emerging technologies such as video games.

Interestingly, research shows that immigrant students rely on media as a means to positively impact their educational experiences. In fact, challenges such as feelings of loneliness, social isolation, lack of peer activities, identity issues, and absence of family are more intense and more frequently experienced by immigrant students (Kim, 2016). To satisfy these needs, immigrant students consume media products of their homeland (Kim, 2014). Cultural and emotional attachment to their homeland influences media consumption among immigrant students in the United States (Kim, 2016). Indeed, media from their homeland helps immigrant students address daily stresses, and construct a space where they feel more comfortable (Kim, 2016). Hence, media from students' country of origin provides some of the support needed for immigrant students to succeed in their educational pursuit (Kim, 2016). Media helps immigrant students cope with the challenges of studying away from their homeland (Kim, 2016). Furthermore, according to Lam (2012), students of immigrant backgrounds use new media as a space to interact with people in their homelands and as an information source. Immigrant students experience the stress of being in a new learning environment and the rigorous learning experience of higher education (Hailu & Ku, 2014). This may explain why young immigrants' media practices are associated with their identity (Yoon, 2018). Therefore, it becomes critical to

examine the media practices of other immigrant student groups such as Black African immigrants.

Black African Immigrants' Characteristics

African immigration in the United States has experienced tremendous growth since the 1930s (Elo et al., 2015). Black African immigrants constitute the fastest growing population of immigrants in the United States. (Elo et al., 2015). Zong and Batalova (2014) noted that by 2013, Black African immigrants made approximately 4% of immigrants in the United States. This growth implies increased presence of Black African immigrants in the American educational system (Sanchez & Gilbert, 2016).

The growth of Black African immigrants on American campuses creates new dynamics into the educational experience of immigrant students that needs to be explored. Indeed, Black African immigrants in the United States are greatly educated, with 38% obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 28% of the U.S. immigrant population, and 30% of native-born U.S. residents (Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017; Zong & Batalova, 2014).

STUDY PURPOSE

Black African immigrant students face multiple challenges including coping and adapting into a new environment and educational system (Ndemanu & Jordan, 2018). Furthermore, factors such as stereotypes about Africa, language, educational system differences, isolation, and parental involvement shape their educational experiences (Lau & Gordon, 2015; Ndemanu & Jordan, 2018). In light of these characteristics, this article explores how Black African immigrant students navigate their environments in the digital age era, with a particular focus on their use of video games. This article considers the video gameplay of Black African immigrant students, and provides insights into the meaning of their gameplay. The study also helps researchers and educators understand the needs of immigrant students from sub-Saharan Africa, who come from Black dominated, collectively oriented, and multilingual countries, in relation to White or Black communities in the United States. Moreover, immigrant population growth creates the need to understand the media/digital practices immigrant students engage in as they navigate educational attainment and socialization in a new environment in the digital age.

This article is divided into four sections. First, it focuses on media literature related to immigrants to situate the study within the context of immigrants and media consumption. Thus, the study builds on media literature, given that video games are new media (Burwell, 2017). Second, it puts forth the theoretical framework employed to understand how

participants' Black African identity and immigrant status shapes how, why, and which video game they play. Third, the article discusses the methods and results, and then concludes with the implications for researchers and educators for a better understanding of these students' learning needs and experiences with media such as video games.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Immigrants and Media Use

As previously stated, most studies examining immigrants' media consumption do not investigate Black African immigrants. Video game being a new technology and relatively new form of media (Hsu & Wang, 2010), literature on immigrants' use of media will inform this study.

Motivations for Media Use

Immigrants in a new country often experience a process of acculturation and adaptation, and they regularly turn to media to help them adjust and learn about the new cultural environment (Lin et al., 2010). Immigrants rely on social media, ethnic television, or English language TV, radio, or print media to adjust or adapt to the new culture (Dalisay, 2012). While researchers do not agree on the effect of different types of media (e.g., television, social media, radio, print media, new country or immigrants' country media) on immigrants' adaptation process, they do recognize that media assists in immigrants' adjustment. For example, Shumow (2010) found that immigrants from Venezuela in the United States used media for four main purposes: "to connect and stay informed about events taking place in their home country; to stay connected with the local; to construct the "growing sense of exile identity; and to maintain the feeling of attachment to Venezuela" (p. 388). Media choice is then driven by particular needs among immigrants. Other research reveals that media, in conjunction with interpersonal relationships, plays an important role in the adaptation and adjustment process of immigrants (Dalisay, 2012).

Subsequently, media use among immigrants differs from the general population because of the needs and interests of a population that feels isolated because they left their culture to join a new society (Louie, 2003). For this reason, new immigrants regularly consume the host country's media for companionship or information about the behavioral and social expectations of the new country. Learning cultural values and accelerating the assimilation process and integration in the new country are factors motivating immigrants' consumption of the host country's media (Dalisay, 2012; Moon & Park, 2007). Media in the host country contributes to immigrants' familiarization with their new environments because media in the host

language influences immigrants' learning about and acclimatizing to the new society (Elias & Lemish, 2008).

Research also reveals that immigrants' consumption of ethnic media strengthens their native cultures, preserves the cultural heritage, and reinforces feelings of internal solidarity with their community because ethnic media creates group identity among immigrants (DeFleur & DeFleur, 2003; Elias & Lemish, 2008). These conclusions have led some scholars to suggest that exclusively engaging with ethnic media may prevent the integration of ethnic groups because it supports their separateness. Yet, Lam (2012) argued that ethnic media actually help immigrants resist or oppose American worldviews. Thus, consumption of ethnic media can evidence the desire to maintain cultural heritage and affiliation with the immigrant's community (Elias & Lemish, 2008).

Ethnic media is instrumental in the adaptation process of immigrants. It sustains immigrants' cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and ethnic performance—that is, behavior linked to immigrants' ethnicity (Ramasubramanian & Doshi, 2017). Consequently, ethnic media serves multiple purposes such as integration into the new society, maintenance of cultural bond between immigrants, and preservation of cultural heritage, identity, and native language (Elias & Lemish, 2008).

As a tool for integration, ethnic media functions as a source for finding jobs, and a resource for practical information about navigating the host country (Alencar & Deuze, 2017).

Shumow (2010) argued that media consumed by an immigrant population often reinforces the feelings of displacement/deracination and perplexity. Yet, with other research showing the positive effect of media on immigrants' feelings of acculturation (Elias & Lemish, 2011), it can be assumed that media influences immigrants differently and serves different purposes. Media is increasingly assuming an important role in the daily lives of immigrants both in need of information about the new country and in need of "cultural continuity" (Elias & Lemish, 2011).

Motivation for Media Use and Immigrant Students

Lam (2012) argued that the media practices of young people from immigrant families have been ignored by research in spite of the growing population in schools. Even though limited, current research in media practices of immigrant students shows that immigrant adolescents develop language, literacy, and social skills across countries (Lam, 2012). Immigrant adolescents use social media and online tools to interact with people and to share information in diverse communities abroad and in the new homeland (Lam, 2012). For example, in a study of high school students at an ethnically diverse high school, Lam (2012) discovered that 72% of adolescent students

who immigrated to the United States in their early childhood used the internet to communicate with family and peers both in the United States and in their countries of origin. Immigrant students' digital practices led them to gain information from websites in the United States and websites from their countries of origin (Lam, 2012).

The use and exposure to information from different parts of the world seemed unique to immigrant high school students in Lam's study, and this exposure expanded their perspectives, allowing them to develop contrasting views (Lam, 2012). For instance, among Chinese high school students, Lam (2012) noticed that blogs and instant messaging helped Chinese students connect with peers from school and local Chinese youth groups in the United States. The students used these media platforms to interact with Asian-American youth and to converse with childhood peers, relatives, and online friends in China.

Similarly, precollege immigrant Korean students' consumption of Korean media products helped them interact with their family and maintained relationships with peers in Korea via different social networks (Kim, 2014). This media use is framed by these students' experience in the United States. Social isolation, loneliness, boredom, and the nonexistence of peer activities and intimate relationships forced the Korean immigrant students to address these challenges through Korean media consumption (Kim, 2014). Engaging with people in Korea through media provided an escape from everyday stresses, from the lack of friendships and the absence of different socio-cultural activities (Kim, 2014). For Yoon (2018) immigrant students' media use exhibited vacillation between integration into and disintegration from the host society as they shifted between ethnic media and host country media. This process of integration and disintegration signals peculiar digital media practices which may create new identities (Yoon, 2018). Digital media may create a space for young immigrants to reconnect with their homeland (Yoon, 2018).

Motivation for Video Gameplay

With regard to video game use among immigrant students, the literature is scarce (Bayeck, 2016). However, game studies researchers demonstrate that video gameplay is motivated by video games' potential to meet players' psychological needs such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Przybylski et al., 2010). As Ferguson and Olson (2013) indicated, video gameplay offers opportunities to meet basic human needs, reduce stress, and satisfy feelings of control not met in real life. Video games also provide opportunities for individuals to connect socially (Ferguson & Olson, 2013). Video games enable players to hang out with friends, compete, lead, make friends, and experiment with different identities (Olson, 2010).

Osmanovic and Pecchioni (2016) indicated that enhancing relationships and connections while creating pleasure are important motivating factors for adults and young adult players. Players engage in casual and serious discussions (Osmanovic & Pecchioni, 2016). Meeting psychological and emotional needs may explain college students' orientation toward video games (Greenberg et al., 2010).

Researching Taiwanese players, Huang et al. (2015) noted that making new friends and maintaining relationships with old friends is encouraged through gameplay. Gameplay also increases self-concept, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships among participants (Huang et al., 2015). As with traditional media, video games appear to meet players' needs and informed gameplay.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As shown in the literature above, media plays an important role in the experience of immigrants irrespective of the country of origin. Building on this literature, this study explores video gameplay of three Black African immigrant students by interrogating video game choice and gameplay motive. The current study addresses the following main questions: (a) how do participants explain their motivation for video gameplay? and (b) how do respondents make sense of their video game choice and play? In other words, this study purposed to gain insights into the uses and meanings of video gameplay among Black African immigrant students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This exploratory case study draws on the ethnic identity concept and on the uses and gratifications theory to make sense of data. Ethnic identity refers to a person identifying as member of an ethnic group, expressing ethnic attitudes, and having a positive sense of belonging to that group (Cokley, 2005; Coutinho & Koinis-Mitchell, 2014). The ethnic identity perspective helps define and distinguish Black African immigrants from other Blacks. In our study, a Black African immigrant is an immigrant identifying as African, who feels connected to an African ethnic group (Bayeck et al., 2017).

The uses and gratifications framework examines questions related to why and how individuals seek to use media to satisfy their needs and motives (Huang et al., 2015; Joo & Sang, 2013). The theory contends that users purposely seek different media to satisfy different needs such as belonging to a social circle (Elias & Lemish, 2011). Personal motives and needs shape media choice and consumption (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011). Indeed, from a uses and gratifications perspective, people's needs inform media selection (Kondrat, 2015; Korhan & Ersoy, 2016). Furthermore, considering that

participants in this study were immigrants, and assuming that the immigration process creates needs that immigrants try to meet through different media (Elias & Lemish, 2011), the uses and gratifications theory is useful to understand Black African immigrant students' gameplay.

METHODS

Research Approach and Participants

This exploratory qualitative case study used semistructured interviews as the primary source of data. Participants were male students originally from three countries in Africa: Liberia, South Sudan, and Cameroon. Each participant spent part of their adolescence in their home country before arriving in the United States. This group of Black African immigrant students consisted only of male players, which explains the focus on three male participants. Participants in this study were also soccer lovers and played *Fifa*, a video game simulation of the association of football (i.e., soccer). Additionally, all participants were legally present in the United States, and self-described as Africans.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis Process

Applying snowball sampling allowed each participant to be recruited and to recommend or recruit others. This sampling method allowed interviewees to suggest names of other participants and was appropriate because of the limited number of Black African immigrant students at this particular institution. Snowball sampling is a sampling technique that uses and activates social networks to access hidden or hard-to-get populations (Kircherr & Charles, 2018; Noy, 2008).

Participants in the study were referred to the researcher, and three agreed to contribute to the study. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which facilitated the emergence of themes that addressed the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The next section discusses the findings. All participants' names are pseudonyms.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the data yielded six main themes that explain the use and meaning of video gameplay among participants: identifying with soccer, strengthening and expanding network of friends, connecting with Africa, finding stress relief, supporting cultural continuity and identity, and adjusting to the new environment.

Identifying with Soccer

A love for soccer explained participants' engagement with the video game *Fifa*. Soccer was the game they loved and played in their home countries, and was part of their background. Marc stated, "You know, it [soccer] is not just something I learned when I came to the United States. It was already something in my system." In their perspective, it was natural to only buy and play the video game *Fifa* in the United States. As Eduardo further explained, "I grew up with soccer, so it is my first sport, that's why I like it, that's why I like to play *Fifa*." This statement demonstrates that the choice of *Fifa* as the video game to play is rooted in participants' love for soccer and experience playing this sport. It is then understandable to see participants mention their experience prior to their arrival in the United States, and express their emotional attachment to the video game, which is in their minds a virtual replacement of real soccer.

Indeed, playing the video game *Fifa* is equivalent to playing soccer, for "when we play the video game it is soccer" (Feliz). This assimilation of *Fifa* to soccer is also evident in Eduardo's statement: "I will play football [reference to Madden video game], but I won't really like have the same feelings like when I want to play soccer [referring to *Fifa*]; it is actually something I am connected to."

The similarity participants established between real-life soccer and *Fifa*, the video game, makes it possible for them to transfer the same love and passion for soccer to the video game, and then experience a connection with the game. In fact, playing a different game will not allow these students to arouse, revive, and maintain the passion and attachment they had (in their homeland) and have for soccer. This finding is not unique to this group of students. Kim and Ross (2006) observed that identification with a sport was among motives for playing sport games. However, for these participants, identification with the sport seems to add another connotation. Participants identify with *Fifa* as not only the sport they like and play, but also as the sport reflecting their Black African immigrant identity. Hence identifying with *Fifa* sets participants apart, and distinguishes them from other Blacks.

Strengthening and Expanding Network of Friends

The desire to spend more time with friends stimulated video gameplay. Participants acknowledged that they wanted to play the game because all their friends played the game: "I play other games, but this is a game my friends like to play, so I just play what everyone wants to play" (Eduardo). The game afforded participants to remain connected to their friends as it made them spend more time together. Explaining why he played *Fifa*, Feliz said that "I mean because we are [filled pause] I mean always

together you know like everyone is together like we are never on our own, we are always like [filled pause] let's say on the same page.”

By virtue of playing the game, participants strengthened their relationship and bonded to the extent that they felt like they were always on the “same page” and not isolated. Thus, through play, participants meet the need for friendship. Isolation and lack of friendship are issues identified in the literature as challenges experienced by immigrant students in the United States (Kim, 2014, 2015). These challenges, for example, motivate consumption of homeland media among immigrant Korean students (Kim, 2014). Interestingly, for these students, the video game *Fifa* appears to play the role homeland media play among immigrants (Kim, 2014, 2015). Through *Fifa* gameplay participants felt a part of a community and no longer isolated, which is one of the consequences of immigration (Moon & Park, 2007; Shumow, 2010). Moreover, being always together achieved the need to belong, which mirrors immigrants’ need for internal solidarity with their community (Elias & Lemish, 2008). Instead of consuming ethnic media as indicated in previous studies on immigrants’ media consumption (Moon & Park, 2007), participants turned to the video game *Fifa*.

In addition, the video game created an opportunity for participants to make new friends and expand their social network. Eduardo confirmed that the game “helps me like I make a lot of friends and those friends help me with other stuff that I don’t understand why they are doing so here.” Video gameplay serves therefore as a means to socialize and get to know other African students who can assist players with issues not specifically related to the game itself, but related to other aspects of life. For example, though participants studied and took classes together, the game helped develop stronger relationships. The power of the game to consolidate friendships is recognized in the following statement: “Yeah it [*Fifa*] actually added more, but even without, we already have a friendship, it already existed, but *Fifa* added something, a little bit to it” (Marc).

In a similar vein, Feliz reflecting on his interview, said, “Yes, actually, [laughter] I mean I like this interview because I never thought that it was *Fifa* that brought us all together like that.” The video game and the activity of playing strengthened and expanded their network of friends. This finding is similar to prior studies that discovered that video gameplay is also motivated by the desire to socialize and make friends (Greenberg et al., 2010; Olson, 2010).

Finding Stress Relief

To deal with stress caused by their studies, participants play *Fifa* as illustrated in the following excerpt:

...like sometimes you come back from class you are like tired stressed, you just play *Fifa*. I mean sometimes you know how [filled pause] sometimes you have a boxer if he is tired or if he is stressed he just goes and start punching something. —*Feliz*

Video gameplay turns into an activity that players participate in to deal with tiredness and stress resulting from the academic pressure of learning in a higher education institution. When participants felt overcome or beaten by their academics, to regain a sense of victory, control, and feeling good about themselves, they played the game to just win. As Marc said, “Yes, we just want to like, just win.” Furthermore, the desire to win or the competitive drive in this context informed the need to release the stress created by their student status. It could be assumed that participants were not only playing against each other, but also against an absent adversary, which is the class. In class, learning new things may have triggered a loss of control, which participants try to regain by turning to *Fifa* to win. Winning here is therefore not merely about beating another player to demonstrate mastery; it is also about meeting basic human needs for control not satisfied in their real lives (Ferguson & Olson, 2013). As discussed in the literature, immigrant students experience additional stress provoked by a new and rigorous learning environment (Hailu & Ku, 2014). This finding also aligns with research listing relaxation and need for control as gameplay motives (Ferguson & Olson, 2013; Williams et al., 2009). Yet, preferring *Fifa* to other video games underlines the connection between players’ identity/background and gameplay.

Connecting with Africa

Participants also reported playing *Fifa* because soccer was the most popular sport in Africa. They did not feel the need to play or learn how to play other video games such as *Madden* or *NBA2K*. Marc, one of the participants, argued,

For us I think soccer is the, the sport that we played in Africa so we got attached to it. So it seems like easy for us instead of us to start playing basketball or football [reference to *Madden* and *NBA2K*], we just play soccer [referring to *Fifa*].

Again, this statement highlights the rationale behind participants’ choice of game, but also the desire to stay connected with Africa. Interestingly, through the game, participants do not only try to stay attached to the continent, but also find a space where they can voice their opinions, express their feelings, and discuss things of importance to them as immigrants from specific countries. For instance, Eduardo said the following:

Whilst playing, we also get to talk about things back home with all our friends from all our different countries that is why it is actually fun. We have our conversation about back home, about like our countries, and stuff like that. We talk about politics.

The video game becomes a virtual recreation of Africa, a space where players find an opportunity to reconnect with their origins. Gameplay among participants is an activity also driven by the desire to address issues pertaining to the continent. The gameplay creates a space that allows players to engage in some sort of catharsis, to find their voices, and offer up hopes for their countries. Some participants in this study come from countries in the continent that have experienced or are still experiencing political unrest. Moreover, as students in the United States, on a campus where they are an extreme minority, the safest place they found to discuss topics relevant to them is the video game environment. Still, this connection to Africa and catharsis were enabled by *Fifa*. Eduardo commenting on players' engagement in debates related to the African continent said, "that is why it is [that is playing *Fifa*] actually fun".

Supporting Cultural Continuity and Identity

Gameplayers perceived soccer as a characteristic of their culture, and their identity. Thus, in an attempt to ensure the continuity of this culture, and to preserve their identity, they play *Fifa*. The following statement expounds the relationship between *Fifa* and participants' desire to maintain their culture and keep their identity: "... I am African, everybody plays soccer, it is part of my identity...it [*Fifa*] helps you not to forget where you are coming from" (Eduardo). Hence, players' cultural identity motivated *Fifa* gameplay:

Because soccer is the only sport that we play, the only sport that counts [that] as African people, we play, you know, and when you come here like you stumble upon other sports like football which you never heard about, you are not going to play it. Yes, I don't even care what other people say. But, I know if you say let's play *Fifa*, I will say open the game, and say let's do it. —*Marc*

Cultural identity in this context is about group loyalty and conception of self as belonging to specific cultural group, in this case, being African (Reece & Palmgreen, 2000). The necessity to retain their culture inspires play as also shown in this sentence: "... you know, even though we are in the U.S., we should be able to keep our culture" (Marc). Emphasizing the desire for cultural continuity through *Fifa* gameplay, Feliz said:

It is a cultural thing...why would I change my culture... no I mean I like the way I was brought up... because my culture is like part of me so if I change my culture it is like I am changing.

For this reason, participants see no need to learn how to play other games for “I don’t want to change because that is who I am; I don’t want to change who I am. So, it is just like continuing what we’ve been doing for a long time” (Feliz). Yet, when it comes to cultural continuity and identity in the literature on immigrants’ use of media, ethnic media is a means immigrant employed to satisfy these needs (Elias & Lemish, 2011; Kim, 2014). Nevertheless, participants in this study appeared to find the means to keep their culture and identity playing *Fifa*. Using *Fifa* as a space and tool to preserve culture and identity could be explained by participants’ assimilation of *Fifa* to soccer, and their perception of soccer as an expression of African culture and identity.

Adjusting to the New Environment

Finally, playing *Fifa* contributes to participants’ adjustment to their new environment. For instance, participants mentioned playing together when they have free time, and often going out with friends they made through video gameplay. *Fifa* recreates a social and familial environment similar to the ones they had before their arrival in the United States. Indeed, when asked whether they would play *Fifa* in their countries of origin as much as they played in the United States, interviewees such as Marc made it clear that they would not be playing the game at home.

Because I have like [filled pause] over there, I am not just [filled pause]. Like here, I am just in school and by myself; but over there you have a lot of family and relatives. You cannot just focus on *Fifa*; *Fifa*, it is nonsense.

Playing the game enables participants to deal with the absence of their families. The game provides an environment and opportunity for participants to fill the vacuum created by studying far away from their countries, families, and friends. In this regard, playing is motivated by the need for family. For this reason, they also play the game every day at every opportunity. During the school year they play “basically five days a week actually [and] we play a little bit more during the holidays than the regular school year” (Eduardo). Video gameplay’s effect on the adjustment of participants was also observed in Feliz’s explanation as to why he could not play the game as much in his home country: “Back home it is a community, we are always together.” Players need to adjust to their new environment, and use gameplay to substitute for missing their connections back home (van Geel & Vedder,

2011). As immigrants, these students go through the adjustment process, and they use *Fifa* to acculturate instead of other ethnic media as shown in other studies (Dalisay, 2012; Elias & Lemish, 2008).

The importance of the gameplay in participants' adjustment is also noted when participants contrast what they are doing here with what they could be doing if they were in their countries of origin. For instance, Marc declared: "If I was back home, I won't play the game, but here when I have some time that, you know ... what I think about, you know, is let's go play *Fifa* you know." Feliz's statement further shows the importance of gameplay in participants' adjustment:

I don't think we will be staying in as much because I feel like we will have more stuff to do [filled pause] there will be more fun stuff outside of the house to do; so here, I don't think there is a lot of that.

The game provides a space to cope in the new location or in the host country, which in this case includes the learning environment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Findings in this study align to some degree with previous studies on immigrants' use of media and with research on motives for video gameplay in the existing game literature. Although media consumption has been related to immigrants' adjustment needs (Dalisay, 2012; Elias & Lemish, 2011), video gameplay is yet to be included in the type of media immigrants consume for adjustment. This study establishes the use of gameplay for adjustment, particularly in using *Fifa* for assimilation and self-identification. Through gameplay, students found resources they needed such as friends to support their learning experience. Playing also assisted in making sense of their experiences both in the United States and in their homeland (Bayeck et al., 2017). *Fifa* represents soccer, a game they grew up playing in their homeland, in which they also recognize their African roots. Playing connects them to life prior to their arrival in the United States. It brings back memories they want to keep alive in the host country, an identity and culture they want to maintain in the host country. The game and gameplay can be likened to a "third space," an in-between space where players negotiate the meaning and representation of their culture (Bhabha, 1996).

The game helped participants in this study to relax and to make up for the absence of their family, and as result, adjust to the new learning environment. The video game could be seen as a space where participants recreated a home away from home as they played and discussed politics of their respective countries, engaging in some sort of transcontinental

communication (Kim, 2016).

The results also revealed that participants used the video game to preserve their identity as Africans in the United States, and in the process enabled “cultural continuity” (Elias & Lemish, 2011, p. 1248). The gameplay in this case, just like ethnic media in the literature, assisted in the creation of an exile identity and served as a tool for identity and cultural preservation. It can be argued that the game choice was motivated by the desire to continue practices embedded in participants’ culture and in what they believed was their African identity in the United States. Moreover, the use of gameplay to strengthen their friendship aligns with Huang et al.’s (2015) findings on Taiwanese video gamers. Finally, it is important to note that while prior research mentioned ethnic media and social media as means employed by immigrants to connect to their homeland (Elias & Lemish, 2011; Lam, 2011), this study reveals that *Fifa* and gameplay linked participants to their culture and homelands.

Implications and Future Research

This article explored the choice of video game and the motivation for play of three Black African immigrant undergraduate students. The results showed that these students used video gameplay as a means to meet needs generated by their immigrant and learning experiences. As mentioned earlier, research on Black African immigrant students often features the diverse adaptation and academic challenges they face. However, this study provides insights into the means Black African immigrant students find to gratify these needs and simultaneously support their educational experience. This study also adds to the body of knowledge on the media use of immigrants, by discussing Black African immigrant students in the United States. New forms of media such as video games have the potential to create spaces and be tools for cultural adjustment and cultural identity preservation for Black African immigrant students.

There is need to further investigate the use of video gameplay for assimilation in higher education. For instance, other immigrant student groups’ use of video games can be examined, and larger studies can be performed to better ensure generalizability across populations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article was first presented as a paper at the American Educational Research Association Conference in May of 2017.

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Manuscript submitted: June 21, 2019
Manuscript revised: January 21, 2020
Accepted for publication: March 16, 2020