

Hello everyone.

I'm a professor and a designer, and for the past 10 years, I have been the voice of the following people.



You might think of them as grandparents
Watching over their grandkids,
Maybe living in a retirement community.

And you might be right about that.

Except... they are not your typical seniors.

They are... gamers.

Older Gamers.

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Is this the UK's oldest gamer? 78-year-old queues past midnight to get her hands on the new Call of Duty game

• Doreen Fox from Dudley, West Midlands says the action keeps her focused
• She first started playing games on her grandson's Nintendo in the 80s
• Ms Fox, who also enjoys knitting and gardening, is also partial to playing Grand Theft Auto

By ELLIE ZOLFAGHARFARD

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Doreen Fox, 78, from Dudley, West Midlands loves nothing more than play the 'Call of Duty' video game. She queued past midnight to get her hands on the latest release

Widowed Ms Fox says she loves the thrill of the bloodthirsty violence of the controversial Call of Duty games - but admits sometimes she often 'shoots the wrong man'

She first started playing computer games on her grandson Gareth's Nintendo in the 80's where she mastered the likes of Super Mario Brothers

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And when they had their pictures taken for the newspapers, they were respectively 78 years old...

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Gaming Grandma Slays Competition

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It's the sound millions of parents hear coming from their kids room. Except in this house, it's not the kids playing video games -- it's Barbara St. Hilaire -- the Monster Slaying Grandma playing Final Fantasy 7.

"I'll start usually maybe about five o'clock at night and play until two, three o'clock in the morning," says St. Hilaire.

At age 69, St. Hilaire has found time to play hundreds of video games even though she has 12 grandchildren and finds nothing atypical about the hobby.

"To me I see nothing unusual about it," she says. "I guess it's because I've been doing it so long."

CBS News correspondent Richard Schlesinger reports she's not really that unusual. The video game industry surveyed players and found almost 20 percent

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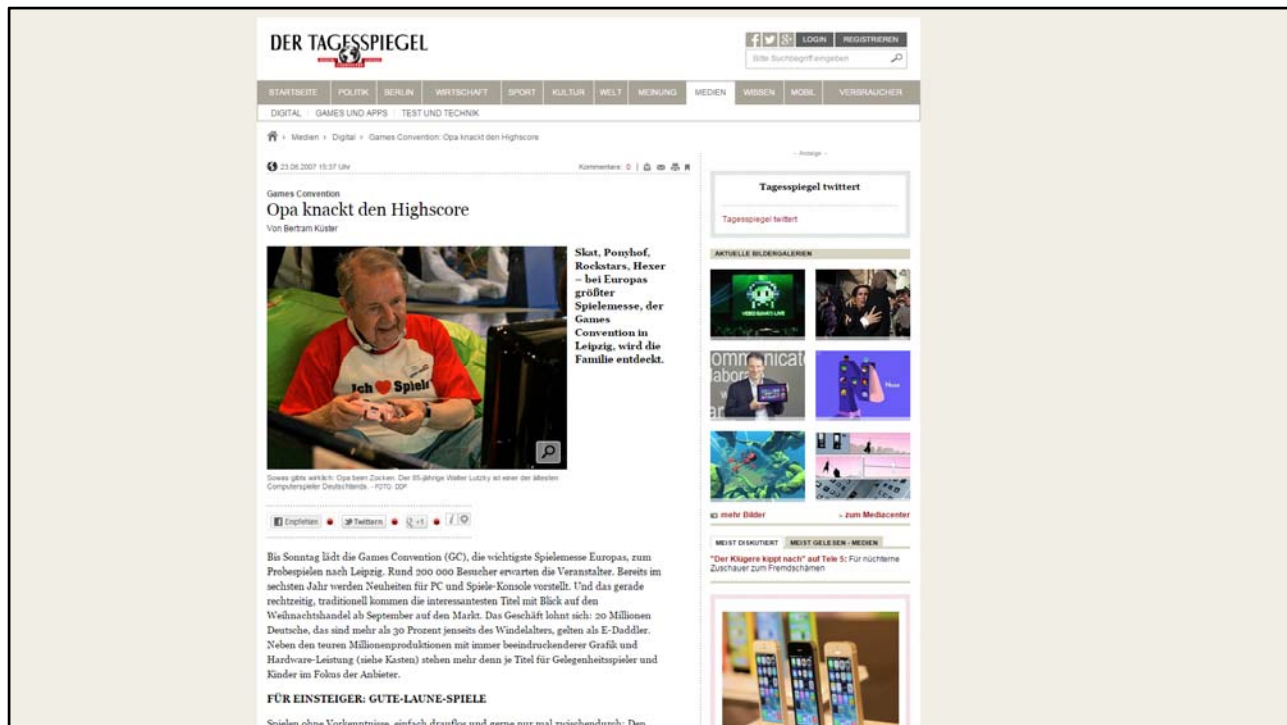
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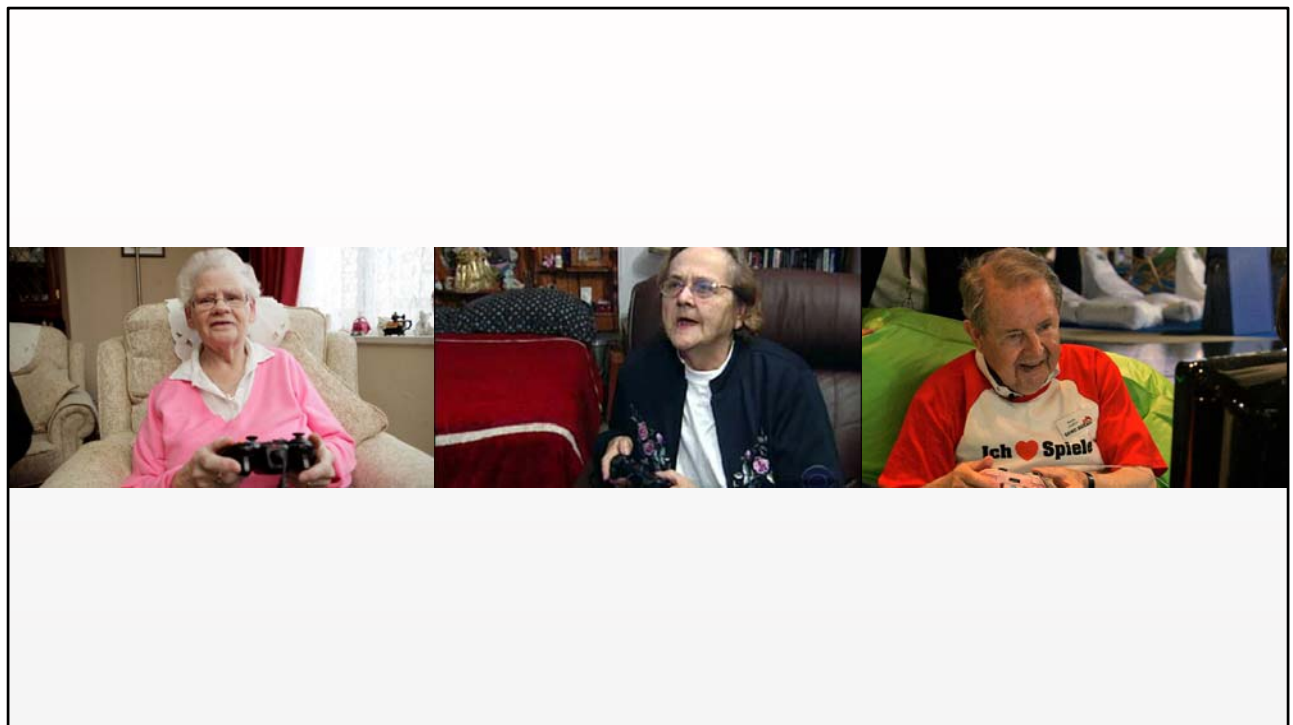
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69 years old

4



And people like them have been the subjects of my work.



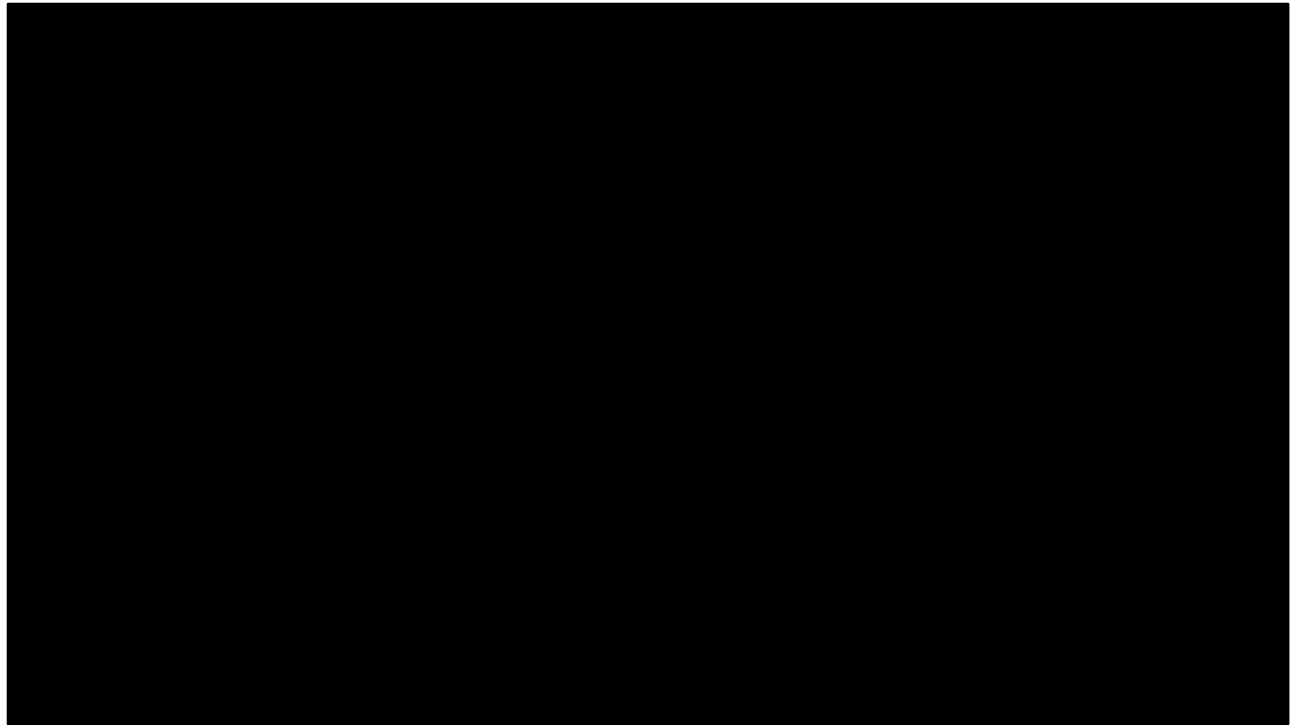
Because you see, I strongly believe that they are pioneers.



Pioneers of what ageing will look like in our not so distant future.

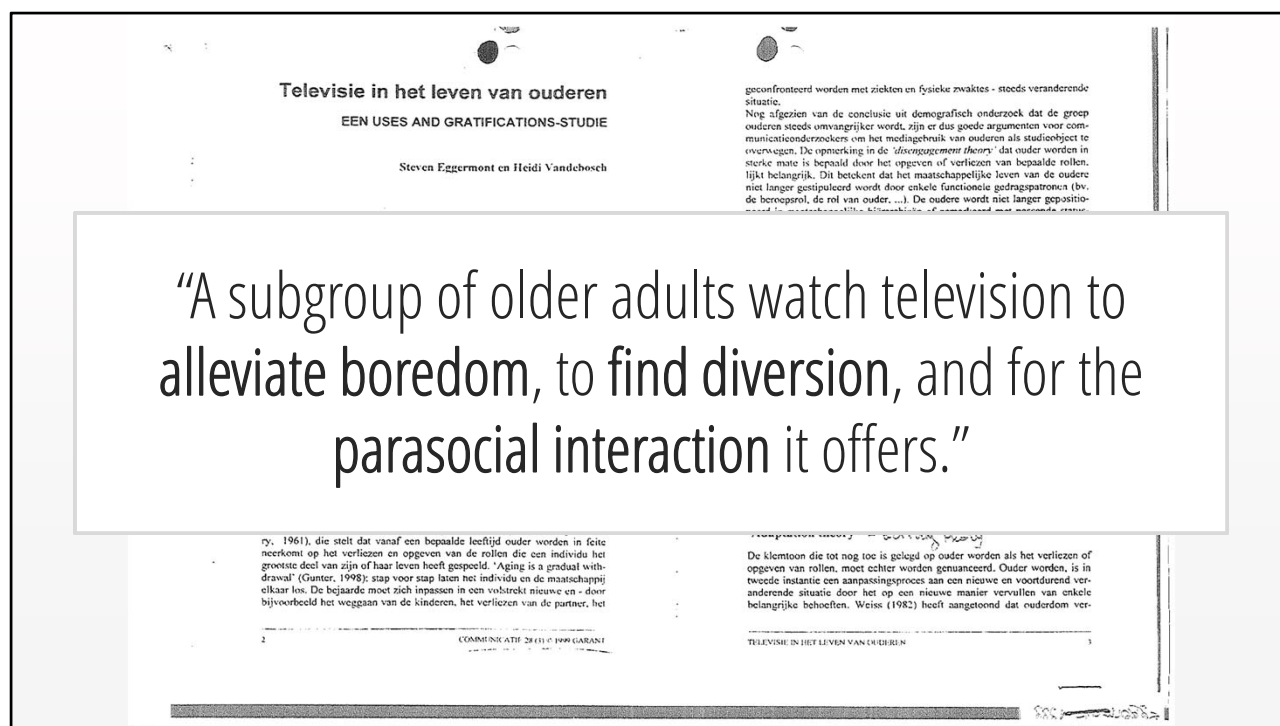
And that is what I want to talk about today.

So let's start with the beginning.



What made me get into this field?

Well, it happened to be this one study.



It's a study that I read in 2004 while I was preparing my doctorate, and here is one of its conclusions. (click)

Many older adults watch television because they are lonely.

And because of their loneliness they crave the *parasocial* interaction that soap operas offer them;
an illusion of social interaction between themselves and the fictional characters they see on screen.

At the time, the 20-something me felt that this was deeply disturbing.

Not necessarily because I was feeling compassionate at the time.
I was simply shocked that people were that ineffective.
Because you see, at the time that I read that paper, we had video games.

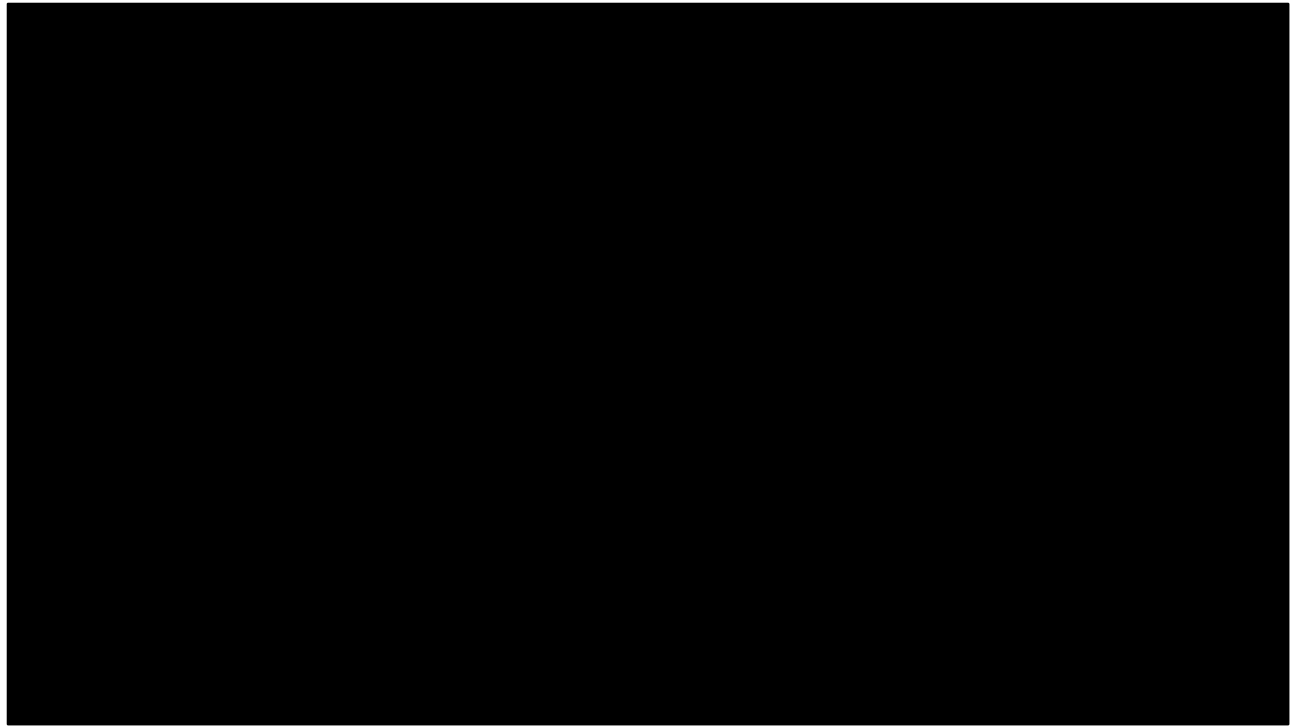
Moreover, we had (click)



The World of Warcraft.

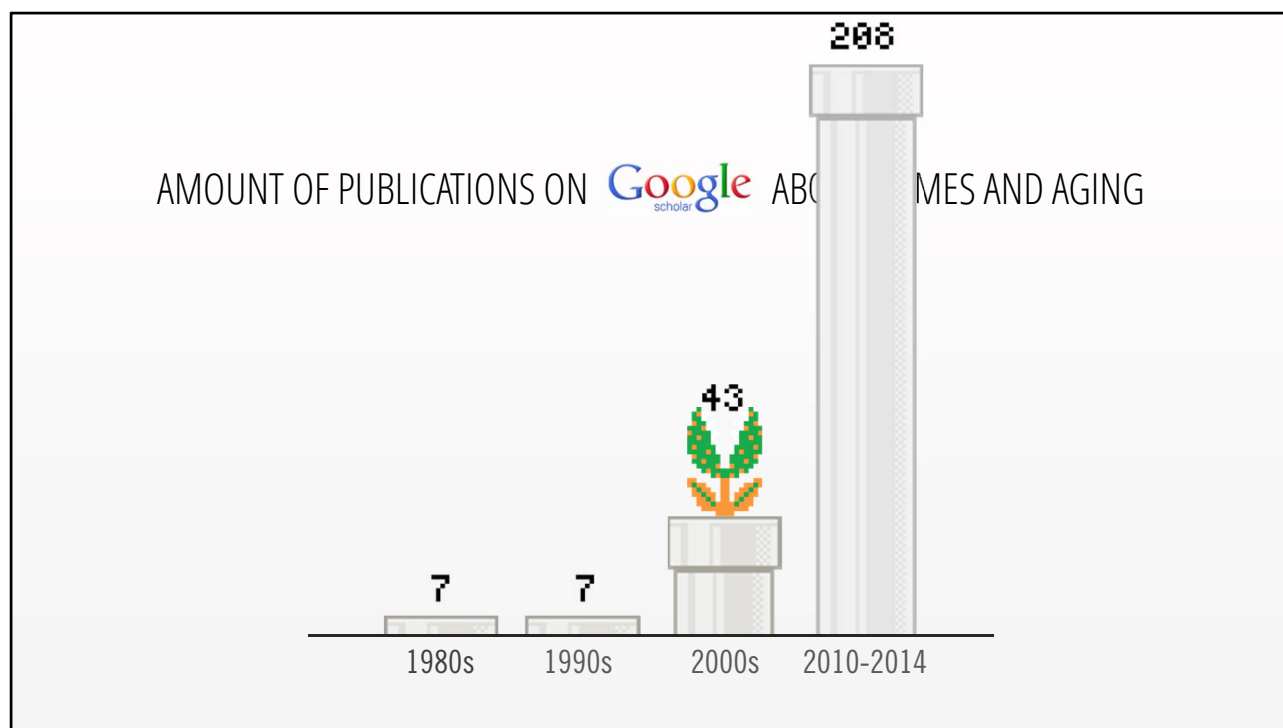
The Massive Multiplayer Online Game that has millions of players play together at the same time.

So let me ask you... how could someone be lonely in the age of WoW? Why would someone pick the Bold and the Beautiful over online gaming?



So that is my origin story.

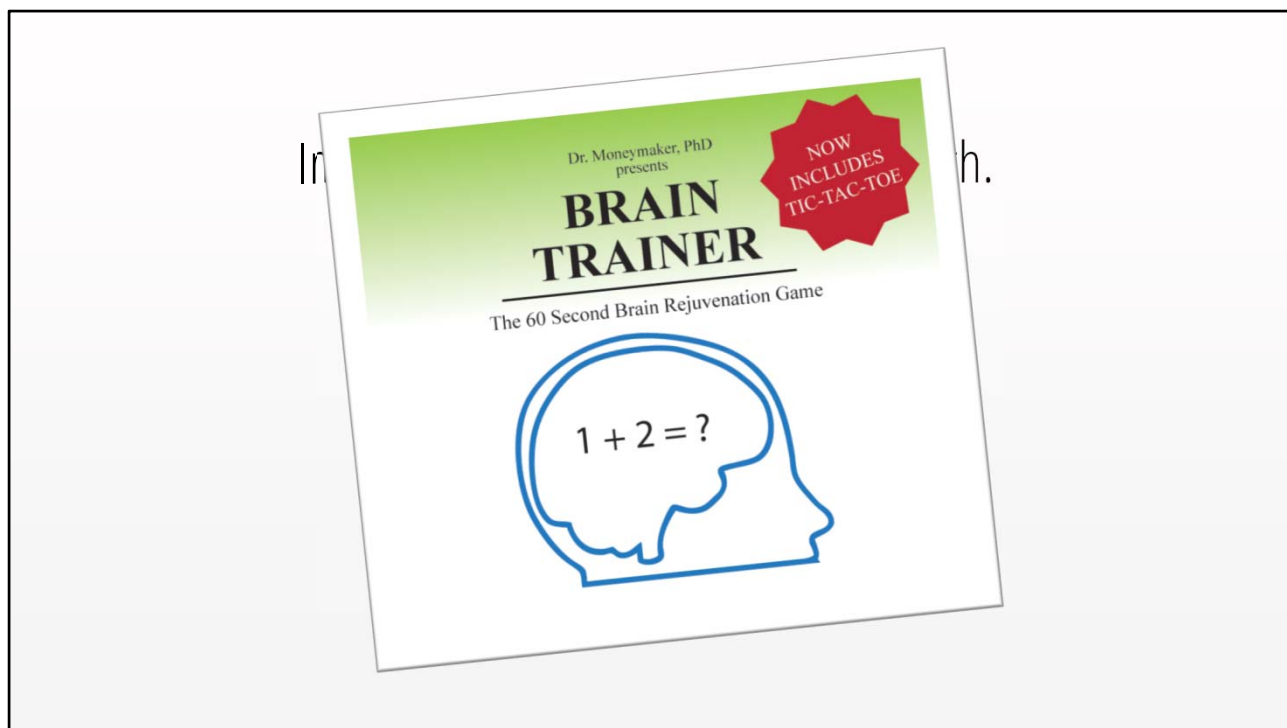
And since then,



The academic research on this topic has started to grow dramatically.

Which is really great, because researchers have found that video games can actually do a lot of great things for older adults.

Some games

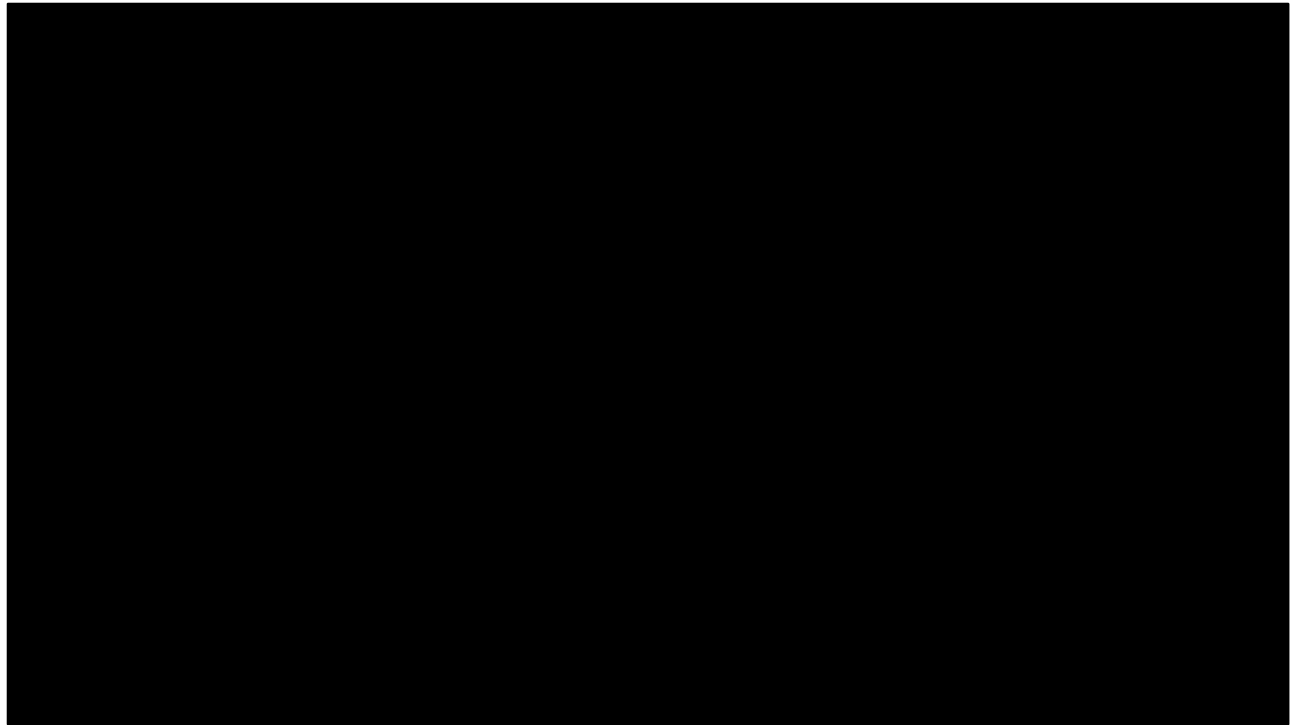


Improve physical and cognitive functioning (**click**)
The can stimulate social wellbeing (**click**)
The can provide therapeutic support (**click**)
And so much more.

In fact, you can look at video games as your first line of defense against age-related decline.
They can truly change how you age. (**pauze**)

Just think about all those Brain Training games. (**click**). They are absolutely amazing, right? (**pauze**)

Well... let's not get ahead of ourselves here

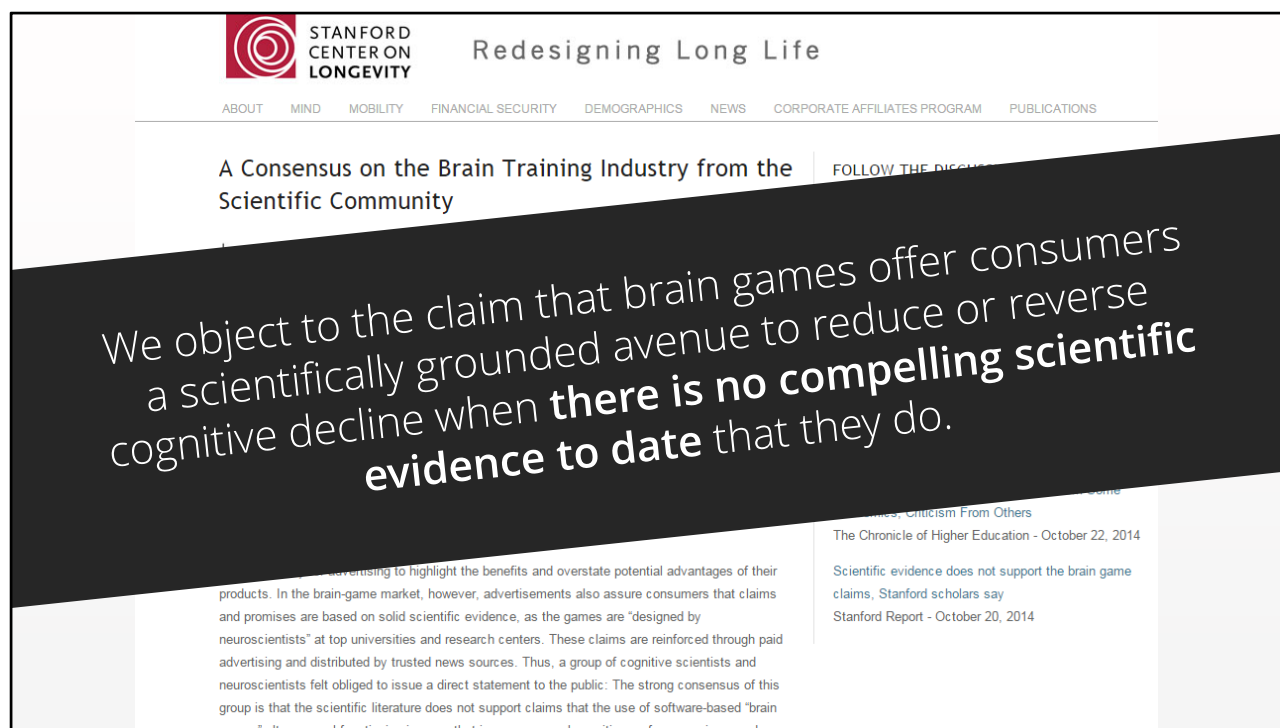


While I believe that video games and other forms of play can do wonders with regards to ageing, we still have a very long way to go.

In fact, I believe that we are looking at both ageing and gaming in the wrong way.

And it starts with Brain Training games.

Here is a consensus that was published in 2014 by the scientific experts on this topic.



It literally states there is no compelling evidence that these brain training games actually work.

In fact, there is even some research that demonstrates how regular, commercial, entertainment games have much better cognitive outcomes than brain training games.

Now I know what you are thinking... what about all the marketing then?

Well, at this point in time, brain training games are still



Mostly hot air.... And that is a huge problem in my opinion.

Because similar to how the marketing of pink games (**click**) pushes materialism to young girls which can be detrimental to their confidence,

Brain games push the idea that you are useless to our society if your brain has gotten too old.

The former is criticized for being sexist, but the latter should be criticized for being ageist.

And ageism is making it very hard for older adults to start playing games and get all those benefits that I just mentioned.

I had numerous participants in my own research talk about how it is socially unacceptable for them to play games.

Some of them told me how they ran through their house to hide the gameboy when a friend would come to visit, or

“When I play my Gameboy outside of my home I see people looking at me as if I’m crazy. They think I’m demented.

But the Bible says... I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

– Bernadette, a 62 years old female gamer

Or used Bible Quotes to defend why they are still playing games in later life.

“People think that I am getting demented because I play games”, this lady said.

Really, folks?

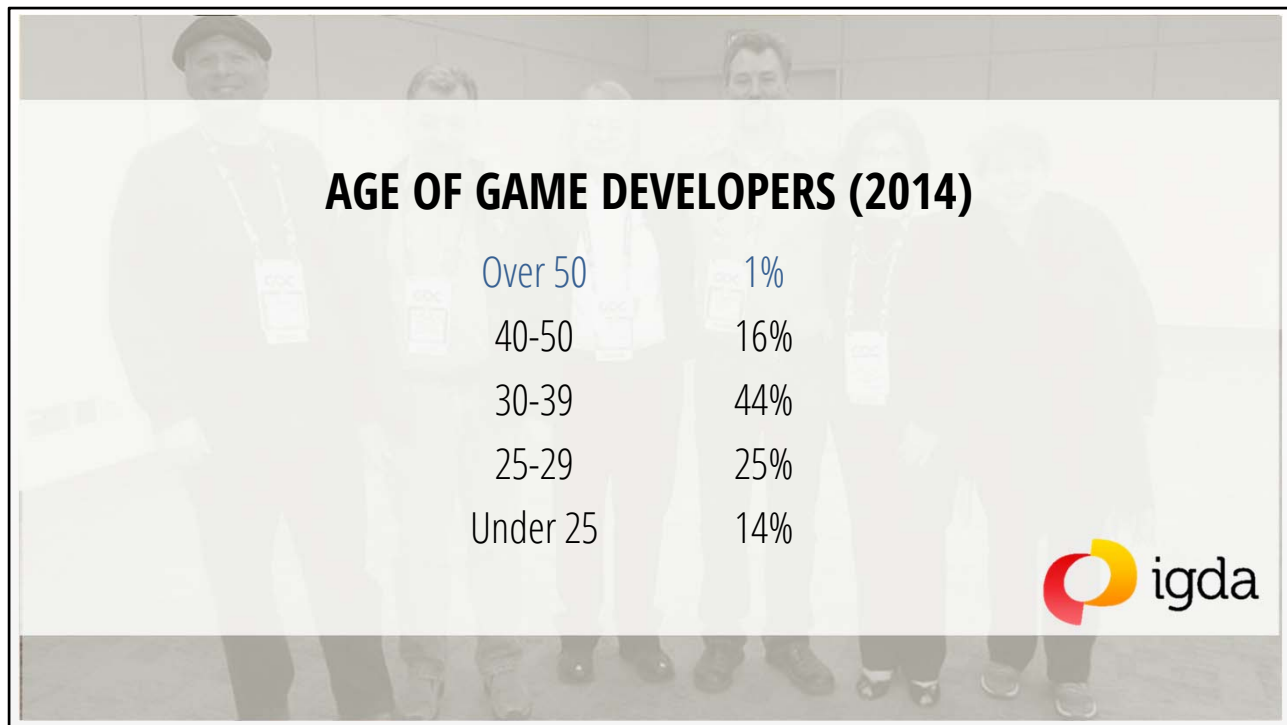
Why do we applaud a 70 year old that is obsessed with Chess, while we would look down upon the same person if he were to be obsessed with Pokemon?

The answer is ageism.

(pauze)

And ageism also extends to the game industry.

At the 2015 Game Developers Conference in San Francisco,



a group of industry veterans has started to raise awareness about ageism in the industry. (**click**)

The key statistics here is that only 1% of game developers is over 50.

1 lousy percent.

How are we going to make games that are genuinely interesting older adults, if the industry is so much younger than them?

How are we actually going to make games that are actually accessible to older adults?

I can tell you the answer. We are not.

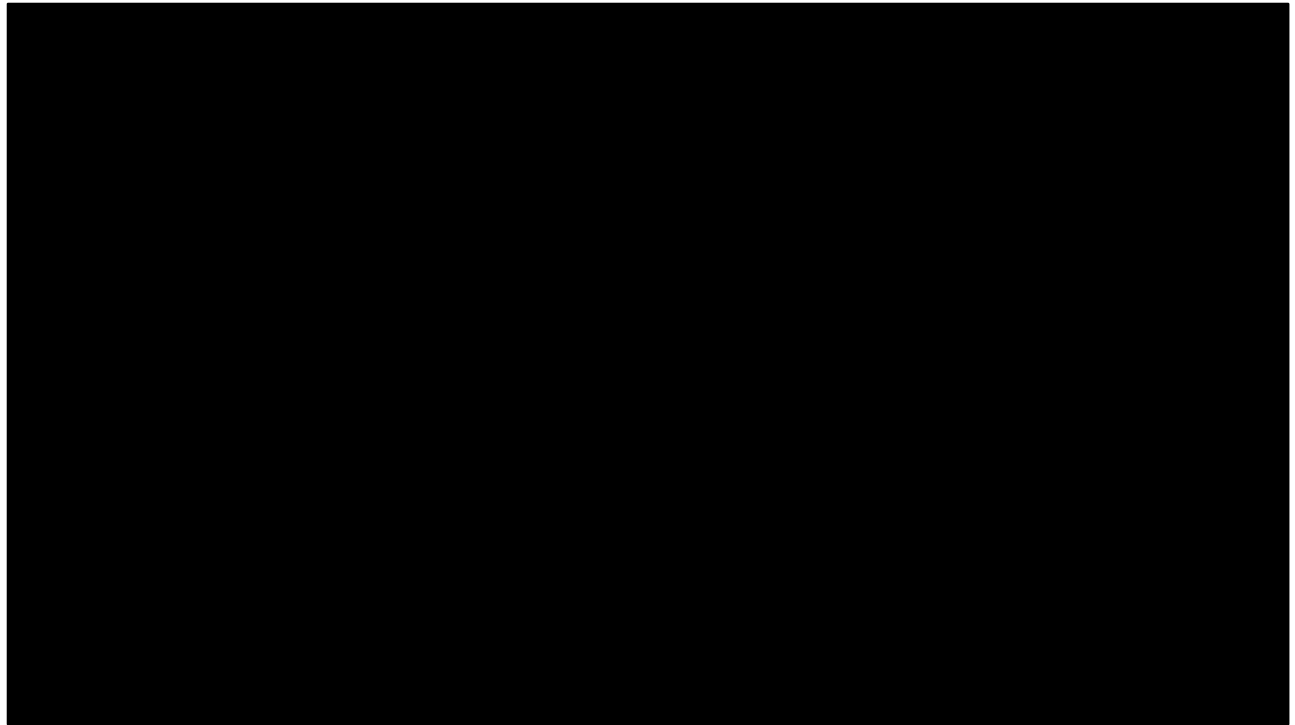


We have a long way to go to make games that are accessibility to ageing players.

And knowing the benefits of playing digital games in later life, that is really scary to me.

Because no matter the good shape you might be in today, there will be a day that you will all have an age-related disability.

One that might prevent you from using a gamepad, hearing the audio cues, or even turning on the console.



So please... consider this talk a wake-up call

Today, we are living in a society in which 40 year old women have been the largest demographic group in gaming for quite some time
About 25% of gamers are over 50.

We really need to start accepting video games in later life.

Everyone knows how important play is when you are growing up, well... let me tell you



it is just as important when you are growing old.

It activates your mind... your body... your life... in more ways than we can properly measure.

We therefore need to get rid of ageism, and let older adults play games for the sake of playing them.

Not for anything else, those are just side effects... of well-designed, fun-to-play video games.

(Pause)

Thankfully, designers have realized this and are starting to come up with amazing playful experiences for older adults...

For example...

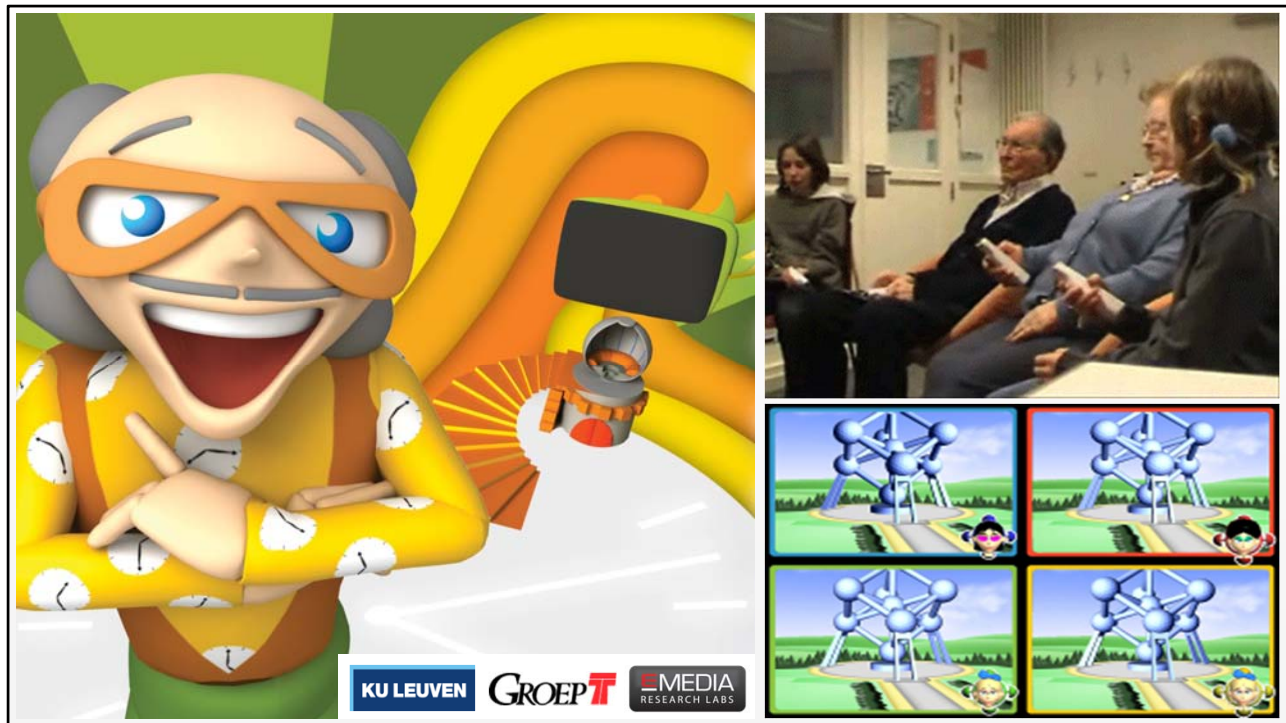
Recordis



Recordis is playful turntable designed for Alzheimer patients. It helps
Them to recall memories,
To interact with others,
And to feel proud about themselves.

How does this game achieve that? Well, because it is genuinely fun.

Blast From the Past, which is a game that I worked on myself,



a game I worked on, Is a Nintendo Wii game that has grandparents and grandchildren explore their cultures together and learn from each other.

Again, this is a game that does something good for you, but above all... it is genuinely fun.

Final example, age Invaders



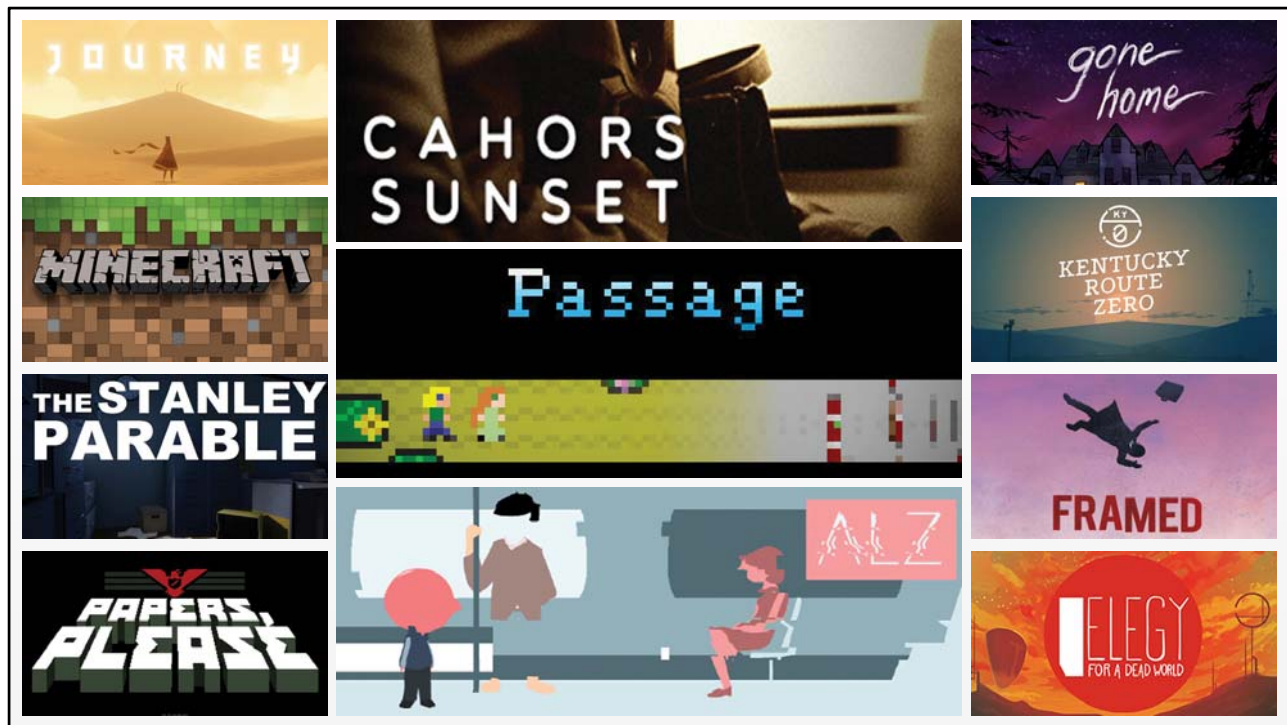
Age Invaders is an intergenerational social-physical game that has three generations play together online on a big LED board, and that **(click)**

features the coolest Bluetooth slippers I have ever seen!

How fun is that? **(pauze)**

So academic design researchers have started to take challenge of designing games for older adults to heart, which is wonderful.

Now, what about the industry?



Well, we are currently seeing the rise of the indie scene, a growing group of independent game designers that are designing thought-provoking, emotionally moving games.

While these games might not be made for older adults, they are often specifically aimed at a mature audience that prefers meaningful media content.

And I promise you... these are games that WILL blow your mind. Which is actually a very good thing when you are trying to avoid Alzheimer's.

Truth of the matter is that, between academic and industry efforts,



that games are growing up with their players.

And as a result, they will redefine the culture of old age, just like they have done for youth culture.

So here is what I want you all to do



www.bobdeschutter.be
@bobdeschutter

When you get back home, I want you to play a game with people from a different generation.

Help older adults to start playing some great entertainment games, or – if you are a grandparent yourself – find a game to play with your grandchildren.

We all need for our society to start embracing play as an important function in later life.

As something that we consider to be essential to growing old.

It is time to embrace the arrival of the silver-haired gamer.

Thank you.