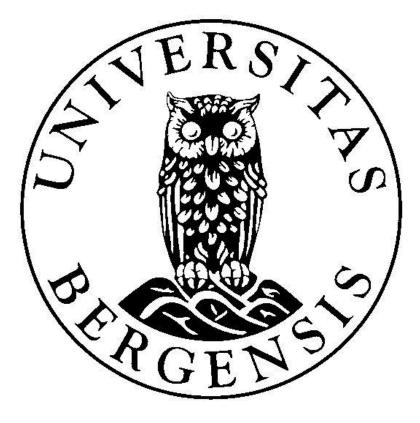# Good Game, Well Played: A Ethnographic Study of Collegiate Esport in Southern California.

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Abstract

Anthropologists have previously engaged in virtual fieldwork in order to discover and document different large online worlds such as *World of Warcraft* (Nardi 2010), *Everquest* (Taylor 2006), *Second Life* (Boellstroff 2008). These ethnographies cover a multitude of topics such as motivations for playing, gender disparity, addiction, and language. This thesis looks away from the large online role-playing worlds, yet take inspiration from previous anthropological works in order to take a closer look at university students in Orange County in California who spend their time playing competitive video games for social and economic rewards. I observed and documented two teams of collegiate esports players during their weekly training sessions and performed informal interview with persons on collegiate esports teams, university staff, tournament hosts, student run gaming organizations, tech companies, sponsors, and esports fans.

This thesis connects to the growing literature on video games as it explores ways in which collegiate esports players create new forms of language and social relations. It delves deep into the in-game linguistics communications players use to succeed in their competitions, and how specialized negative and positive lexical words are created and used to describe established emotions of rage or respect towards opposing and friendly players. I attempt to show how traditional understandings of playing games and sports are applicable to esports, and how concepts of "fun" and "work" challenge each other when recreational activities become professionalized and award participants with social and economic rewards. Research also led me to study how collegiate esport players use and understand spatial navigation in the games, using game developers "camera" creation in order to traverse and navigate the virtual worlds they inhabit. This research also looks at how the video game culture has stereotypically been seen as a homosocial sphere for men. How these stereotypes have played into society making it difficult many people to participate despite no physical limitations for doing so. I attempt to shed light on important aspects of the disparity of gender in the wider gaming culture, yet show hope that efforts are being made to create a more open culture for all gamers. Finally I briefly discuss gendered time obligations and how the moral panics of video game addiction can distract mainstream society from life struggles of individuals.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Methodology

1.1 The Fieldwork Noob

I can't express the mix of feelings I experienced on my first day in the field. Having read a hundred different accounts of anthropologists who traveled the world to live amongst the people they so eagerly wanted to know more about, taking part of their daily lives and returning with oceans of new knowledge to share – I felt overwhelmed. I woke up in sunny California on January 18, and got ready for my first day, dreading I would do something wrong, or that I would not find any people who would talk to me. My sentiments were quickly calmed as I met my first interlocutor, a university man, Mark, whom I'd emailed during the months before my departure from Norway. Mark is the acting director of the University of California Irvine Esports program, a program that offers scholarships for students who also competes for the university's esport team – at the time, their League of Legends team. I felt unprepared, I could not answer questions he had about my work as I hadn't done any yet, nor could I say what I hoped to find as I was trying to keep an open mind to all possibilities. Luckily, he had patience, as I stuttered in a foreign language I know well, I must have seemed awfully unprofessional. Some syllables magically escaped me and he mentioned I should contact some of his acquaintances; I quickly wrote down the contact information and asked to talk more with him another day. The first meeting was over. Drenched in humility I staggered into the nearby restaurant to reenergize myself and to write in my journal my assessment of my first meeting. I have never felt more unprepared for anything in my life. But the first step was taken... Only nine hundred and ninety-nine steps left.

This thesis is based on fieldwork performed in Southern-California, primarily in Orange County. My interlocutors were mostly young, and mostly men between the ages of 18-25. Before I travelled I had an idea that friendship and all it entails could easily flow from an offline relationship to an online relationship, and vice versa. What I found was that the importance of communication between collegiate esports team players, and how esport is engrossed in the larger video game culture and indeed sports culture. My fieldwork project became focused on the social relationships governing communication and the use of

specialized languages among team players. Below I outline how the different parts my thesis are organized and how in particular chapters I focus on particular topics.

1.2: The Methodology of Anthropologists

Anthropological research supports itself mainly on the ethnography collected by a researcher. The ethnographer takes his or her time to collect vast and detailed accounts of data, which means they need to spend much time amongst interlocutors and in the society they live. Moving into a society and a new research area requires not being burdened or overloaded with preconceptions derived from stereotypes of everyday life or pre-determined ideas of what to find; these can sometimes hinder recognizing important taken-for-granted aspects in the new fieldwork context. The act of joining in to learn can be described as participant observation. It involves gaining access to a group of people by taking your time learning about them, the language they use, what's important to them. Ethnographers do this through observing their daily lives, participating in their activities, speaking with them about things they want to communicate, and following up with more structured conversations where they answer in order to help the ethnographer understand better (O'Reilly 2012). Anthropologists are interested in the world as it is understood by others. Experiencing the world is quite subjective, more accurately inter-subjective that is created through the sharing of subjectivities. Moreover, we can only be described another's subjective experience from our own crafted and suspended forms of subjectivity as Geertz (2005) has especially noted. Ethnographers we aim to inform and describe subjectively mediated realities, that is forms of culture and social relations that are dependent on shared forms of subjectivity. This is why time and immersion are important, it takes time to understand others and how they become inter-related in each other, and to bring this knowledge to light. I would have liked to have spent more time with my interlocutors but this is difficult within the time constraints of a Masters thesis. I could have also conducted my fieldwork in other locations so my findings do not represent all collegiate esports athletes or all members of videogame environments. There may be different ways of creating team relationships among esports players in Hong Kong, London, Madrid, Johannesburg, etc. Nevertheless I do believe my fieldwork captures emerging new forms of sociality that is real and becoming more widespread as the video game culture becomes more mainstream and more intensely commercialized.

For my fieldwork, I used participant observation coupled with semi-structured interviews and conversations. I found my first interlocutors by contacting them online either through email or social media. By snowball sampling (O'Reilly 2012) I was introduced to more people through my interlocutors, and eventually was informed of larger events and places of interest to visit. The larger events were usually gaming convention hosted by university groups on different campuses. At those events I would often find representatives from various video and computer companies showing off new games or new hardware to eager consumers. I also found outreach representatives from different gaming groups (university or local groups) and companies (Bars, restaurants, and gaming shops). My key interlocutors were the students who played in different collegiate esport leagues, which I define and explain in Part I further below. I spent many hours conversing with members of teams in the real world, and I observed them playing and interacting with each other during online practice sessions. The raw material gathered from online play consists mostly of the notes I've written from sessions I witnessed but I was also given recorded game sessions by interlocutors.

When meeting offline with my interlocutors, often for lunch or to spend some time in the sun, I often used a voice recording device (with permission), and then later transcribed the conversation. The direct quotes from my interlocutors have been kept intact often with bad grammar and condensed phrases, for this is part of the social and cultural meaning of those communications. Some segments in the text are taken from hand or computer notes and memory, and are therefore not written within quotation marks, but rather weaved naturally into the text. Many of my interlocutors are anonymized, though with two exceptions. First, employees at a university esports program have not been anonymized as information from and about them are important in relation to their current career positions, and their opinions are also understood as paid workers in this growing sport. Second, one of the teams I followed is referenced by their self-chosen gamer names. The reason for this is that the names were used from the start of my fieldwork, my interlocutors addressed each other publically and online with those names, they hold a certain importance to some of my arguments, which is why I did not anonymize them. I did thoroughly discuss this with all interlocutors before entering their names in my thesis. Other interlocutors have been given pseudonyms or they are not mentioned by identifying names in the text, this is primarily to protect sensitive interactions or opinions.

One challenge I feel I should discuss is the challenge of fieldwork in large cities, amongst people who are fairly preoccupied by multiple obligations. This made it difficult to gain

access to a consistent group of people, and though I was lucky to find a consistent group, it could easily have gone the other way. Most of my interlocutors were university students that spent long hours at the universities they attended, daily and often on weekends. In addition to their university obligations many of them had part-time jobs, or were starting personal relationships and connecting with new friends. All of these activities were time consuming, leaving little, or in some cases no time to spend with an aspiring researcher. My fieldwork was a bit different from that of some other anthropological fieldwork experiences in that I often had only short durations of time with interlocutors, both online and offline. Rarely did I spend more than three to four hours with a group online, and it was hard to gain face to face access during the day, leaving me often with half an hour to two hours of conversations. This pushed me to find more interlocutors in order to keep busy and attain more informational data to bring home and analyze. The lack of ongoing contact limited my ability to dive deeply into the personal lives of some of my interlocutors. A particular case I remember was a semi-structured interview I had set up with a university esport player, where upon arrival I was informed that he came directly from a six hour long written exam. My interlocutor was exhausted. He was quite willing to a have a conversation, but was mentally too tired to discuss his role in the collegiate team. I decided reschedule our discussion, but due to the intensity of his obligations the nearest available time was two weeks later. I did eventually get to converse with him, and had a longer semi-structured interview, but challenges like this example were a weekly thorn in my side.

Another challenge relevant to my fieldwork was the distance between interlocutors. Even though many of my interlocutors attended the same university, they lived miles apart, which spread me thin as much time had to be spent travelling from one part of the city to another, and even from one city to another city. Given the lack of an effective public transportation system, I had to rely on Uber or Lyft that are phone apps that allow you pay a private person to drive you to your destination. Though cheaper than normal taxis, this was still a large expense, especially when I had multiple meetings and conventions to attend. My limited funds from my research stipend made it difficult to go and speak easily with interlocutors in Los Angeles or San Diego, for this could easily set me back a few hundred dollars. This meant I had to focus on Orange County. Though there was a clear limitation to my research there that excluded certain distant events due to the cost of travel, it meant I had to prioritize neighboring events that were readily accessible. I suspect many of interlocutors who had low paying wages and limited scholarships faced the same problems. For that reason, I am quite

happy with the decisions I made just because they often led to many happy coincidences and acquaintances. There are many challenges to anthropologists in the field; time, money, access, ethics, morals, subjectivity - overcoming all these challenges is part of the anthropological approach and it creates the data which is collected and analyzed and used to produce knowledge.

Once again I would like to thank all those who took the time to converse with me, show me around, and allowed me to spend time with them. I am truly thankful.

1.3: The Three Parts

Starting off with part one I discuss the history of research on games and the concept of play (Introduction to Play and Games). I discuss different ways of viewing play action and the motivations of humans engage in play. Using the works of Johan Huizinga, Roger Callois, and Erving Goffman, I analyze some of the reasons why videogames are so well liked, how the fantasies of old games acquire new meaning in the age of technology. I also explore how the separation of work and play has become more blurred, as play itself becomes professionalized. Play and work begin to leak into each other through the digitalization of play and games, but also the digitalization of work. I then move on to discuss the question of identity, more specifically the *gamer* identity. Who can consider themselves a gamer and why? Which games do they play? I use theories on social identity, stereotypes, and *gaming capital* to paint a picture of whom and what a gamer is. Moving on from there I discuss the term *esports* and dive into a discussion of sport and video games, as some commentators do not view esports as a legitimate type of sporting activity due to the perceived lack of physical endurance. Others differ and argue that sport is about particular kinds of competitive games and that esports is being incorporated into the sports label by a media industry that seeks to entertain a mass audience with new competitive games. I discuss briefly previous anthropologic works on video games, mainly those who have studied Massively Multiplayer Games (Golub 2005; Taylor 2006; Boellstorff 2008; Nardi 2010). From there I explain what competitive video games are and how to understand them. Most esport games share many similar aspects, the main one being to defeat an individual or a group of opponents. My decision on which games I would focus on was partly due to the choices of my interlocutors and my personal knowledge of many games, for I have played a considerable amount of

games in my life. Perhaps it was not coincidentally that I met teams that competed in *Overwatch* and *Heroes of the Storm*, for we shared a common rapport. In this thesis, each game is given its own chapter where I go into detail on how to understand the game and the game's position in the collegiate esport environment.

Part two is my main analyses as it focuses on the language created and used by my interlocutors. Language is extremely important for all cultures and gaming is no exception. Language can be viewed in terms of voice, intonations, abbreviations, written text, and symbolic evocations. All these are employed and created by both game developers and gamers themselves. I will use the work of language philosophers such as Wittgenstein (2001) and anthropologists such as Newon (2014) to discuss words and concepts especially in terms of how they are used in *Overwatch* and *Heroes of the Storm*. I was fascinated by how my interlocutors would change tone and language as they engaged in intense online battles against other teams. Continuing with language I explore how my interlocutors understood and used spatial language to aid them within the video games worlds that they play. I use the work of Levison (1996) and Basso (1988) to outline theories about the social and cultural construction of space and place, and how this was implicated in how my interlocutors successfully traversed and communicated locations within games. From there I delve into the work of Goffman (1961) to explore the social settings of a collegiate esport team. How they interacted with each other and how certain breaks in social relationships are navigated and corrected. I particularly look at how certain terms are deployed to describe and manage potentially negative divisive behavior.

In part three of my thesis I explore questions on gender and how the gamer identity stands in relation to the masculine and the feminine, and their changing social and historical form. My curiosity led me to this topic as I discovered the majority of visible gamers are male, and by visible I mean those who publicly identify as gamers in online spaces, the high percentages of men in the game developing industry, and the large numbers of men at gaming conventions and other massive public events. Yet this is not the whole story, for statistics indicate that there are almost as many female video game consumers as there are male. But as we shall see in part three, they play different types of games. This leads me to explore masculinity in the wider gamer culture and how this masculinity is measured and judged by gamers and non-gamers, and how this masculinity is also being policed and transformed. I then look at how female identity may be in conflict with the gamer identity, and explore the reasons why this is and how it came to be about because certain games being publically identified with public

gamer culture. I conclude with a short discussion about time (Winn and Heeter 2009), addiction (Schull 2002 and 2005), and moral panics (Cohen 1973; Szasz 1960).

The end of the thesis is quite short as I provide a short summary along with suggestions for further research. And in the spirit of esports; Good Luck, Have Fun.

Part I

Chapter 2

Introduction to Play and Games

"Fieldwork is hard man", I said to one of my interlocutors while eating lunch in the sun outside the local university cafeteria. It is early afternoon and the temperature is high enough for us to wear shorts and bask in the pleasurable spring warmth. We're discussing the happy news that his team is going to a semi-finals event in a few days to compete for tuition money. My interlocutor is a part of an official yet unsupported university esport-team, put together by a former student and alumni. The team competes in the popular video game 'Heroes of the Storm' and their collegiate tournament named 'Heroes of the Dorm'. It is March already, I feel as though my data collection is sub-par and my first attempt at fieldwork has gone horribly wrong. I lived in southern California where the weather is always warm and the distance is always far… it doesn't always take long to get anywhere, but it is a long way anyway, at least it feels that way. The topography of the area is flat and predictable… There are large square areas filled with shops, parks, universities, religious buildings, hotels, bowling alleys, golf courses, and office buildings. It is a fairly rich neighborhood, inhabited mostly by foreign and local students, office workers and stay at home parents, university staff and the unexplainably wealthy, not my usual kind of neighborhood. I do however enjoy it very much, it's clean, warm, sunny, and I have a bike I can traverse the area easily on a daily basis. "Fieldwork is hard man", but it is all work and all play.

Work and play are often positioned as two very separate social domains in the average person's life, but for collegiate esport-players these domains intertwine with each other. Playing video games has been turned into scheduled practice sessions and hours spent in online and LAN[1] tournaments in the hope of seeing some financial and social rewards. Esport players consider competition and video games a "fun" activity; however for some it is a stepping stone to a working career. This mixing of domains is not a new phenomenon in the domain of sports and other recreational activities such as gambling. Increasingly there is a

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[1] Local Area Network (LAN); closed networks between computers are often utilized in larger esport tournaments. In smaller tournaments it is usual to play using the games online connectivity.

notion that esports is "sport-like" in terms of the industry and players' own views on what they are doing. You can work with your play, and play while you work. Historically, this has not been the case, and there has often been a struggle to distinguish work from play, or to redefine their boundaries in different contexts. Here it is necessary to look briefly at the history of play and to explore writers who have thought about the social and cultural contexts of play.

Respected scholars such as Johan Huizinga (2009 [1949]), Roger Caillois (1961), and Erving Goffman (1961) have all discussed play and games, with each using their own focus on how to view and understand them. The dichotomy of work and play is repeated by all three authors' works, all see play as a free activity that is positioned as outside the "serious" work of ordinary life. Caillois (1961) even went as far as to call play "an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill…" (:5). Huizinga, who analyzed play within a cultural and social framework, wrote:

> "Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly… It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules in an orderly manner." (Huizinga 2009: 13)

Huizinga continues to say that *play* precedes culture and society, comparing the early forms of play and games to those of animals; the battle of horns between two rams, the exhibition of a nest by bower-birds, strut and showing-offs by a peacock[2] (Huizinga 2009: 47). Play evolves alongside culture and "as a culture proceeds, either progressing or regressing… the play-element gradually recedes into the background" (ibid: 46). Play obtains its own place in society to be taken out and put away at ones wish and leisure, living in its own world of rules and structure. A group of people can pick up a ball and make a game of kicking and throwing it to each other, cooperating and keeping score of how long they can keep the ball above the ground, or they might divide the group in two and make imagined goals by using the nearby landscape, and then compete against each other to score the most goals. But when they tire and put away the ball and the imagined goals disappear, the group assimilates and becomes one again with other groups, the world where the game's rules and

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[2] Huizinga uses different bird spieces as examples as he lists the "basic factors of play"; "wit, contest, performances, exhibitions, challenges, preenings, struttings, showing-off, pretences and binding rules" (Huizinga 2009: 47). I felt it more proper to include different animals as his point is that play precedes humans, but also makes the human possible for it is humans who supremely develop the capacity for play and mimicry.

structure live, cease to exist. When the ball is picked up again it might be used in the same manner or used to create new games and imaginative rules and structures. Huizinga (2009) also points out that the *play-element* can be observed in rituals of daily life, though it is not considered as play or gaming in these contexts.

All games are played, but not all play activities are games. Roger Caillois in his work *Man, Play, and Games* (1961) supports Huizinga in his suggestion that play is both free and "not serious" postulating a list that defines play as *Free, Separate, Uncertain, Unproductive, Governed by rules, and Make-believe* (Caillios 1961: 9-10. Original emphasis). However, Caillois critiques Huizinga for being too vague in his definition of play and his lack of classification for distinguishing different games (ibid: 4), a task Caillois proudly sets out to do. He proposes four "main rubrics" (ibid: 12);

1) *Agôn*, being games of competition, played with and against others. These involve dueling skill, strength, memory, intelligence, strategy, and all for the glory of a win.

2) *Alea*, where lady luck gambles away her hard earned money in games that seem to be the most unproductive of the rubrics for skill and intelligence are replaced by chance and luck.

3) *Mimicry*[3] is more about theatrical flair as a person imitates a fictional or actual other, be it beast or man, wind or wave, or hybrid forms as in the sad case of a very mute static tree in a third grade production of Robin Hood.

4) *Ilnix* is the pleasure in an alternative corporeal cognitive experience. It can take the exemplified form of a young woman jumping off a bridge, connected only by an elastic rope so as to make her feel the intoxication of disorder and dizziness. Another version is the vertigo and adrenaline enjoyed by speeding through a rollercoaster; ah yes, even the toddler as he spins around and falls down in joy as the room continues to spin around him (Caillois 1961: 14-26).

With Huizinga and Caillois, we have established that play and playing games are free yet also often rule-bound activities. They can and should be distinguished and classified in groups due to the qualitative nature of the games. Caillois (1961: 65) also proposes a list of motivations that influence persons to play certain or all games:

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[3] Caillois mentions that "mimicry exhibits all the characteristics of play… with one exception… the continuous submission to imperative and precise rules cannot be observed… the rule of the game is unique: it consists in the actor's fascinating the spectator, while avoiding… to break the spell" (Caillois 1961: 23)

- The need to prove one's superiority

- The desire to challenge, make a record, or merely overcome an obstacle

- The hope for and the pursuit of destiny

- Pleasure in secrecy, make-believe, or disguise

- Fear or inspiring fear

- The search for repetition and symmetry, or in contrast, the joy of improvising, inventing, or infinitely varying solutions

- Solving a mystery or riddle

- The satisfaction procured from all arts involving contrivance

- The desire to test one's strength, skill, speed, endurance, equilibrium, or ingenuity

- Conformity to rules and laws, the duty to respect them, and the temptation to circumvent them

- And lastly, the intoxication, longing for ecstasy, and the desire for voluptuous panic

The extensive list may be seen to contradict to Caillois emphasis on play as a wasteful act. For it cannot be wasteful if it fulfills a person's wants and needs, though it may be unproductive in terms of producing tangible wares, spiritual awakening, or improving personal traits. Some play is made to be unproductive, but some play gives something back. If not in terms of tangible wares or services, it rewards players with sensations and knowledge. A gambler will learn not to bet on a limp horse or a blind rooster, a child will learn his limitations by jumping from increasing altitudes into the local lake water, and the actor will learn to shift his accent, pitch and tone to imitate a fictional character. Knowledge, skill, and above all pleasure can be productive outcomes of play. Though he might not explicitly have sought to do so, Erving Goffman in his chapter *Fun in Games* (1961) discusses productive outcomes from play and games. He approaches the subject with the serious intent to analyze the "fun" in games. Goffman argues that people enjoy doing activities together, whether it's playing games or making love. Interactions with other people are the foundations of society, and having "fun" with other people helps create social structure and rules of interaction

(Goffman 1961 and 1990). We will return to Goffman in a later chapter as I discuss his work in relation to my own fieldwork.

Games and play are governed by rules that seem to live outside the ordinary as an opposite of the ordinary life. Games are played only after rules and limitations have been established and agreed upon by the players (Huizinga 2009; Caillois 1961; Goffman 1961). While the rules and framework of established games are often set, variations occur within culture and societies. House rules are often implemented in games and games vary across the world of depending on how the culture views the world of fantasy, mimicry, and reality. Games are shaped by the society and the culture within which they reside. Today this includes contemporary forms of play and games known as video games. Video games are electronically created virtual worlds where participants can interact with through computers and video game consoles. Individuals can engage with and in them at their leisure. Playing them is not a forced activity of any sorts even if these games can be addictive, an issue that will be discussed later. These objectified imagined worlds are shared and so exist with or without any particular individuals. The rules and structures are a constant in the alternative world, and cannot be altered at will by a player[4]. Game developers are the gods of their game; from start to finish they determine everything from the smallest grain of sand to the infinite cosmos in the virtual universe. Only they can make changes to the rules by altering the coding within the game. Online games are again a bit different, they are based on the interaction between massive amounts of players, either competing or cooperating to achieve goals, explore game universes, simply enjoy time together, and often sharing many of the motivational influences suggested by Caillios in the text above. While these games have rigid rules, player interaction with the world can be transformed. Games can alter the perceived experiences of users by providing new narrative and motivational schemes and an alternative experience of social co-operation and competition.

Doing fieldwork among students and people who play games both for fun and as work I often pondered the implication of mixing the two. If what you do for fun is also the source of extra income in terms of money or valuable items can the activity still be defined as fun? Most, if not all of my interlocutors' plays video games for fun, they watch others play video

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[4] I am excluding so called hacks and exploits of code within the games because it only affects one player's interaction with the game, it does not change the foundation of the game for other players.

games for fun, and they discuss video games for fun[5]. However they also had instrumental reasons for playing and talking about games. Some of my interlocutors worked within the video game industry, other worked within the esports community, some were students participating in collegiate esports leagues, and some worked in student run video game clubs at different universities. All treated video games as a fun activity, but it was never just fun. It was also part of challenging oneself, measuring skills against opponents, working together to defeat a large enemy in a game, or feeling the rush of a win or loss after a competitive match. But most notably, all shared a larger identity; they addressed themselves as a *gamer*, belonging to a larger culture of videogame users: *gamers*.

2.1: Who Plays Video Games and What is Gamer Identity?

The Entertainment Software Association (http://www.theesa.com) is an organization that supports the business and public affairs needs of video game companies, and it researches the habits of video game consumers in the USA. They released an annual report that in 2017 (ESA Essential Facts 2017) estimated that:

- 67% of US households owned a device that could be used to play video games.
- 65% of households have a person who plays video games three or more hours each week.
- 41% of these video game users are female and 59 percent male.

This data was based on standardized surveys of over 4000 households nationwide. The survey defines anyone who plays video games in any forms as a *gamer*, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or on which device they play games, whether it is smartphones, video game consoles, computers, or handheld gaming consoles. While this survey is useful, it can also conceal the qualitative differences in participation, not to mention the disparity in gender, ethnicity, and age in the global video game environment. Participation does not make an identity, for to identify as a gamer is both an individual and group activity. It can be self-ascribed from solitary activities though it is a strange use to define someone as a gamer for

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[5] This is not something new, as any professional athlete or gambler engage in their work games in their leisure time, but then treat it as a fun activity. The boundary between work and play is both erased and upheld is this fashion.

playing the card game Solitare[6]. It is more correctly used to define video game users who participate in shared activities. Here I must expand upon the fact that shared activities is not just playing a game together, but rather the gamer engaging him or herself in a larger or smaller community that centers around the activity of playing games.

In their article *How to be a gamer!* Fredrik de Grove, Cédric Courtois, and Jan Van Looy (2015) explore personal and social indicators of the gamer identity. Their starting argument is that gamer identity is socially constructed and that it is closely tied to certain knowledge and consumption practices (2015: 347). The gamer identity is performed using knowledge gained from social situations both online and offline. It becomes an identity group when certain levels of knowledge are expected from participants. Mia Consalvo (2007) suggests the term: Gaming capital, building upon the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) on different forms of capital. Bourdieu presents us with three forms of capital: Economic capital utilizes a person's access to economic means and wealth, be it money, property, inheritance, and the like. Cultural capital (ibid: 17-21) can take different forms, and includes a person's knowledge, bodily skills, as well as any cultural property such as, books, paintings, instruments, machines, collectibles, and educational qualification. The third form of capital is Social capital and it refers to the size of social networks, acquaintances, friends, and the ability to utilize these. It includes a person's membership of different groups and how those groupings provide each member with a collective social capital, a network of friends so to speak (Bourdieu 1986: 21-24). Consalvo (2007) uses the idea of cultural capital to create the term Gaming capital as a way of describing the specialized knowledge and skills of videogame users that allows them to compete and master their environment, in both its virtual and non-virtual forms. Gaming capital becomes part of the performative identity of the gamer that can be used in social situations to create hierarchy and social bonding. In doing so it helps create social capital for gamer groups and increasingly also economic capital in esports competitive environments.

The importance of social and capital strongly connects to the self-conceptualization of gamers, and their ability to identify themselves and others as gamers. De Grove et al (2015) suggests using the work of Henri Tajfel's concept of social identity, and quotes "That part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that

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[6] Though defining a person who solely plays Japanese role-playing games by him or herself, as a gamer, would not be weird.

membership" (Tajfel 1981: 255 in De Grove et al 2015: 348). Self-categorizing an identity is thereby connected to personal validation and the social acceptance from others. It is through forming social relationships with other like-minded persons who share similar gaming capital that a person activates their gamer identity, and thereby becomes part of groups (Grove et al 2015).

Gaming capital and the social interactions involving it creates a gaming culture in the form of specialized knowledge, practices, and language. I will analyze the terms and grammar of this language at length in a later chapter as well as the specialized knowledge it assumes. By practices I refer to regular ways of interacting that imply taken for granted knowledge concerning video games. This knowledge includes knowledge of the social rules governing not only the mechanics of gaming but also the etiquette for interacting with other gamers both online and offline. Noting that gaming has a culture leads to the larger question on where gamer culture stands in relation to the more mainstream culture of television and movies, or even books. Some might view gaming as a subculture (Hebdige 1979). Subcultures, as analyzed and modeled by Dick Hebdige (1979) can be viewed as a group that shares visual style, interests, practices and beliefs. According to Hebdige subcultures forms as a resistance or protest to a hegemonic culture, and develop its own "style", a combination of music, clothing, language, hair and make-up style, or common-place objects such as a type of car or bike – through this display of style the new subculture claws out a position in society. Hebdige (1979) suggests that new subcultures may cause moral panics in society, a narrative of corrupted youths that need to be assimilated into the normal parameters of life. Consalvo (2007: 3) suggests the term subculture is too limited to explain the large world that is gaming, though she does suggest that specific games might create subcultures within the gaming culture, as fans of some games or genres of games can create a unique group that share ideals and practices. These subcultures within gaming may be visible regionally as gamers recognize each other based on certain indicators, though indicators may differ from country to country, culture to culture, and game genre to game genre.

The methods used by De grove et al (2015) included online surveys and structured interviews. Their work, asked participants to discuss their friendships and social networks in order to assess when the gamer identity became salient. Findings suggested that a person will identify as a gamer if he or she is amongst others who identify as gamers, where they can share their gaming capital with each other – if your friends identify as gamers, you are more willing to identify as one yourself. Findings also suggested that time spent playing

videogames was an important indicator on the self-categorization of the gamer identity – which games are being consumed was also a factor, so-called *core* games (First-Person-Shooters, Role-Playing Games) was one of the greater indicators for gamer identity (ibid: 357). De Grove et al (2015) goes on to suggest that the concept of prototypicality established imagined and real indicators that persons must perform in order to identify as gamers. "People judge others and themselves on how prototypical they are for a certain social category" (Grove et al 2015: 351). Their findings suggest there exists stereotypical images of gamer identity that persons use as indicators of their own or others compatibility with the gamer identity.

The original stereotypical image of a gamer was, as Williams et al (2008: 955) describes "As portrayed in print media, game players are stereotypically male and young, pale from too much time spent indoors and socially inept. As a new generation of isolated and lonely "couch potatoes", young male game players are far from aspirational figures". Caricatures of gamers are usually much the same, they are young men, they are too fat or too skinny, too pale, socially awkward or inexperienced, often single, living in their parents' basements or attics and living off fast-food and mountain dew. Kowert et al (2012: 473) writes "the origin of this stereotypical image is unknown", but I speculate that it stems from a coalition of previous stereotypes such as the "nerd" or "geek", which are stereotypes often rooted in the socially inept young males who are less than athletic and seeks different hobbies such as chess, and today seek technology and science based hobbies over physical prowess in traditional sports. Most video game user do not fit these stereotypes, though some gamers might, and this causes many who participate in playing video games to hesitate identifying themselves as gamers. There still exists a lingering social stigma in having video games as an interest or hobby, and this has a societal impact in forms of regulations of video games by authority figures.

Gamer identity is performed in social relations (online and offline). It requires knowledge of games and gamer language, cognitive and bodily skills, which accumulate to create personal gaming capital that then can become the collective cultural capital of a gaming group-team. Stigmatic stereotypical images (young, white, male) makes it harder for some persons such as women of colored minorities to identify as gamers, even though De Grove et al (2015) argues that time spent playing is the strongest indicator. What particular games are being played is also an indicator of equal importance to that of gender and age, and this can sometimes mean that gamer identity easily conflicts with the female identity (:358). The

gendered aspect of videogames and videogame environments will be discussed in a later chapter.

2.2: The Game is Afoot

As I bravely traveled to the dangerous country of the United States of America I settled in Southern California. I searched of young men and women who actively competed in online video games at a university, I was looking for a collegiate esports team. Now you may think to yourself, "is competing in video games really a sport?" short answer; yes. The long answer; within the academic community there are still debates on how to define *esports*, if esports are sports, how to write the word esports (Esports, eSports, e-sports, E-sports). I have in this thesis chosen to write "esport" on the basis that my interlocutors wrote it as such and suggested it as the correct spelling. Wagner attempted to define esports as: "*…an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies*" (Wagner 2006: 3, original italics). This is a useful definition as it recognizes that competitors work and train very hard in order to become professional players and compete alone or as part of a team. One of my interlocutors, Kathy[7], had her own definition which includes important aspects of both esports and sports[8]:

> *"I define esports as a combination of top tier competitive gaming, the industry behind that, the entertainment industry, the broadcasting and casting of matches, the analysts, all of that. And obviously the fans and the people that watches that. And the game developers are kind of tied into that, they are the ones that push their esport scene or they are the ones changing the games and create the systems necessary to make these things happen. So esports is competitive gaming, plus everything that makes it happen, and it is pretty similar to traditional sports right now in what their trying to make it. I think it can be very different. But I think it is easier to model something after something that already is established into something new."*

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[7] Kathy works as the Arena Coordinator at the University of California, Irvine, Esports Arena. We will get to know her more in part three of this thesis.
[8] This quote, as most of the quotes from my interlocutors in this thesis, was captured in a semi-structured interview by using an audio recorder and then transcribed at a later date.

Kathy highlights the commercial and institutional aspects of media performance and viewership in her definition, which is also a subtle analysis of the complex vested interests that are involved with the players. One very important thing to remember during this thesis is that not all video games are esport even if they have competitive elements. The term *esport* is understood to entail all media broadcasted competitive video games such as League of Legends (Riot Games 2009), Counter Strike: Global Offensive (Valve Cooperation 2012), Overwatch (Blizzard Entertainment 2016) and many more. Here sports and games are not just professionalized but also their professionalization becomes part of the definition of them as sport and games, part of their social and cultural constitution in the present. Esports as a spectator sport has a lot of viewers but since there are so many games, both popular and less so, that are being broadcasted on many different media channels it becomes next to impossible to find the exact number of viewers. Data is easier to come by for the more popular games, according to Esports Charts (https://esc.watch 2017) League of Legends largest tournament had an overall peak of 106,210,010[9] viewers during the 2017 World Championship hosted in China this year. This number of a 100 million+ peak viewers is only for one game and it should raise the awareness that esports offers massive advertising and commercial possibilities. Viewership is effectively competing worldwide with popular traditional sports such as the NFL, NBA, MLB, Golf, but it has some way to go before it competes with football (soccer for our American friends) or cricket. However, the increase in viewers has led traditional sport franchises to invest in their own esports team, sponsoring them with salaries, equipment, and clothes that feature team names and corporate logos. This franchising has led to media channels and streaming services such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitch, and ESPN to place bids on different video game competitions in order to secure media rights for broadcasting these esport events. Those events are often hosted by the video game companies themselves that have developed the games. This provides another revenue stream to those companies which have a vested interest in new ways of commercializing their video games through advertising and media sponsorship of competitions (Blum, June 1 2017).

Historically, esports can be seen emerging from competitions in the arcades (video game parlors) during the 1980s. Players met face-to-face in arcades and they would compete against each other or against arcade machines. This social structure was displaced and incorporated into homes with the growth of powerful home computers, video game consoles, and improved internet speeds and connections. Gamers began to visit each other at their homes in order to

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[9] https://esc.watch/tournaments/lol/2017-world-championship

play against or with each other. Contributing to this was the invention and growth of competitive multiplayer games via internet or LAN (Local Area Network). For parents this was preferable as it offered them the seeming safety and security of the home in place of the arcade parlor over which parents had little control. Some parents could share in the activity which came too be marketed as family entertainment. This form of electronic competition became more professionalized through increased marketing activities and media coverage by game developers and electronic media journals. This led to the creation of Twin Galaxies organization in 1981[10] with the function of recording and archiving tournament data, rankings, and scores (Borowy and Jin 2013).

Playing video is a consumer activity, this was true for the first video games, and are also true for the current video games – but video games are also an experience of art. A video game often has a virtual world, bound in two or three dimensions, accompanied by landscapes, music, stories, myths, legends, challenges, and so on. All these pieces constitute a work of art, and art is an intense experience according to John Dewey (2005 [1934]). For Dewey, art is an "esthetic experience" – he separates the "artistic" and the "esthetic". For Dewey (2005) the "artistic" implies the work done by the artist, the creation of art. The "esthetic" is the way in which consumers interact and feel the work done by the artist, hence the term "esthetic experience". The artwork is not "art" until humans see it, talk about it, feel it – in short, experience it. Dewey was opposed to separating art from normal life; he was in opposition to the ways museums treat art, as they lock artwork behind doors and glass prisons, he much preferred the art of dance and music – art that existed in the everyday lives of humans. For Dewey video games might have been the ultimate art, as it incorporates different art styles and methods to create an experience the consumer must actively engage in.

Borowy and Jin (2013) relate esports and video games to an increasing economic trend to commodify experiences, termed *Experience Economy* (Pine & Gilmore 1998, in Borowy and Jin 2013: 2257). They draw on the work of Alvin Toffler, who argues that there are two types of experiential products being commodified; "simulated environments" such as those provided by computers, robotics, historical or fictional reenactments, and so on; and "live environments", meaning tourism, theater, sport events, festivals and so on (Toffler 1970: 230-231, in Borowy and Jin 2013: 2257). Unlike the more passive simulated worlds offered by film and television, those offered by computer games give players the ability to actively engage in the simulated environment. To some extent capitalism has always involved the

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[10] http://www.twingalaxies.com/help.php#tab-1

commodification of experiences, their production and sale, whether it is a new carbonated drink, yogurt or any other taste sensations. The same with driving a new car or acquiring a bigger and better television, it is the production and sale of experiences which is moving in new directions, as it becomes moved into the virtual, or more accurately into simulated worlds that offer their own experiential realities. The body does not disappear in the virtual, but all games incorporate the body movements of players into virtual space. Some do so by just responding to particular body reflexes or movements such as the pushing of buttons, but others transpose the whole body image of players into a screen reality that reproduces identity in a new medium.

Video games are working to redefine boundary between mind and body, virtual and real. This can be seen with the Wii console or PlayStation Move controllers which incorporates players' real-time movements into the game as part of competitive sports where the object that is being competed over, such as a ball, only exists in the virtual world. Other games involve different dances where an interactive floor mat is placed on the ground and one can dance within the screen by stepping rhythmically on it. There is also the new Virtual Reality headgear, where your own perceptual field of vision is removed from reality and placed in the virtual, which requires you to turn head and body in order to view the virtual landscape around you. These technologies blur the boundary between the real and the simulated, incorporating the real body into a simulated world and simulated body. They confer an alternative identity and experiential reality on players, and this can be part of the pleasure and meaning of escape from stress of school, home, work and familial obligations that players may seek (Schull 2002 and 2005).

As opposed to the motion dependent party/sports games describes above, in most esport games there is a more sedentary position with most body movements restricted to hands and eyes. Some, like Hilvoorde & Pot (2016) argue that esports do not use motor functions to the same degree as other sports so as to be on an equal level with sports that use the entire body's movements (:16). However some sports like shooting or archery rely on very restricted but precise bodily movements – moreover, like other sports, the motor functions required to play esports at a professional level can only be acquired with specialized training and this can result in the repetitive strain injuries of muscles and fatigue. In addition to quick alert perception and fast reflexes, competing on the highest tier of esports also requires split-second strategic and tactical decision making, which is also celebrated in many traditional sports such as basketball (fast paced decisions on when to pass the ball, dribble or shoot). Esports

combines these mental capacities with precise button clicking, this accuracy must also have the perfect timing as any miss-click (wrong timing, wrong button, etc.) can result in a loss. Indeed, esports often celebrate players' skill in intuition, timing, strategic gambling and fast decision making in an individual or team environment.

2.3: Competitive Video Games

What we may refer to as common knowledge often includes a certain understanding of games and sport in one's own local culture. Most people are familiar with football, basketball, baseball, American football, rugby, cricket, each with their own cultural reference and geolocation. These are a part of common knowledge because they are very popular and are often played during childhood and teen years as recreational activities. This is increasingly the case with esports. The movement of video games out of parlors where parents saw it ambiguous and dangerous into the safety and supervision of the home helped to mainstream video games. It allowed parents to accept them as legitimate recreational activities for their children and even to participate with their children in playing video games in much the same ways as they may have played football, basketball or card and board games with their children previously.

Yet the market penetration of video games has not been wholesale or complete but often uneven. So I do understand that video games, in this case competitive video games, may not be interesting to some people. It may not be a part of their pool of common knowledge. In the next chapter of part one of this thesis I will introduce what the basic elements of a competitive video game can be, and how to understand it, I will describe some basic knowledge that a player or spectator will need, and then explore two different games created by the same game developing company –Activision Blizzard Entertainment; who created *Heroes of the Storm* (Blizzard 2015) and *Overwatch* (Blizzard 2016).

Competitive video games are made with the wish that people who play them compete for some symbolic prize or reward within the game's reality. Games with a competitive focus often allow one human player or a team of human players to interact within that alternative world through virtual characters. There is a set amount of human players who can interact at the same time, which creates the first limitation. How many players are going to compete

against each other? In the game *Overwatch*, the developers decided that there should be only two teams competing at any one time. On each team there should be six players, making it a game that includes 12 players altogether. Now – they need a place to compete, so the developers made virtual areas in the game world known as *maps*. Maps are usually visually stunning having deep layers of artwork and architecture, and even layers of space air, surface and underground. Yet all these seemingly physical spaces are made up by code and numbers. The map has a certain size and depth which can vary as the virtual character moves through it in a way that gives the illusion of taking a certain amount of time to traverse. Space and time are artefacts of the game's code. The virtual characters are also made of codes and numbers – yet each character is assigned a certain height, moves at a certain speed, can do damage to other characters, and can sustain damage from other characters. These illusions of certain body movements and qualities are all decided by the numbers created for them. Damage is usually the counter number to health – a character can sustain a set amount of damage, which is represented by a number that signifies the character's *health bar*. Every player and their character is audited, kept appraised of its health status and risk potential and often has to trade the former for the latter. Every character is different; has different variations of numbers that decides their interaction to the world and other characters. The game unfolds by implementing strategies that build upon controlling the enemy player or teams movement; it is a tug of war with damage and health bars. The point of most competitive games is to achieve an objective, be it controlling a point, destroying a core building, capturing a flag, accumulating more resources, or as simple as eliminating the opponents. But the main point across almost any competitive game is the control of space. By controlling space you in effect control where an opponent can go, and where the opponent cannot. This control of space is usually what determines the winner as any position the opponent finds him or herself in is a negative one.

Chapter 3

Choosing the Games

Sitting down and deciding where to travel and what to study was somewhat challenging. I knew I wanted to travel, and I particularly knew that I wanted to study games and gamers, but in which fashion? There exist extensive ethnographies that capture gamers in their natural habitat, the online virtual world. I started reading the works of Alex Golub (2005), T.L. Taylor (2006), Tom Boellstorff (2008), and Bonnie Nardi (2010), all of whom have done extensive ethnographic work within massively multiplayer online virtual worlds. Taylor explored a variety of issues such as motivations for playing, gender in the online gaming community, player knowledge and skill within the game, all within the world of *EverQuest* (Daybreak Game Company 1999). Golub (2005) and Nardi (2010) performed extensive participant observation within *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004), and I will discuss their work closer below. Boellstorff (2008) focused on a different type of online game called *Second Life* (Linden Lab 2003), this game functions more as a life simulator, giving the player a chance to create an avatar who can look and act different from their actual world persona. In *Second Life* there is no objective or purpose other than what the participating players make of it. There exist many different virtual tools to create objects and buildings within the world, some of which have monetary value in our offline actual world.

Nardi performed participant observation in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) and explored different themes such as motivations, skill, gender, addiction, aesthetic experiences, culture, community, and friendships. One of Nardi's larger points was that *World of Warcraft* could be viewed as a work of art with its complex mechanics and immersive and beautiful visuals. She uses John Dewey's (2005 [1934]) concept of art as experience to argue the active consumption and participation of *World of Warcraft* players as they progress through the virtual world. Dewey (2005) himself argues that art should be in the hands of consumers, locking art behind glass frames puts a distance between the consumer and the artwork thereby hindering the artworks true potential of affecting active consumers. Nardi (2010) uses Dewey to argue that video games such as the *World of Warcraft* reintroduce art as media, something that is both aesthetically beautiful and can be consumed through participation.

Video games are often referred to as immersive due to their ability to capture the player. By providing never before seen landscapes filled with fantastical fauna and flora it invites players to explore and interact with the fantasy world, much like the standard pen and paper fantasy games that came before them. Game developers often create enticing sounds and lights to highlight players' progression through their participation, though anthropologist Alex Golub (2005) argues that persons who play at a high level will deactivate or scale down these visual and audible signals to focus better on the mechanical aspects of the games. In Golub's article, *Being in the World (Of Warcraft)* (2005), he follows a group, a guild, known as Power Aeternus as they engage in Multi-User-Dungeons (MUDs) within the *World of Warcraft*. In this game the MUDs are known as dungeons, instances, and raids. Power Aeternus, is described as a high-ranking medium-core raiding guild by Golub (2005) and focuses most of their time on completing raids that require 10, 25, or 40 people to accomplish. Golub (2005) joined them in their raiding and found that most members turned down special effects lighting and sound in order to better control the mechanics of their avatars without the distraction of the lights and sound that the game developers had implemented to give the illusion of a grand battle against numerous visually impressive enemies. Golub goes on to discuss how cooperation and teamwork combined with player-made modifications to the screen helps inform the raiding party of important numbers such as damage dealt to the boss, percentage of aggression from numerous enemies, mana and health on surrounding team members and enemies, important timings for attacking and more importantly dodging dangerous attacks, and so on. This importance with numbers is what Nardi (2010, chapter seven) calls "theorycraft[ing]", it refers to the actual math and numbers players make use of too better control and navigate their gameplay, i.e. defeat monsters and enemy players. Golub (2005) makes a point that intense cooperation is important for the play activity to be successful, making me turn my attention to towards the competitive and co-operational side of video game culture.

These rich ethnographies focus on player interaction with the virtual worlds and the players' interaction with other players. This made me interested in the connection between players, how their friendship evolves and how they find each other, though my collected data drove me somewhat away from that main focus. Instead my main focus rests upon cooperation and teamwork, how specialized language fits into the competitive arena that is esports. Before I started my fieldwork I looked at different competitive video games, some games are more popular than others and some games were more familiar to me as a gamer.

My initial thought was to find a game I was not too familiar with so that my previous knowledge of a game would not cloud my observations. Alas this proved harder than expected and due to the short six months I had to establish contact and learn potential interlocutor's games. I was lucky enough to find some teams that played two games I was acquainted with, at least to the degree of understanding basic game mechanics and objectives. The teams I followed during the spring of 2017 played *Heroes of the Storm* (Blizzard Entertainment 2015) and *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment 2016). Some of my interlocutors also played the games *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009), *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (Valve Corporation 2012), and *Hearthstone* (Blizzard Entertainment 2014). There are many people I am thankful to for allowing me to follow them through their online interactions and for lengthy personal conversations. I will firstly describe the games I followed in order to set up the chapters later in the thesis.

3.1: Heroes of the Storm (HOTS)

Heroes of the Storm released in 2015. It is constantly being updated and worked upon by the developer and publishing studio Blizzard Entertainment. The game borrows art styles, narratives, and characters (heroes) from Blizzard Entertainments' other games such as *Warcraft*, *Starcraft*, and *Overwatch*. Each game produced by Blizzard Entertainment offers players its own immense virtual universe. With *Heroes of the Storm*, each a player is tasked with choosing one of their many *heroes*[11] and joins a team of four other human players so as to fight a rival team of five other human players or five computer controlled players (*Artificial Intelligence – A.I*). They compete on a "battleground" [12](map) with various objectives depending on the map, the virtual terrain where they meet. The game is a part of a popular video game genre called *Multiplayer Online Battle Arena* (MOBA), where two teams battle against each other. The teams start on opposite sides of a virtual arena (map); this map is balanced so that one side mirrors the other; the left side of the map is identical to the right side of the map, much like a football field is. However, unlike a football field, the enemy side is covered by a "fog of war". This means that all map features are visible on the map, but is covered by a fog so as to obscure enemies from parts of the map your teams characters do not

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[11] http://us.battle.net/heroes/en/heroes/#/
[12] http://us.battle.net/heroes/en/battlegrounds/

occupy; characters have a limited field of vision, represented as a circle around the character. Players can purchase hero identities with in-game currency earned through playing, or through micro-transactions. Players can also purchase cosmetic alterations to a hero (skins) or their default transportation tool (mount).

On each players side of the map there are important buildings and structures. There is one main building, In *Heroes of the Storm* this building is called "Core", yet main buildings have different names in different MOBA games. There are also two or three buildings (depending on the battleground) called "Keep", that if destroyed will reward the opposing team with an advantage. These buildings are the teams' defenses and can inflict damage on enemies. They are protected by towers that can harm enemies who come within a pre-set range. In front of these buildings and towers lies a destructible "wall" that enemy players can damage and eventually tear down. Further towards the middle lie more towers and special buildings called "forts" which are smaller buildings that can also inflict harm on enemies.

Maps have two or three lanes which are roads that lead to the middle of the map, on these roads march non-playable characters (NPCs) that do damage to the enemy towers and building. These NPC's are referred to as "creeps" or "minions". The game's goal is to eliminate your enemy's *core*, but to do so you have to be strong enough. So you set out to destroy enemies, minions and buildings; which gives you experience, which makes you stronger. This allows you to destroy enemies, minions, and buildings even faster and push into the enemy's care and destroy it. Additionally and unlike other MOBAs on the market, *Heroes of the Storm* battlegrounds usually have an additional objective which teams compete over. On the battleground *Blackhearts Bay* there spawns virtual treasure chest which characters can damage in order to obtain doubloons. They can then use the doubloons to bribe the ghost of the dreaded undead pirate Blackheart. When Blackheart receives enough doubloons he jumps on his ghost ship and fires his ship's cannons on enemy buildings, tearing them down and securing a large experience boost for the team who bribed him.

Players control their characters using a mouse and keyboard. They view the hero and the battleground (map) from a top-down view, from an inclined aerial perspective. When a match is started the hero is at level 1. Each hero has a set of abilities that can inflict damage or provide shield/health. Other abilities provide useful effect such as putting an enemy to sleep or stunning them, at that point the enemy hero cannot be moved by his or her human player until the sleep or stun period is over. When abilities are used it becomes depleted and has a set amount of time before it can be used again, this is called a "cooldown". At level 10, the hero

may choose a valuable "Heroic" ability that has with a longer cooldown. This can greatly influence a skirmish with an opposing team as heroes have fully mobilized and accessible resources. It is possible for heroes to reach level 30, although this rarely happens during a match. Heroes are awarded the choice between different "talents" as they progress to 4, 7, 10 (Heroic), 13, 16, and 20 (Storm talents). The talent chosen influences or alters the existing abilities the hero has, making those abilities substantially better and more dangerous to the opposing team.

Heroes are divided into different *roles*[13]. In *Heroes of the Storm* they are divided into four categories; *warrior*, *assassin*, *support*, and *specialist*. The *assassin* is the main damage dealer; it is a role that focuses on eliminating as many enemies as fast as possible. *Warriors* are the frontline of a team; they are there to soak the damage that the enemy team dishes out and to defend the team's weaker heroes. *Support* characters influence the battleground by restoring health to allied characters or giving them "shields" (amount of temporary life value). *Specialists* are diverse, but are often able to damage and destroy buildings faster than other characters. There are other roles but it will not push the analyses any further to go into these in this thesis so I will only focus on the common roles and the over-arching understandings of them.

Blizzard Entertainment made this game to be competitive and has spent the last two-three years building an esport community for it. Many university students around the United States have founded their own teams and gaming clubs so as to compete with each other in online tournaments. The biggest of these tournaments is hosted by Blizzard Entertainment themselves and is ironically named *Heroes of the Dorms*. I attended the live tournament in Las Vegas where the top four university teams competed for the first place prize of 500 000 USD in scholarships and other gifts. The top prize allowed each player of a winning team to have his or her annual tuition and student loans paid up to a total of 25,000USD for three years, up to a total of 75,000USD. The annual tournament was started in 2015 by Blizzard Entertainment and Tespa[14], and only full-time university and college students are eligible to compete in it. There is (to my current knowledge) no university funded scholarships for

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[13] These are sometimes known also as Class, Personality, or Category. Game developers come up with new names for roles as to not directly copy previous games and to give a sense of innovation.

[14] Tespa is Blizzard Entertainments daughter company that handles all the business of collegiate esports for the Blizzard corporation

Heroes of the Storm teams, meaning no team at any university receive monetary support to compete in this particular esport[15].

> *Today is April 8th: game-day. Heroic Four of the 'Heroes of the Dorm' competition is set to be played in the Cox Pavilion with a live audience and streamed on Facebook Live. I had planned to be in Las Vegas most of the week, seeing the sights and to do fieldwork at the tournament venue. I called an Uber and travelled towards the venue site. Upon arrival I saw I was already late to secure myself a good seat, the line was 200 people long with more and more arriving. Amongst them were some professional esports players, YouTube personalities, family and friends of the competing players who came to show their support. The doors opened and we were filed through a security check where they looked through bags for the normal sharp objects or sneaky snack-packs. The indoor venue was a sight to behold. There was a large stage with flashing lights, big screens and speakers, and space for around 500 seated audience members. There were live interviews being conducted by the Blizzard staff. People mingled, wrote signs to hold up, bought merchandise and snacks for the coming matches. I purchased some light lunch and decided to purchase some merchandise that I could give to my friends back home. I found a seat, chatted a little with the person next to me and got ready for the first match. The room exploded in sound and flashing lights, the crowd roared, stamped their feet and clapped their hands. They were ready. This was a top collegiate esport event.*

I followed one university *Heroes of the Storm* team which I will keep anonymous because a few team members did not explicitly agree to be mentioned by name or gamer name. The pseudonyms I created allow me to refer to them as *Tank, Support, Dps, Melee, Flex, Substitute,* and *Benched*. They are young men between the age of 19 and 24. Some had mixed ethnicities, but all were born in the United States. It is not important how far they got in the tournaments, what is important is the way they interacted and communicated with each other which will be discussed in part two of this thesis. I used participant observation in the virtual world and also spoke with them through the communication tool *Discord* where one can have group conversations using headphones and microphones. My fieldwork notes indicate that there are new programs at universities and schools that are being created to support and train future esport players. But there is a noticeable lack in infrastructure across the industry and

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[15] Some however, are sponsored by universities in forms on jerseys, computer gear, and a space on campus to train.

most university teams are not sponsored in any shape or form by the institution they represent. One very positive note however is that some universities have decided to allow esport players at the school to receive economic rewards when they win tournaments.

3.2: Overwatch and the UCI Zotboys

It is afternoon as the UCI 'Overwatch' team meets online using a communication tool named Discord, they all use headphones with microphones that allow them to hear and speak with their team mates. I myself am wearing headphones without a microphone and am therefore relying on the discord chat room to socialize and speak with the team. The team is aptly named Zotboys after the school mascot The Anteater which makes a "zot zot" noise. They are planning to scrim against another school in the Californian area. Waiting for all the players to show up and for the practice to begin the Discord voice channel is filled with light hearted banter, sharing of daily events and light hearted mockery of each other and other people they know. The playful banter shifts to topics about the game; which team compositions are they going for today, and which maps do they want to practice on. Going into the game there is a short time before the match starts and this allows team members choose their desired character. In an almost ritualistic way they warm up their fingers by making their character spin around fast and jump around using the shoot and different abilities. As the match starts the banter dies down and all six players on the team change their language to what will be described as "in-game language". These are short efficient sentences that are used to secure the flow of information to other team mates concerning names of friendly and enemy characters and their position and action flow. Important information can sound like a drill sergeant at a boot-camp as they repeat the word or sentence multiple times to make sure all team mates hear the order and act accordingly. Protoges says "I'm going to ult (use his character's ultimate ability) be ready", as Protoges uses his ultimate ability he calls out "got Lucio, focus Lucio". The other team mates, mainly Lootre and Lionpoke; those who play characters with a high damage output called DPS (Damage Per Second), charge against the stunned enemy and take him out. As the team secures their first kill in the fight the enemy's team is thrown of balance as they are now playing five characters

*versus the Zotboys six. Weakened they get picked apart and killed one by one. After
the last enemy dies Protoges calls out for a "reset", meaning the team will gather
together so as to form a tight squad and are ready for the next team fight. This will
happen in a matter of seconds as the enemy team respawns at their starting point.*

The example above captures a short period of time in the game *Overwatch* (Blizzard
Entertainment 2016) where each match can last anywhere from 5-20 minutes. Competitions
are played between two teams of six players. Each can use one of 25 different characters that
have its own special abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Games are played on different virtual
arenas known as "maps" which has different objectives; *Control, Assault, Escort*. All game
modes have an area that opposing teams can contest so as to control. Defeating the enemy and
gaining control over this contested area rewards the team with points. In competitive play
teams play a best of three or five matches. *Control* is a pretty straight forward game type,
players start on opposite of a large map and contest a location in the middle of the map. The
first team to hold this location for a set amount of time wins the match. In this game mode
players are rewarded and win only by holding a location point and not by eliminating their
opponents or surviving a set amount of time, although it is much easier to hold the location if
enemies are dead. *Assault* is a variation of Control where one team's objective is to defend the
location and the opposing team tries to assault them and take over the location. These maps
usually have two locations. After the assaulting team wins the first location the defending
team is pushed back to their second location on the map which they now must defend. *Escort*
the payload is a different kind of game mode, it can be referred to as attack or defend. One
team is tasked with first capturing a special object which is stationary in one location on the
map known as the payload. After they do this players must stand close to the payload as it
moves along a predetermined route to the next location. During this move they must defend
their position and the moving payload against the enemy team. The enemy will try to attack
the route the payload travels on so that it does not reach the next location. Both teams can
manipulate the payload by standing close to it – the attacking team moves the payload further
into the map as they stand by it, and the defending team pushes it back to its original starting
point.

After its release in May 2016 *Overwatch* is considered one of the most popular esport
games. It boasts 30 million registered users and Blizzard Entertainments has created its own
global competitive league; *The Overwatch League*, which is set to start during 2018. The
game has a cartoonish visual style. It focuses less on the blood violence of many FPS-

games[16]. *Overwatch* draws on knowledge of the real world (not by much, but a little) as maps are named after some real world countries and locations. It creates a hybrid the real and fictional geolocations. For example, the game map Nepal is set in a snowy high mountain village with adorning statues and buildings that are inspired by cultural architecture of the area. Hollywood is another map that is divided up into different art and architectural styles so as to simulate a movie set surrounded by storage spaces and office buildings.

   I had the good fortune to follow a team of young university students that played *Overwatch* together at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). I will refer to the players by their in-game name (gamer tag, nicknames). The team consisted of a team captain Protoges and team member Izakbirdie, Lootre, Lionpoke, Selectt, and Tildae. Each member had strengths and weaknesses and it is through training and playing that players hone their skills and evolve as players. Each player also has a "hero pool", meaning the number of particular in-game characters that the player is good at playing. Protoges played the characters Reinhardt and Lucio, which have different abilities or roles. Reinhardt operates more as a warrior and tank. He has a shield which negates incoming damage and an ultimate ability that can stun and knockdown opposing characters. Lucio is an acrobatic fast moving support character. His role is to rejuvenate the health of his fellow team mates or to boost them with extra speed so that they more easily traverse the map. His ultimate ability is to give each team member in his close area an external shield that absorbs a set amount of damage for a set amount of time. Each team member chooses their in-game characters and trains to become efficient in abilities of those characters. Their choice must be different from other team members so that the team as a unit can make the maximum use of qualities of the diverse characters the game has to offer. This requires sacrifice and compromise by team members, who have to relinquish certain characters that they may be good in so that others who are good with those particular characters can use them effectively. This is also what players are being trained in, namely the art of corporate strategizing where the group is something larger than the individuals who must adjust and accommodate themselves to its strategic needs and objectives. The training of players is not only the mechanics of mouse and keyboard but also in the art of team work, of corporate belonging, of specialized participation. Later in the thesis I will discuss further the pedagogic training of character-personality that players must undergo to be successful team players. There is a certain art of self being worked on and honed in games, which can be

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[16] This might be a marketing scheme to attract younger players without invoking concerns from parents.

analyzed using Foucault's (1988 and 2007) work on pastoral forms of power and their use of technologies for crafting and transforming the self.

Players train together two to three times a week, often in the afternoons after everyone is done with schoolwork and part-time jobs; such as student housing representative, fast-food restaurant cashier, and other low paying part time jobs. Each training session can last up to four hours effectively minimizing or reconstituting their leisure and study time as students. Several members of the team view this activity as a fun extra job, with the prospect and wish to gain something monetary or physical from it[17]. This is also an excuse for engaging so whole-heartedly in this recreational activity, an excuse that can be given to more critical close relatives or friends who might find these games wasteful and irrelevant. Players compete in small and large tournaments together and seek to win equipment for their computers that they can sell or use, or occasionally a small amount of money. Players need to focus on actual and potential victories so as to minimize costs in resources and time, and so to keep motivation up and encourage team participation. One of the team members, Selectt, informed me that his parents had been reluctant to approve this time consuming activity until he came home and showed them a monetary check and computer equipment with the value of almost a thousand U.S dollars that he had won in a larger tournament. Selectt wants to become a professional esports player. He also wants to finish school so that he has something tangible to fall back on in case esports does not work out. As with other sport activities, esports is seen by some of the working and lower-middle class members as a potential form of social mobility into a well-paid or well-resourced sports culture. The latter is seen to that reward competition as a national value that embodies what had made America truly great. Sport is always more than sport; it embodies competition as a global value for successful capitalism and hence part of the interest of corporations in funding and sponsoring large esport competitions. Esport seeks to tap into this popularization of competitive individualism and corporatism that is invoked by professional sport activities in western societies.

Most players on the team have a focus on school and/or have part time jobs, which sometimes makes it difficult for them to attend every practice. To solve this other players may be substituted – subbed in – players who perhaps did not make the cut during initial tryouts pre-season. Sometimes these other players are friends with members on the team who attend to gain a foothold in more professional games. I often observed matches where team members were unable to attend and other were substituted, and this had a clear impact on the team in

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[17] Tournaments often award players with computer hardware, game culture clothing, and decorative items.

terms of cooperation, levels of performance and inner social dynamics. Players give the following reasons for not being able to attend; family or friendship obligations, work schedules, late university classes, and intense exam weeks. The full team ideally should work well together through players fulfilling their specialized roles-skills. Having new players come into the team can be disrupting in that it breaks down established forms of communications and can create a struggle to assert the correct chain of command. On one weekend the team played a tournament in one of the southern cities in California without their team captain and they lost. This was attributed to a lack of proper communication and bickering amongst players who lacked their established clear chain of command to direct and co-ordinate their specialized roles. After that tournament, the team had multiple discussions about the way they acted that weekend and took steps to try and fix the problem. They included more people in these conversations and shared their experiences in order to gain more opinions on the matter but also so as to socialize potential new players into what is required. Communication to address problems within the team was a constant issue that I observed. More than once I witnessed discussions from five minutes to an hour after a practice session where the team analyzed their plays that day and then decided to train and reflect on their mistakes and misplays by the next session. They saw this as helping them to best evolve together as a team. Co-operation is something that has to be produced through players having detailed knowledge of each other's characters, capacities and expectations. A great deal of what Foucault (2007) has called pastoral work needs to be done in re-aligning people – Their online and offline characters and capacities with each other and with an internal structure of power and co-operation. Individuals must attune and maintain their own desires and capacities with those of other players and the team's overarching needs and objectives. It is a certain pastoral power to produce subservience and complicity along with leadership which is being informally articulated and agreed upon.

A great deal of pastoral work goes into managing and maintaining an esport team. Drawing upon religious history and the birth of the social sciences, Michel Foucault (2007) explains pastoral power as beginning with the idea of a good shepherd that leads, manage, and protect his flock. Foucault (2007) outlines some groundwork for the use of the pastoral power metaphor. It is firstly a governing power; it is based on the symbolic relationship between Gods and humans, working through a king, pharaoh, or holy man. Secondly it is a good power, and Foucault explains that while power takes many forms the pastoral power is inherently a good and caring power. For it is the work of the shepherd to guide his flock to pasture. He is responsible for his flock and his happiness is based in the success of the flock.

Thirdly, pastoral power is an individualizing power, for each member of the flock is an individual with its own wants and needs. The challenge for the shepherd is caring for the flock and the individual member at the same time, without sacrificing one for the other. Self-sacrifice is also an aspect of pastoral power, but I will return to that in my chapter – *Language and Communication*. Foucault (2007) goes in great depth to discuss the evolution and revolution of pastoral relationships in regards to state and church, and speaks of the many complications with using pastoral power in modern political states. However, I have chosen to use the metaphor of the pastoral power relationship, shepherd-flock, to exemplify some governing and co-operational strategies they use to succeed as a team.

The metaphor of the pastoral shepherd has historically taken the form of a god, king, pastor, and now, for us, a team captain for an esport team. The role of team captain and shepherd is not so much to exercise dictating power over his people, but to guide them in times of necessity, advising them, teaching them, and caring for their wellbeing. For esports team captains this is challenging as they are not outside the actions of their team members, but act alongside them, guiding both himself and managing others. The team captain is therefore often named the "shot-caller".

Being able to understand each other and efficiently share information and knowledge is key for the Zotboys, as for all esport teams. They divide roles amongst themselves into a hierarchy with the main roles for communication called "shot-caller" and "target-caller". Players in these roles communicate most during the match and their lines of communication need to be kept free and uncluttered. The shot-caller will decide which character composition the team should play, and will express his or her wish on what particular strategy the team should adopt. This role is often given to the player with the most knowledge of the game, the one with the highest gaming capital in respect to the game. He needs a good memory and must have fast accurate analytical and strategic skills. This person will often be named the team captain. The shot-caller relies on his team members feeding him information on where the enemy are, which characters they play, and what they are doing at any moment. From this the shot-caller needs to rapidly decide what to do. Due to the fast pace of the game he has only a small window to receive information, process it, and put it into play as a strategy. This makes it vital that information can flow rapidly and accurately in sentences so short that they do not take a lot of time to utter yet are perfectly understandable.

The role of the target-caller kicks in when the team engages the enemy. This role will call out over the voice chat as to which of the enemy character the team should now focus their damage on so as to most easily secure a kill. After the first enemy is killed the target-caller

chooses a new victim and ideally will call out that particular character's name and position. In these skirmishes it is important for all players on the team to be intimately familiar with the different locations on the match map and what those locations are called; "Anna by elephant" for example would signify that the enemy character Ana is located near an elephant statue on the *Overwatch* map *Nepal*, and that the target-caller's team mates should go to that location and focus their attack on Ana. During a skirmish with the enemy team the voice chat would be filled with information from one or two target-callers:

> *Lionpoke: "Ana by elephant… Ana one in back… got her, get the Genji on point…*
> *ulting… heal… heal please… Roadhog, get the Roadhog"*
> *Protoges: "call location please"*
> *Lionpoke: "Roadhog by gate"*

Short sentences and fast paced communication, as well as knowledge of the actual lingo make a team more efficient in its game maneuvers and tactics. Knowledge and adaption to the in-game language is acquired through regularly playing the game and internalizing its maps, characters and their possibilities. In-game lingo is usually highly coded and specific to a game though it does draw on the use of broader "gamer language" which also takes time to learn, as does any language or skill. Team mates will continually work with their language to best understand each other; any new short-hand words that surface are explained and used at appropriate times in order to normalize their use. The term "Ana (enemy character) one in back" is a completely useless sentence outside the context of the *Overwatch* game – as it refers to the condition of an enemy's health bar and the location of the enemy amongst the opposing team. A long sentence would be "Ana is in the backline of the opposing team with low health, focus your damage on her". All team members can feed information or request assistance or healing, but within the hierarchy of the group only the shot-caller and target-callers can instruct the team and its specific players which in tirn determines who is going to be healed or die. For learning to be sacrificed for one's team mates is part of the pastoral pedagogic work of the game. Following instructions that co-ordinate team activities important to secure a victory. Failing to do so can lead to potential or actual losses that demotivate other team members. It can throw them of balance and render them less effective by problematizing their desire to co-operate with those that do not follow instructions. A successful team depends on successful relations built on shared expectations with regard to internal power

relations of respect and obedience. With language and communication in mind the next part of the thesis explores these topics in depth.

Part II

Chapter 4

Language and Communication

"[T]he meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein 2001 [1953]: 18)

The introductory quote is taken from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (2001) where he philosophizes about how to understand language and more importantly, everyday language. Wittgenstein suggests that words have meaning within their language community, and that languages evolve as some words become obsolete or change into something new, or new words are created that provides entirely new meaning. He postulated that the rigid concept of dictionary definitions can fall short as humans will find reasons to exclude or include a word, making rigid rules useless for determining what is or isn't within the meanings of a word. Wittgenstein instead suggested that language communities operate with what he describes as a "cluster of concepts", with words and their meanings creating a large cobweb of opinion. At the center of the cobweb can be certain "paradigm concepts" that all language users in the community agree are the meaning of a word, yet there can also be "fringe concepts" in the outer threads of the cobweb that are subjectively included or excluded. Words therefore exist within what Wittgenstein suggests are "family resemblances", something or someone falls within this definition of a word because it shares certain likenesses to some of the meanings.

To give some examples and a most fortunate one as well; the word "sport" can invoke a cluster of concepts. At first listeners will probably think of the paradigm concept truest for their language community – for Norwegians this would be football, but for Americans it might mean baseball or basketball. Each of these language communities think of a word and its meaning within a cluster of concepts. But if I were to say "esport", this concept would be excluded by some in the language community as it does not fulfill their view of what constitutes a sport. For others the concept of "esport" fits right at home in the center, it participates in the paradigm concept. The cluster of concepts and their subjective understandings of the word "esport" can be different for different persons who may be part of the different language communities depending on whether they play computer games or not. The same is true of the word "game" – it creates a cluster of concepts for different language communities, e.g. children in schoolyards, gamblers is a casino, football players. They fill this

word with a cluster of concepts that they feel fit or do not fit. This creates a consensus with the word having different core meanings or different paradigm concepts for those who play or watch different games such as *Monopoly*, *Jenga*, football, or hockey. Certain meanings, concepts or activities are pushed out of the center of a word to become fringe concepts – such as games involving staring contests or who can hold their breath the longest. From the outer fringe concepts to the inner most paradigm cases there are a multitude of concepts or possibilities that can belong within the cluster, which can earn their place because the family resemblances they share with the paradigm concepts.

Words can serve multiple purposes. One word within a language community can mean a large variety of things, and the creation of new languages and their communities can take older concepts of words and reuse them for their own purposes. This holds true for many types of sports and arts, academic disciplines and subcultures who use a specialized language to communicate amongst themselves. Language has become an essential part of team focused esports. Any player must be socialized into understanding and using an intricate and specific language when playing competitive video-games. Lisa Ann Newon (2014) suggests that the language used in the *League of Legends* (LoL) community can be viewed as a speech *register*; which is described as "… a variety of language used in a particular social setting, or for a particular purpose" (:86). This language is a variant of the larger gaming culture's use of language that is created and shared by all players but now adapted within the specific game community. The collection of words put forth by Newon (2014) as a LoL "lexicon" (page 87-103) consists of some words that are found in the overarching gaming culture, and some words that are specific to the LoL community. Newon's lexicon is extensive and is divided into categories such as "words for game roles" (ibid: 90) and "words for locations/status" (:92-93). Considering my fieldwork spanned two games and dipped into multiple communities across different universities I will limit myself to overarching words and some game specific ones. The two teams I observed shared a similar gamer language, a common core, which was applied to both games. Indeed this game specific language was created partly by the game developers and then worked upon by players as they practiced and competed. The lexicon created by game developers involves an instrumental use of language that help game users economically transmit and understand basic terms when they play the game. These may vary from spatially specific words such as "friendly core" or "friendly spawn point", to character specific words such as "heroic" or "ultimate" (both meaning a characters

best ability). The games are different in many aspects and so sometimes the language connected to those games can vary.

I separate commonly used words into different categories, such as *Commanding*, *Informative*, and *Status Effects*. The informative words used by friendly players are often created by game developers and adapted by players. The words are often spoken by game developers when they advertise their games to the public. These words are not just superficial superlatives that are used by game developers to market-hype their game to a wider audience though they can have that function. Words are learnt and internalized by players because they also function to transmit bits of knowledge between them. Players use the words to navigate through the game and to organize their activities in order to succeed. Two important game words are "cooldown" and "ultimate", abbreviated to "CD" and "Ult". An ultimate ability allows the character that a player controls to either greatly damage the enemy team, temporarily disable the enemy, greatly shield or heal the friendly team, or boost a friendly character with speed, damage output, or immortality. Every new character created often has its own unique ability that corresponds with the role and meaning of the character and with it follows new language and information. The challenges to developers of games is to create something new or work upon something established without jeopardizing the balance or roles and functions between characters

Here is some of the short hand words used in the two games I studied.

Informative Words	Lexical meaning
Cooldown	The time it takes for an ability to be ready for use again
Trade	A player on each team is eliminated
Ultimate	An ability with a strong impact on the game and its mechanics, has a long cooldown
Spawn Point	Where the characters materialize on the map
Respawn	Coming back to life after death, either on map through ability use, or at spawn point.
Skill Shot	An ability that requires players to skillfully aim and time correctly in order to hit an enemy
Objective	The goal or winning action of the map and game.

The term "trade" implies the willingness to be eliminated in a skirmish against the other team. It is risky business to trade willingly. The term often describes a skirmish where both sides lose the same number. For the trade to be successful it is advantageous if the lives traded

are unequal. Removing a key player on the enemy team against a not essential player on your own is considered a good trade. The team expects players to be willing to play the role of an expendable character, to sacrifice themselves for the team. Such practices go against the stereotype of computer games generating heroic forms of individualism. They do this, but this is also counterbalanced by the need to train and produce altruistic unselfish players who voluntarily subordinate themselves and realize themselves through collective objectives. Eliminating the opposing team's Tank and Healer, whilst losing an Off-Tank and a DPS, can be considered a good trade. Your team is left with a defensive frontline (the Tank) and a supporting backline (the Healer), fighting against an unprotected enemy team that can't rejuvenate lost health. The eliminated players are returned to their respective spawn point and await the respawn timer to count down to zero. Here Foucault's (2007) pastoral analysis of techniques and practices for forming subjects and subjectivities is relevant for esports with its strategies of trades and the need to respawn. In an esport team you become both the shepherd and the sheep – you need to be willing to sacrifice yourself for the team, and allow others to sacrifice themselves for you without being directed by a higher pastoral carer. There is a secular Protestant project in this democratization of the shepherd. The religious history behind Foucault's pastoral approach creates a paradox for the shepherd. If he sacrifices himself for his flock, the flock would be left defenseless and unguided, though through the promise of resurrection the paradox is void and an acceptable reason for dying for the flock appears. This is told and implemented through the story of Jesus Christ dying for his people, then resurrecting after an instance of time, three days. For without the promise of resurrection the loss of life weighs more heavily. Resurrection gives it renewable value, it can be traded if this life that is granted a second chance, or third, or fourth chance. For team members this becomes the economy of battle for them, they trade their lives to secure a victory for their team. This creates collective solidarity, a set of shared debts that allows the team to strengthen their bonds to each other and to value each other even more.

Commanding words describe actions made by friendly or enemy players on the map. The small list below is frequently used words that serve to set the pace of skirmishes on a map. At the start of the match the team moves as one towards the objective and the shot-caller will call the play for the first fight.

Commanding Words	Lexical Meaning
Engage	Attack the enemy team at this position
Dive	Quickly advance and attack the enemy team
Go In	Attack

Go For (specific character name)	Attack this character (name)
Poke	Carefully engage, damage when you are able but do not engage fully
Disengage	Stop attacking and retreat to safety
Back/Back out	Stop attacking and retreat to safety
Reengage	(After Disengaging) Restart the attack on the enemy team
Hold	Wait in this position, hold position here.

Izakbirdie: "ok, let's focus".

Lionpoke: "alright alright… we're going straight to point then dive in, to point."

Izakbirdie: "yeah, that sounds better, we usually go white room."

Lionpoke's above short sentences command the friendly team to traverse the map quickly to the objective, the point, and then attack the enemy. A shot-caller will use different words to qualify and specify the nature of attack to signify the level and means of engagement from team members. Using the word "poke" commands the DPS characters on the team to move forward and damage the enemy team bit by bit, effectively slowing down their advance. This strategy tries to get the enemy team to spend its limited resources on rejuvenating the health to their own members or forcing them to change directions and retreat. The poking can also move the enemy team into a disadvantageous position and make it easier for the friendly team to attack them. "Engage" and "go in" are the general commands given for a team attack when the team is in a healthy state and comfortable position. The command "dive" is often used when one team is disadvantaged in their positioning, having to rely on overwhelming or surprising the enemy team and pushing them out of positions or eliminating them in order to secure an objective. Commanding the team to "disengage" or "back out" makes the players break off any attacks and retreat to a safer position, often this tactic is used when the team has suffered casualties and is now outnumbered in the skirmish. It is also a tactic used to set up a "reengage", lulling the enemy team into believing they are winning a skirmish then attacking them again when they are in exposed positions. The arts of guerilla warfare have been incorporated into computer games. The use of commanding words by shot-callers is often followed by reference to the status of abilities of one's own team members and of the enemy.

Below is a short list of *Status Effect* words often introduced by game developers.

Status Effects	Lexical Meaning
Slept	A character is hit by a sleeping ability and incapacitated until the effect wears off or the character receives damage or help.

Stunned	A character is incapacitated for a short time after being hit by stun ability.
Knocked down	A character is knocked to the ground and is unable to control his or her character until their character gets back on its feet.
Booped	A character is forcefully displaced away from a character that casts a displacing ability.
Silenced	Characters are unable to use their abilities for a short time
Hooked	A character is incapacitated and displaced towards the casting character's "Hook" ability.
Full	A character has full life
Half	A character has half of its health remaining
Low	A character is close to death
One	A character has one remaining health bar
Lit	A character is close to death and must be finished off
Dead	A character has no remaining health and is removed from the board, to have to wait a period of time to come back to life in the respawn area.
Healed	A character's health is rejuvenated
Speeding	A character boosts the speed of the friendly team

Status effects are temporary alterations to characters that help or hinder a character. They are useful tools that control the outcome of a battle – it bends the game mechanics[18] and affects the interaction between player and character, some positive, but most negative. Being "booped" or "hooked" removes the control you have over your character's position and moves it either away or towards an enemy character. On *Overwatch* maps with a lot of air space and other places to push characters off the map it is normal to see characters with abilities that knock-back or "boop" enemy characters. It can make for some hilarious moments as you see an enemy character flying off the maps border into the abyss. Being "hooked" occurs when a character that has a metal chain meat hook or something similar throws it at an enemy – if the hook connects, that character is dragged forcefully to the hook casting character. Displacing and immobilizing enemies is often the goal, so they are "slept", "stunned" or "knocked down" so as to remove an enemy from play for a short amount of time. Being "slept" is different from "stunned" and "knocked down" as any damage the target

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[18] Game mechanics can be described as how the player interacts with the game. "While the rules can dictate how the game works, the mechanics refer to the rules that establish how the player participates in the game" (Fernández-Vara 2015: 98). In other words, how the character runs, jumps, fights, and so on.

receives during the sleep will wake it up and give full control back to the player of the sleeping character. However it still serves the same purpose, it eliminates temporarily the control that an enemy player has over his or her character.

Boosting friendly characters are positive status effects and usually consist of increasing the speed, giving extra health or shields, or augmenting the damage output of a friendly team member. The boost may become a constant aspect of a character and is referred to as a "passive ability" that has a low effect. Boosts may also be activated manually to reward friendly characters and this produces a larger boost that lasts a short amount of time. Though not long, these effects can greatly affect the outcome of a battle and are usually implemented as Ultimate abilities that require the player to use it judiciously at the appropriate time instead of randomly activating it. The ultimate abilities do not get reset when you die, but are earned through damaging opposing players or from a natural cooldown time. By only having access to it a few times throughout a match it has greater value than characters other abilities. Astute timing and strategizing are needed when using such ultimate abilities and this discerning economical use of any ability is continuously worked upon by esports players so as to become more skilled players. To be an effective member of a team requires not just fast mechanical muscular uses of a mouse and keyboard, but also players who are shrewd and economize and share their resources.

The health of a character is measured numerically by a health bar and there is a certain mathematization of reality transmitted by the economy of the game. Terms like "full", "half", "low", "one", "lit", and "dead" are all ways of describing a character's health. These terms are mostly self-explanatory. Communication chatter is rarely about friendly characters with their health bar filled up; it serves no purpose for team members to note this. After engaging an enemy in battle and applying damage to them, the health bar will be drained bringing the characters close to death. It is then that players get excited and go from talking to shouting out "Genji low, Genji one, dead, Ana half, Ana lit, she's dead". Describing the decline of the enemy character's health bar serves to focus team members on eliminating that character. It allows them to move from one target to the next target in rapid succession until all enemies have been eliminated or the player shouting has himself been eliminated.

The language of gamers is created, maintained and evolved by its constant use in its different region where different strategies can generate its own lexicon.[19] Though the program and much of the lexicon is created by game developers, they often study and modify the game according to how it starts to be played in ways they had not anticipated. There is creativity in gamer's use of game strategies that is part of the shared pleasure of the game. The lexicon used in the games I studied also creates a social sphere. Not knowing and understanding this language shuts individuals out of the social sphere. However this is not in the interest of game developers who require quick learning and accessible knowledge to market their games. They use their pre-lease promotions to disseminate and teach the game's lexicon so potential customers are not deterred or intimidated by the need to immerse themselves in a specialized detailed vocabulary. Yet this is what gamers need and so there is a tension between what developers require, namely, an accessible language and what gamers produce, namely, a condensed cryptic code.

In the next section of this chapter I will expand upon the use of language by focusing on gamers understanding of space and movement in relation to the different viewpoints of character and player.

4.1: Spatial Language

"Space is an abstract term for a complex set of ideas. People of different cultures differ in how they divide up their world, assign value to its parts, and measure them… Certain cross-cultural similarities exist, and they rest ultimately on the fact that man is the measure of all things" (Tuan 2011: 34)

Yi-Fu Tuan (2011) suggests that space is an experience humans learn through the interaction of the senses available to them and through their interaction with each other. Through sight, touch, sound, movement and shared cultural constructs, individuals gather information and create maps of their world. Tuan writes "space is experienced directly as

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[19] Online play is often separated into different regions – most often; North America, Europe, Korea (or Asia), and China. When a game experiences increasing popularity game developers often extend their reach to new regions in order to supply players there with stable servers, good connection to each other, and having them play with people from their own regions. This creates regional strategies which are showcased in world championships. Different regions find different strategies and tactics to implement, making competitive play evolve.

having room in which to move" (ibid: 12). It is here we will take our step into the moving experience of virtual space. Tuan's suggestion that humans use senses to conceive of space in the real world is also applicable to the virtual. Video game users enter or view a fictional body of an avatar or character bound to its own bodily limitations that are different from the user's body and perceptual field. Here in the virtual the same principles are made to apply. The character occupies space, and can move, see, and hear its environmental cues in order to understand its position. However the human user cannot feel the touch of ground beneath the character's feet, or the air across its face. It is an imagined touch that alerts the human user of the virtual space felt by the virtual character. Game developers spend a lot of time to create the sensation of movements and depending on which game they produce game developers award the human user with different ways of seeing the character they are playing and its perspectives. Some characters are seen from above depicting a view of the character from the outside; this is an out of body point of view that allows larger control of the environmental cues offered to the overseeing player. Other game perspectives are placed inside the body of the character, seeing the virtual world through the eyes of the character. Some games allows you to switch between these points of view, and even gives you complete control to rotate and move the field of vision in three-dimensions.

"Where are they? Call targets and locations" – Protoges

The language of *where* something or someone was located differed depending on which game was being played. In *Overwatch*, the player sees the landscape and world from their character's eyes, and players are not accompanied by a small map in any corner of the screen to aid them in their spatial awareness. My interlocutors used spatial terms such as "on", "there", "here", "by", "near", "up" "down", "in front", "behind"; and they used named locations (see below) such as "point", "car", "generator", "bridge", "café" which were static locations within the game. They also shorten phrases with spatial information; "Diva by car", "McCree behind gate", "Pharah is sky", "Genji on point". Players learn to use this spatial language to inform each other of their position or the position of their enemies. They create a shared topography of socially important sites, a collective memory of place names for positioning themselves.

Levinson uses the work of Talmy (1983 in Levinson 1996: 359) to describe analyze how "the thing to be located is the "figure" and the thing with respect to which it is to be located is called the "ground"". Levinson translates a bit and identifies the ground as a possible "speaker" (ibid); e.g. I am the speaker, and the figure is in front of me; I, the speaker, am in

this case also the *deictic center* from which the spatial language revolves, but the deictic center may also be something else such as a table or a car. It can be understood as where is one thing is in relation to another, and this one thing can be a subject viewed from different angles and heights. For the *Overwatch* players, the subjective field of vision from their individual character is usually their deictic center; in addition to each player having their personal deictic center, there existed collective deictic centers known as "their part of the map", or the team as a collective outlook. This does not mean that all players play one character, but that each individual player and its character are in close proximity of each other, forming a visible grouping, sharing a perspective.

As with many types of competitive play opposing teams start on opposite parts of the game map. This is staged by game developers for the purpose of familiarity with traditional sports competitions and it creates a natural direction for players to move in order to find both objective and enemies. This home starting side is known as the *spawn* area for the team, if they die they will resurrect in the spawn area after a set amount of time[20]. It is a regenerative space of belonging. As the team begins to traverse, friendly players share a collective direction in which to move. They move together as a group with the shared knowledge of safety that there is nothing behind them and that danger is in front of them. This creates a collective field of vision and the group functions as a moving shared deictic center. From this group center different players use space indication language such as "to the left", "to the right", "up", "over", "sky", "down", "our", "their", "frontline", "backline", "dive", "back" to describe the location of friendly or enemy characters in relation to the team as a deictic center. The spatial language used is a mix of what Stephen Levinson in his article *Language and Space* (1996) calls "No coordinate systems" and "coordinate systems or frames of reference" (Levinson 1996: 359). When it comes to the latter, Levinson divides them into; (a) horizontal and (b) vertical (ibid: 359). He then splits horizontal frames of reference into three; (1) intrinsic, (2) relative, (3) absolute.

"The English intrinsic system can be thought of as a six-sided box-like armature…
the cubic armature is oriented by gravity, so the *top* side of an object is uppermost,
and the *bottom* the underneath facet" (Levinson 1996: 367).

We view the attributes of an object as having six sides; front (in front of), back (behind/in the back), sides (left, right), top, and bottom. Considering a computer screen is flat – it is

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[20] If the game has a character that can bring other characters back to life, the eliminated character does not return to the spawn area, but rather rises from the grave at the position they died.

natural for users to seek to recreate such intrinsic three dimensional frames of reference during games. During play *Overwatch* players would at times use themselves and their collective viewpoint as the "object"; describing positions of enemy team members by saying "Hog to the left"; meaning the enemy character Roadhog was in the left area of their view. "Soldier top left"; utilizing two sides of the intrinsic frame of reference, top and left, to locate the enemy character Soldier 76 at the top left corner of the collective view area. "Ana in their backline" applies the deictic center to the enemy and describes the enemy team with a front and a back – and the character Ana is in the back of the enemy group. "Go far right, far right" commands all friendly team members to move as far as possible to the right on the map. The natural way of communicating positioning and enemy characters is to use the six-sided field of vision employed by individual persons in everyday life, but this can sometimes leads to confusion when team members are outside the perceived collective field of vision and thus fail to recognize it. Such confusions are why a team will often try to stick to named locations and their intrinsic frames of references.

Named locations are virtual or real geographical places that are recognizable by others within a social or cultural group. These locations can also invoke information that informs a person how the location should be understood and approached. For some cultural groups, such as the Western Apaches, described by Keith H. Basso (1988) in his classic article *"Speaking with Names"*; named locations carry memories of their ancestors that serve to recall a history of a place involving stories of their ancestors at a particular location. Basso (1988) outlines the complexity of the Apache as they "speak with names" in condensed ways so as to navigate social encounters with each other. Particular named locations carry a history and often a moral story that is relevant to current concerns and conversations. Basso analyzes a conversation between his interlocutors, Louise, Emily, Lola, and Robert. Louise is concerned that her younger brother is sick and need medical help after not acting appropriately in the landscape. Lola responds by offering a named location that contain a story relevant to her predicament. All four interlocutors sit in silence as they each recall and experience the story of this named location, which involved a young girl who was careless and impatient while harvesting wood for her grandmother. The young girl fell whilst taking a shortcut and was bitten by a snake. She became sick but later recovered. The morality of the story focuses on the importance of patience, respect and understanding of named areas that can become dangerous to those who refuse to learn the stories of the terrain they inhabit. In everyday conversations, the story is not narrated in full but invoked by reference to the names locations

where the story took place. These verbal exchanges are compressed and culturally specific. To understand them, an individual needs to be a member of the social group and its background culture. With the Apache, place means to serve to formulate a picture in the mind, a narrative pictured shared by the linguistic community. Basso formulated three distinct ways which;

> "[M]embers of the local community involve themselves with their geographical landscape in at least three distinct ways. First, they may simply observe the landscape, attending for reasons of their own to aspects of its appearance and to sundry goings-on within it. Second, they may utilize the landscape, engaging in a broad range of physical activities that… may leave portions of the landscape visibly modified. Third, native people may communicate about the landscape, formulating descriptions and other representations of it that they share the course of social gatherings." (Basso 1988: 100)

The third point Basso makes here is that members of a community give meaning to landscape locations that indicate how to understand and respond to that location, that is, how to navigate through their shared terrain. It is here we move over to the virtual landscape as video game users create compressed names and meaning for locations in their games. These place names inform players of where to go and how to position themselves, and what dangers and safety the location offers. These places also carry a collective memory of previous games and advantages of capturing them or the dangers of approaching them.

Often during my fieldwork interlocutors would discuss the positive and negative aspects of holding a location in the virtual landscape on the basis of their history and collective memory of each other's experiences and strategies. Particular places invoked a memory of shared strategies, invoked a common way of looking at the landscape, themselves and their opponents. For them, these discussions arise from the concept of control of sight in the game. Not control of one's character, but the need to control more vision than the enemy. At the same time as members seek to share a field of vision by controlling locations in the game that block the vision of the opposing team. The deep strategy of calling out locations to navigate to and hold was pervasive throughout the match. Some maps in both *Overwatch* and *Heroes of the Storm* provide areas of cover, where team members can hide and ambush opposing players that are moving into that area. However these same areas are very dangerous and are often avoided unless the team is sure that they are able to gain control of them first. For esports players these named locations carry with them not only the description of *where* it is, but also

carry the shared knowledge of potential dangers and safety a location might have and the opportunities available if they repeat previous tactical uses of that place.

In *Overwatch*, players traverse the map in much quicker fashion than other games, and this gives an edge to those teams that move faster, or knows better which locations are good or bad. Thus players name as many places so as to navigate together where they should be, and describe where the enemy is.

> *"Are you on me? Ok. Green room, Security, SUV, Car, Backstairs, Lower, Orange, Front stairs, Lights, Generator, Gate, Point, Upper Café, Lower Cafe…" Protoges is running and jumping around the map 'Hollywood' as he calls out the names of locations on the map.*

Protoges invited Lionpoke to a custom game. The purpose was to teach Lionpoke the established names for all the named locations on the map *Hollywood*. Lionpoke was using the spectator tool in *Overwatch* to view the game world through the eyes of Protoges character. Lionpoke was taking over as team captain and shot-caller. This required him to increase his knowledge about maps and their named locations. As team captain it is expected that you are able to communicate the collective memory of locations and equally important play correctly around them with your team. The run through the map takes about 4 minutes and has 68 locations to remember. Some locations use the same words as others because they are visually the same, but are located at different places on the game map. Other targets are moving such as a payload that goes from point to point. Named locations and moving targets can be given more specifying attributes; so "car" becomes "back-car" or "front-car"; Café becomes "upper café" or "lower café".

The location names are different for every *Overwatch* map and thus good shared memories are required. There is no mini-map on screen to utilize; one can find them online at *Overwatch*'s homepage, though it serves no purpose to have them available when playing. The easiest and quickest way is to learn the map and its locations by travelling through it using a character. A normal thing to witness was players starting custom games and using a highly mobile character to get to know a new map. Players on a team will do this together and create agreed short hand names for locations so they all are familiar with the ins and outs of the map. One of my interlocutors mentioned how his team usually watched professional teams create location calls and then imitated them. This gives the work of naming and creating more specific usable maps to others. He also informed me that when the need arose they also

created their own location calls if there was not an established name or if they wanted to hide strategies from opposing teams.

In the game *Heroes of the Storm*, each player views the battleground from above like a chess board. This field of vision is called "the camera" and allows players to move their own field of vision around the battleground to view other locations than just their character's perspective. Players are also accompanied by a "mini-map" when they are playing. This is located on the bottom right hand side of their computer screen. This map shows a smaller version of the battleground and can be interacted with to move the camera around faster. By clicking on that area of the mini-map you move the player's camera to that location. The mini-map follows an Absolute frame of reference – the top of the map being north, bottom south; however, players do not refer to the map's edges as North, East, South, West – but rather Top, Bottom, Left, Right, and Mid. This creates easily specifiable frames of reference, with the map having no front or back, or three dimensions and being flat and seen from above. *Heroes of the Storm* developers used spatial terms from other games and create a few new one so as to have an efficient easily accessible language that would not deter new player consumers. The map is divided in two balanced and equal sides, "our side" (the allies) and "their side" (the enemies), the lanes (roads) at the "Top" (upper part of map), "Mid" (middle part of map), and "Bot" (Bottom, lower part of map).

> *"Rotate down please, no need to stay top" – Support says casually during a match. It's Wednesday evening, mid-March, the sun has been down for an hour or two. I am sitting in my bed with the computer on my lap, notebook to my right a bag of chips to my left, watching the 'Heroes of the Storm' team scrim another team. The games are often very hard for them to win, or very easy. Today is a very easy one. They work on communication, strategy, and execution against their opponents, eliminating an enemy by picking it off right before the objective spawn; getting their bruiser camp after the objective is done. Normal procedures in their game plan… They win; the team says "gg" to each other and leaves the game and Discord channel… I thank them for allowing me to watch, and set up a meeting with Tank for the next day.*

When my HOTS interlocutors played matches they would use different spatial language at different times. When looking at a map as individuals they used absolute frames of reference, but if they were gathered as a team (in relative close proximity in game; all five players could be seen on screen) they switched to intrinsic. The team was now a deictic unit, with a front which faced the enemy's side of the map, and a back which was the area towards the friendly

side of the map; however, the sides were not left and right, but *flank*. These flanks were just referred to as flanks, players who knew the game instantly understood from which flank enemies were likely to come from when listening to messages like "they are flanking". Verbal sentences combined with visuals clues would alert my interlocutors that the flanking enemy would probably come from the side where there was fog of war.

At other times, the team would change their entire language to the "No coordinate System", which Levinson splits into (a) prototype deixis, (b) contiguity: "topological" relations, (c) named locations (Levinson 1996: 359). I often heard someone say "come here" or "I am here", using *central deixis* (author's italic) (ibid: 360) to entice the team members to (a) use the mini-map to locate the ally requesting that they move towards him, or (b) moving the cursor around on the screen, dragging the field of vision camera around the battleground. Another feature players can use is the "ping"; a virtual needle so to speak that you place in the mini-map and it makes a sharp "ping" noise and blinks with colored light[21], thus highlighting an area. This ping is an extension of what Newon (2011: 150 in Jiang 2015: 17) termed the *deictic stomp*[22]; players would say "here" and use the ping function to create a deictic center. The usage of "here" and "there" are possible in HOTS due to the overview a player has with the camera position and mini-map, which means that spatial language is game specific and merits more research on how spatial language and spatial awareness are shared amongst players.

> *The following day I am yet again sitting in the sun enjoying a meal and talking casually with Tank. He's a young man, with a quick wit and a sharp tongue. We were discussing a previous match they had where they struggled in the beginning off the match. "So Support was like – "Tank, you can't slide out of them, you have to slide all the way into them". So I just asked, "You're giving me permission to go to Africa?" and they went "yeah, just go to Africa", and I was like "oh baby"… So I just went to Africa every time and we just murdered them… The term "off in Africa" was used humorously to signify a player being so far out of position that he was on another continent.*

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[21] Different colors have different meaning and are accompanied by a symbol. The "on my way" ping displays a green light with a foot as its symbol, "defend" has a purple light and has the symbol of a blank medieval shield, "Assist" symbols a hand and displays the color yellow, and the "warning" ping is bright orange with an exclamation mark inside a nabla (reversed triangular symbol).

[22] A Deictic Stomp is a term to describe a player who is showing another player a spatial location by jumping up and down at it.

The term "off in Africa" above, though arguably inappropriate, is a good example of how positioning plays a major role when the opposing teams engage each other. I only heard the term amongst my interlocutors, and it was described as "being way out of position", meaning that your character's placement is in a non-preferable spot, vulnerable to damage and elimination from the enemy. Positioning is communicated more by visual than verbal cues. You are expected to know your position before even entering a match, making it hard for new players to jump into the game. However this is similar to other games – for example, in football and you're in the back close to your own goals you will defend and support the forward players, and if you play chess you will learn the moves of your chess pieces and how to position them before starting the match. The position you take must be correct in relation to enemy pieces and their roles. Different roles have different presumed positions and tactics. A support role involves often being in the backline of the allied team; damage dealing roles are often on the flanks or in the enemy backline; and the tank/warrior role is supposed to be on the frontline of the allied team to scare away dangerous enemy characters that are trying to flank. This creates two main positions, front and back. It also creates many different strategies for players to use depending on which characters they play. In *Overwatch* there is a character called Roadhog which functions like the character Stitches in *Heroes of the Storm* – both characters have an ability that throws a virtual chain towards an enemy, if it connects it pulls the enemy towards the character effecting the enemy's positioning, making the enemy vulnerable to damage from allies. Positioning and communicating one's position is one of the most important features in an esport competition as any steps outside a safe position are in danger of being punished by opposing players. Language is important to co-ordinate activities and to create a collegiate esport team.

Esport players and gamers have created and evolved a language special to their linguistic community, a language that only makes sense for them and within the sphere of gaming. The need to communicate in a fast paced esport is important to them, and studying this language in greater depth can be of interest for linguistic scholars and ethnographers of language and meaning. The use of a language that is specific to a community involves the community creating social rules for shared activity. Understanding and navigating those social rules are necessary for any gamer interested in joining and staying within the community. In the next chapter I will look at how groups play together and I will discuss some concepts/terms that are often the used when players are unable to control emotions or when faced with difficult situations.

Chapter 5

Goffman in the Future

Erving Goffman (1961:43) suggested that "gaming is often fun", it brings people together to enjoy an activity or a challenge. Games are found in all cultures and countries, at every step in the social ladder and exist ambiguously both in the real and the unreal, making the real unreal and the unreal real. Games may be played with family, friends, strangers or as is common to say in the online sphere; *randoms*. Games can be celebrated in public or hidden away in secret private corners. In his chapter *Fun in games*, Goffman (1961) analyses the *focused gathering*; an activity where two or more people engage in either a cooperative or competitive game of skill or chance[23]. He treats a gaming encounter as a social encounter[24], which for Goffman (1961 and 1990) are face-to-face engagements where persons project and negotiate their imagined self against other persons imagined self. All social encounters involve invoking and negotiating a hierarchy of social norms and rules, some of which are highly specific to particular socio-cultural contexts. Computer games require Goffman's understanding of focused gatherings and social encounters to be expanded to include non-face-to-face engagements such as online team based competitive video gaming. Social relations are being reinvented and remediated by new technologies which are part of the popularity modern new computer technologies and their gaming environments.

In modern society, new forms of communication mediate and indeed create social encounters through technological media such as smartphones and computers. This means that social interactions are no longer restricted to face-to-face events. Social encounters can occur in a direct electronically mediated ways through video calls and also be mediated by online personas in a video game or chat forum where individuals may discuss books, movies, or world events but through a fictional character. Using this online persona, a woman may now personify or project herself as a man, or an individual may assume another ethnic-racial identity, age group or personality – or they may simply be themselves as they understand themselves. Using an online icon-figure or persona, a new social encounter is now possible outside of an actual body and its social-cultural constraints for identity can be corporeally displaced into virtual worlds and maps. There individuals can pursue new collective activities

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[23] Examples include but are not limited to: "a game of cards, a couple dancing, lovemaking…" (Goffman 1961: 18)

[24] Excluding delayed exchanges such as a pen pal games of chess or *Warhammer* (Games Workshop 1983).

together. They can use technology to enjoy spending time together doing "something" with other people in other alternative social worlds. The focused gathering of Goffman is re-territorialized into new socio-cultural possibilities for individuals and their collective participation in meaningful shared activities.

There are many different online games and arenas where an individual can become an actor who can meet new people or perhaps more accurately other actors. The persons and contexts that are encountered can be restricted or controlled and cannot be readily transferred into other types of encounters, such as offline or alternative online encounters. Like other forms of sports, esports provides new students with the ability to join collegiate teams, and through their participation in the new virtual world that encompasses them, they become an actual community that can provide socialization and emergent friendships. Students who come from diverse schools, regions, social classes and ethnic groups can find shared goals, meanings, activities, and interests that binds them through their shared virtual worlds. These possibilities give virtual worlds a utopian quality that to some extent disguises the limits of sociality that are in play. Nevertheless, many of my interlocutors stated that making new friends and socializing was their main reason for joining a collegiate team, followed by doing something they enjoyed and the possibility to win valuable prizes.

Many persons in the teams that I followed during the spring of 2017 did not meet in person, except on rare occasions. One of my interlocutors, Tildae, explained to me that he separated his friends into online and offline, not real and unreal. The people he had connected with while playing games online had become an important social circle in his life. He "grew up" playing the first-person shooter (fps) game *Team Fortress 2*[25] (Valve Corporation 2007) and had connected with many different people of all ages, genders, and ethnicities, and he valued many of the close friendships he had attained during his 14,000 hours of play time. He enjoyed the social online community they had built up together, yet he did not want to meet all of them in real life, partly because of the age difference between him and his co-players. This distance between the offline and online had shrunk during his time at university, where he enjoys spending time with his current collegiate *Overwatch* team.

The relationship, offline and online friendships can also work the other way with some interlocutors telling of how they had transitioned into the online games during their early teenage years because of a desire to consolidate existing offline ties. Most interlocutors told of

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[25] http://www.teamfortress.com

how as teenagers and young adults they had made friends with people in different parts of the world and of different ages that were grounded exclusively in the bond of just playing the game itself. But for others, their love for games and competition became an entry way to new social arenas and events. For games also provide people with ways of evaluating character, moral values, discipline, and kindness and it is these things that are also being exchanged in games as in all social encounters as Goffman rightly noted.

Goffman's idea of *flood outs* (1961: 55; 1956), which are emotional outbursts also occur in online spaces. It is an explicit topic of conversation in the comment sections of social media spaces, where it is often penned by anonymous or pseudo named users. In online games where there are social tools such as chat boxes or voice communication, negative flooding out is referred to as *tilting* or *flaming*[26]. Goffman analyzes embarrassment and emotional outbursts or *flood outs* found in focused gatherings.

In social encounters individuals will ideally project their desired definition of themselves and respect the other party's projection as well. As Goffman (1956: 264) notes "embarrassment occurs whenever an individual is felt to have projected incompatible definitions of himself before those present". In a face-to-face encounter the person who breaks their definition is susceptible to embarrassment and will show signs of being flustered, such as blushing, averting eyes, hiding their face in their hands or loose clothes, breaking into high- or low pitched voices, sweating, blinking, or in extreme cases of embarrassment flood out (become highly emotional) or excuse themselves from the situation. These are but some of the cues that one might use to show or be shown embarrassment. This can be rectified in numerous ways by the person who portrays the embarrassment or by those in his/her presence. People in online game encounters rely on audible and technologically mediated visual cues to detect embarrassment and flood outs. Sometimes a team will try to make their opposing team flood out in order to gain the upper hand, so as to disorient them, disrupt their concentration and priorities, and to fragment their collegiate forms of communication. Before we dive into the different mechanics and tools used by players to disrupt the enemy and secure themselves I want to explore the different words and terms that my interlocutors used to describe and understand these – "disruptions" in smooth flowing social encounters.

Embarrassment during a game is viewed differently from related social phenomena such as tilting or flaming. More often than not, embarrassment was the consequence of a player's

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[26] My findings suggest that the act of being toxic is a person's recurring behavior in social encounters and is therefore not a one-time break in that person's projected self.

poor choice of action in the game, and not so much the player's social performance with his team mates though the two are related. It could be due to a bad choice for engaging the enemy, missing certain opportunities, falling off the map, getting caught out of position, or a missed click on the keyboard that lost a vital cooldown. Such actions can cause a player to experience embarrassment which includes being at the mercy of his or her team members reactions, their teasing, humor, anger and even silence. The player's fellow team members can acknowledge the situation in explicit ways or ignore it and continue as if nothing happened[27]. Their choice to respond can determine team membership solidarity and hierarchy. Such choices are partly products of the internal power structures in the team and are an informal way of reproducing them or perhaps transforming them, choosing new leaders, demoting old leaders.

Who becomes embarrassed is also connected to what role a player has on the team. In particular, shot-callers and target-callers are more easily embarrassed for they are the center of attention of their team members. They need to quickly decide where to go and what to do, which increases their risk of making mistakes that is making *bad calls*. This term was used to provide an acceptable margin of embarrassment for shot or target callers by highlighting that collegiate teams were used to ignoring and forgiving bad calls as an acceptable risk taking strategy. However, they would often only do so if the shot or target caller also vocally acknowledged that it was their fault and often this required providing some excuse – stress, lack of sleep, long work hours, and sometimes just to acknowledge it as a mistake that would be avoided next time. Becoming flustered, "losing one's cool", is a risk faced by every player of the game. It comes from the pressure of making a successful move against an opponent, avoiding traps and tricks, striking the winning blow, and aware of the endless possibilities within a game. Being flustered is the break-down of self-control, and during this disconcerted state the player sometimes cannot utilize his full muscular or intellectual resources to play properly; the player is "out of play" (Goffman 1956: 266). Opponents sometimes seek to produce such a desired effect as a way of gaining the winning edge, in much the same way as sledging – that is the use of insults, personal comments and verbal intimidation are used in other competitive sporting activities.

Any person who experiences becoming flustered is faced with the difficult task of regaining self-composure and self-control. Failing to do so and becoming more troubled or

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[27] In high-paced competitive games such as *Overwatch* and other first-person shooters, team members try to ignore small mistakes so that they may effectively move on to the next engagement.

agitated may result in a *flood out* (Goffman 1961: 55) which can cause temper tantrums, or the person may try to escape the situation by leaving the room and his computer controls. He may even burst into tears or laughter as a way of relieving the stress and discounting the reality and relevance of the taunts. Sometimes it is not an opponent but a team member who may cause an incident which causes them to become embarrassed and in need of rectifying the situation in some way so to regain self-composure. In this situation it is as important for the individual to gain support of his team members by them agreeing to read the incident in a particular way. If the incident can be brushed off as exceptional, or ignored, or laughed away, then relationships within the team can be reset so as to continue the tasks ahead.

The idea of self-composure can be viewed in close relations to Foucault concept of *Technologies of the Self* (1988). Here Foucault is concerned with individualization within the flock and how this can be is created through pastoral powers or technologies. As mentioned in previous chapters, pastoral powers are the relationship between shepherd and flock that have to do with the management of subjective dispositions – belief, emotions, motivations, desires, feelings and attitude to life or what Geertz (1957) may call ethos. The idea of the good shepherd found its way into different religious beliefs, more specifically into the Christian idea of confession and self-reflection through which a pastor/priest/minister engages his congregation with a view to helping form and create subjectivities. In particular, it is through truth where individuals seek to come closer to God and Heaven that are made to come closer to themselves, to become individualized. Foucault suggests that the shepherd-flock relationship that is rooted in religious history of confessional technologies has become secularized and dispersed into many professional groups in modern carceral society – teacher, social welfare work, psychiatrist, warden, nurse – who all aim to produce the good citizen. The individual is also required to engage in ongoing self-reflection and self-policing so that the shepherd is no longer required as the individual works upon him or herself using the tools of truth. However, the shepherd did not disappear completely, but the democratizations of confessional self-reflection and becoming a good citizen through that process has ended up in so many arenas that also require methods of social control. These social control methods are visible in the self-policing found in society today. Controlling emotions and actions in social interactions become important as deviancy is policed by others. It forces citizens to integrate into a flock yet each individual is fully autonomous with each member in the flock exercising self-control whilst also helping to control others and to coach them into self-reflection. This occurs in online spaces where also particular forms of social controls come to be used.

Losing one's composure in competitive games is commonly known as "tilting", but the act of lashing out against opponents or team mates has been aptly named "flaming". To tilt or flame continuously is frowned upon in the collegiate esport community as it is considered "toxic" behavior that destroys the solidarity of teams that are a mixture of competitive individualism balanced with collegial forms of co-operation and solidarity.

Flood outs are observable in all competitive sports competitions and they can involve showing either positive or negative emotions. We've all witnessed and most of us have been a part of the joyous cries, hugs and jumping when our favorite team wins the series finale and secures the trophy. This is particularly true for competitive teams or players in all kind of sport that involve some form of spatial belonging – for example to a nation, region, home town or school to which we feel close. Flood outs also occur during defeats when enthusiasts will personally feel their defeat of the team and show this as tears, cries of anguish, anger, and sorrow. The act of maintaining composure is important to competitive players, both in victory and defeat. During my observations of a CS:GO tournament in the Santa Ana esports arena emotions were high amongst the winning teams and graceful amongst the losing teams, though during the matches one could clearly hear the high pitched cursing of a player dying too often. I did not observe anyone "flaming" opposing players, but it is a risk that players face or have to deal with at times.

> Its afternoon, I and one of my interlocutors is conversing online about toxicity and flaming, he tells me a story of how he returned to playing 'Overwatch' after an extended break. He had been playing collegiate tournaments for a year or two, and had reached the acclaimed Top 500 during season 3 of the 'Overwatch' competitive in-game seasons. Due to other obligations he decided to take a break in order to focus on school stuff. The return to 'Overwatch' brought different sentiments than he expected as his rank had fallen quite a long ways, and he had to "grind"[28]his way back up the ladder ranks. Playing competitively requires continual practice as one must keep the fluency in fingers and sharpness of the mind. Taking a break from it risks lowering one's skills, even if it is just a brief break. My interlocutor started receiving flaming insults as other players looked at his previous rank of Top 500 and then judged and commented on his current play based on that. "I would receive insults for my mistakes… "You were top 500 before, why are you playing like shit?"

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[28] Grinding is used to express repetitive actions, i.e. playing many esports matches after another, or killing the same monster over and over again for the experience and items they reward that are then rewarded.

and "he probably bought that account…" I want to say that… those people who get
the most out of competitive gaming are those who don't take the toxic stuff people say
too personal. I know I have sometimes and it really puts your mood down."

Flaming is defined as "verbal attacks intended to offend either persons or organizations" (Reining, Briggs, Nunamaker Jr 1997). It can be directed towards opposing or cooperative players, and is activated when a player moves about the online stage and starts flooding out. In the everyday world of competitive video games, flaming is a normal thing to encounter. However, in the collegiate esport scene there is an attempt to control such behavior which may result in exclusion from tournaments and competitions so as to secure enjoyment for other players and spectators. It is a policing policy created by competition hosts and competitors; and legitimizes the community's professionalization of competitive video games as a collegiate sport that parents should not fear their children participating in. Esports, like other sports needs to develop these policing practices and even more so because there is a perception that the internet encourages and disseminates emotional outbursts that operate as forms of bullying. To avoid bullying some game developers give players the option of submitting a complaint on a player that is harassing or bullying them. These policing techniques create dispersed forms of power and collective forms of social control. They also pose challenges for game developers as some players are banned for being overly toxic towards other players and this can be seen to reduce their player base, yet allowing toxic players and bullies to be present may reduce that player base even more drastically. These policing options are also easily abused by online bullies who make false claims of bullying as part of their own strategies of intimidation. This can further challenge game developers who have to review all complaints in order to look for the truth of who is actually in the wrong, who is bullying whom. The mainstreaming and commodification of esports requires widespread acceptance by parents interested in creating safe and empowering pedagogic spaces for their children and increasingly also for themselves.

"Tilting" is viewed as being thrown off your game or off balance, and results in the player becoming flustered and eventually flooding out. It is an escalating and infectious event that can cause the entire team to break down or lose their ability to cooperate and communicate properly. When a player tilts there are several options for team members to deal with the situation. Firstly, they can ignore their emotional team member so as to allow that person to police their own emotional state and also so as not to further fuel the situation by acknowledging its reality or as something significant. For this may cause the affected

individual to become further alarmed and confused. If a team member tilts, it is also easy to infect other team members leading to a domino effect of flood outs. In a tournament during the springtime the Zotboys lost – later while discussing the loss an interlocutor told me:

> *"That tournament, we weren't our full roster, we had a sub player, we were missing Protoges and he is the captain. So everybody decided to fight during the tournament, well not fighting but arguing like 'oh, I should have done this' or 'I should have done that', and that does not help us during the tournament. We are trying to win so we don't have time to discuss what happened two seconds ago".*

In this situation, too much self-reflection was counter-productive and was attributed to the flock being without their shepherd, in them not knowing when to self-reflect and in overdoing their self-scrutiny so it became paralyzing. These have always been the task of the shepherd and put a break on the democratization of pastoral forms of self-scrutiny. The tournament was lost due to a break in communication and emotional outbursts, primarily due to missing their captain and not having practiced enough with their substitute roster. It isn't enough to be a good player; one must also be a good team member, which means being able to police one's own and other players' emotions. It also entails being truthful on shortcomings in play, taking responsibilities when you do something wrong, and working with the team to improve each other's strengths and weaknesses. But also knowing when to do this, which is not necessarily when one is playing.

In the games I observed there was no time for breaks in the encounter. The match is played from start to finish without pause, and any interruption is a threat to the focused momentum of play that sustains the social encounter. If one or more team members become flustered or floods out, the match can be lost, and the encounter may be corrupted. Any corrupting element can affect the group and must be addressed in hope that it can be eliminated or rectified. This is why social policing is important for esports players. It is also an invitation for further research as one can compare social encounters and social policing in regards to different cultural regions of play.

Part III

Chapter 6

The Masculine and the Feminine

Women and men play video games, but they often do so differently and can often prefer different games with different narratives and play styles. But how do researchers approach questions of gender participation and gendered gamer identity. Many researchers argue that women are excluded from video game environment and culture by the male dominance that exists within it. Fox and Tang (2012) and Burill (2008) argue that performative masculinity hinders female participation in video game environments. Kowert et al (2012), Passßen et al (2012), and De Grove et al (2015) suggest that certain stereotypical traits, often masculine stereotypes, dictate who is classified as a gamer and who is not. Wohn (2011) and Kondrat (2015) discuss if these stereotypes exist due to a male dominated industry that markets its games towards young men. They also argue that the video game industry creates games with strong male protagonists and forgoes representing various ethnicities and genders – it forgoes representing those that are not the perceived market. Others suggest that women have other obligations in life due to emotional labor (Schull 2002) or unequal amounts of leisure time (Winn and Heeter 2009), or that they prefer other narrative structures and other forms of imaginary identification. Masculinity and femininity in this thesis are understood as emerging out of complex social practices and cultural construct. My focus will be on gender norms and how gamers use these social norms to express themselves through playing games alone or with other persons. In this part of the thesis I will discuss academic research into gender videogames in terms of its relevance for my ethnographic work on masculinity and women's participation in the video game environments in Southern California. Here I will investigate the performance of masculinity and femininity tied to videogames and esports, using some of my interlocutors' views and experiences.

The majority of video game users are male, statistically not by a large margin as The ESA reports that 41 % of US gamers are female (ESA 2016 and ESA 2017). Their research includes all games on all devices. If we narrow it to competitive video games and esport then the majority are predominantly male. Very few teams across the different games have male and female members; most female esport athletes are on all-female teams or operate alone in one versus one competitive videogames. To my knowledge there is no research suggesting

any differences in capabilities because of gender when it comes to playing videogames, e.g. different reflex or response times. Instead, the below research points to other social and cultural reasons why esports and video games remain a male dominated sphere.

6.1: The Masculine

Derek A. Burrill (2008) in his book *Die Tryin': Videogames, Masculinity, Culture* suggests that men perform their masculinity through violence and domination, which is fundamental in many competitive sports, more so in esports as violence is visually represented by damaging and killing opposing players' characters. Drawing on Foucault, Burrill views masculinity as technology;

> "… [A]s a set of practices, is a tool the male uses to navigate, comprehend, and most often dominate or subjugate the object world. This technology of masculinity is typically manifested in the male and the masculine as violence towards others (particularly women), and, more often than expected, as pain and violence to one's own body, as well as figurative violence in the form of hegemonic flows across the socius and the enactment of masculine violent myths and fantasies" (Burrill 2008: 14) [and that] "…masculinity (particularly a violent masculinity), as performance, is a complicit part of technological presence and utility, witnessed in the violent action of many videogames, the objectification of women in the games, as well as the conception of identity in the surrounding digital imaginary" (ibid: 21-22).

Burrill continues, using the work of Messner (1998 in Burrill 2008: 31-32), to suggest that new forms of organized sports were created in response to women's movements and modernization during the 19th and 20th century that threatened patriarchy. Sports opened up homosocial venues and spheres where men could act out violent and dominating fantasies upon others (without serious harm or death). This may explain why many sports are viewed as a predominant male sphere, and why some sports are male-exclusive, or at least gender seperated. Geertz (2005) article on *Deep Play: Notes on Balinese Cockfight* exemplifies the homosocial sphere of fighting cocks. Balinese cockfighting is "entirely of, by, and for men" (ibid: 60), a venue for male bonding and challenges through an animal who makes violent fantasies real and bloody. A sentiment that is reenacted in the blood sports of humans such as

boxing or the more popular mixed martial arts fighting, though luckily not to the death. While human blood sports are not fatal or male exclusive they, like videogames and digital space, are male dominated spheres where the measures of masculinity, subjugation and violence are acted out.

Defeating the machine or the opponent is the subjugating act within videogames, and this is often accompanied by its own language. Interlocutors would often describe a victory over a weaker opponent as a "stomping", the visible image of a foot crushing something, or a "steamroll", where the opponent is run over by a train or some heavy vehicle. When discussing opponents' skill, they were often derogatively negative "trash" or "bad". These derogative words symbolize the subjugation and power over opponents. One of my interlocutors, Tank, was especially fond of using violent language about his opponents, especially when opponents vocally challenged him or perhaps baited him into over-reacting. As recorded during one of our conversations:

> *"So they* [talking about the opposing team] *obviously told Dave I was free… free as in I am the worst player. So we scrimmed[29] them – fucking destroyed the shit out of them. I hit every single slide* [playing the character E.T.C in *Heroes of the Storm*]*, I hit everything. Even my stage-dives were perfect. After the game I was telling my team mates; because the opposing team was sitting right next to us… 'I bet they're not calling me free any more'. I was so mad when I heard that… They tried to meme me after the game like, 'yeah we still like you Tank, we only ban your E.T.C because we don't want you to play that hero', and I was like, 'yeah, cause you guys fucking suck'. We only scrimmed them twice because we dumpstered the shit out of them"*.

The language Tank is very much street talk, even gangster talk, it is the language of the pub where men might challenge themselves in an overdramatic language that highlights the subjugation of opponents. It is that kind of masculine brawling language that many women will find difficult and the fact that opponents were in the same room highlighted its personal confrontational aspects. "We *dumpstered* the shit out of them" means we reduced them to a pile of trash, to shit coming out of them, they lost control of their bodily boundaries and dignity which are so important to the presentation of any self (Goffman 1990). Using words like "free" refers to being an easy target and easily eliminated. This was a direct challenge to Tanks success as a player. Dave, the manager of the Tank's team brought the opposing team's

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[29] Played a custom game mode against another team, this game mode is not ranked, and does not affect the public profile of the player.

opinion of Tank to him, perhaps as an attempt to provoke Tank. Dave knew Tank to be motivated by "trash talk", and by doing so provoking Tank to forcefully and publically reaffirm his masculinity in front of his team mates and the opposing team. After successfully affirming his competence in the game, he vocally informs the opposing team that they "fucking suck", he challenges their masculine standing. Measures of masculinity are constantly produced in videogame competitions as in many sports arenas where some form of "sledging" is accepted as an informal norm and indeed as part of re-owning and personalizing the game. Sledging is a practice used in some games such as cricket or tennis by players seeking to disrupt the concentration of a rival player. It uses verbal affronts to gain an advantage by getting the other player to refocus on the insult rather than the game. It seeks to cause errors, miscalculations and poor play by refocusing a rival on being personally humiliated. It seeks to "tilt" them. Tank took up the challenge and transformed his anger into better play, into increased focus and skill. He sought to turn the sledging challenges back on his rivals and to humiliate them. It is through "trash talk" off-screen and actions in-game that challenges these young males masculinity against each other.

Bonnie Nardi in her work *My Life as a Night Elf Priest* (2010) did participant observation research into the game *World of Warcraft* (2004). In chapter eight (Nardi 2010: 152-175) she documents how the public chat channels and the different guild chat channels she visited were male dominated and accompanied by a "hardcore masculine rhetoric". Nardi (2010) describes how men would sometimes use slurs such as "fag", "faggot", "bitch", "whore", and other derisive words against other male players. They used gender power relations to articulate relations between men. Interestingly this dominant male sexual language of power was also borrowed and used by women in their own power relations with each other, indicating its hegemonic reach.

> "Women sometimes used terms for females such as bitch, slut, whore, and hooker (an apparent acceptance, on the part of the less powerful, of logics of the powerful; see Freire 2000). They flirted and engaged frequently, and with enjoyment, in explicit sexual banter. I do not want to represent female *WoW* players as shrinking violets because they were not. For some, the boys' tree house was a space in which they were welcome to speak any way they wanted.

> But female players generally avoided hardcore masculinist rhetoric. They did not belittle other players by calling the "little girl" (or "little boy" for that matter). They sometimes used "gay" to disparage (much less often than males", but I never heard a

female call anyone "homo". Female players avoided the language of what one player referred to as "the female denigrations," by which she meant words such as cunt or slang terms for genitalia such as clit (see Thelwall 2008). Female players did not joke about rape." (Nardi 2010: 156)

Nardi argues that the gender disparity among game players normalizes a certain masculine discourse, it give men room to express a certain informal familiar coarse sexualized language of power that also exists in other informal male contexts such as locker rooms and the pub.

Masculinity is more than violence and subjugation, as one of my interlocutors exemplified when he told me he was more interested in being a good team player, than winning large tournaments. The most important thing for him was the camaraderie he experienced by being on a team, something he had also discovered when playing football at a younger age. Though he did not dismiss the joys of winning, which the team did often achieve (win that is), it was the cooperation and friendships he built by joining the team that meant more to him. Such sentiment were also voiced and be valued by many of my interlocutors, and this pleasure of team-work, of collective play is well documented by Goffman (1961) in so many other recreational and even work contexts.

Exploring masculinity among video games users required more attention to the identity, and how it is built and negotiated through cumulative interactions with others gamers who often seek to accumulate gamer capital. Masculinity is produced but also transformed through the interactions and negotiations of male players who now use digital ways of measuring and evaluating masculinity vis-a-vie each other. For some, this is a digital domain where a woman would interfere with masculine competition but also masculine forms of intimacy with each other. For as we shall see a good team leaders also know how to care for their flock, how to scold them but also mend their wounds. The emotional wounds that always emerge in co-operative forms of play, where teams lose, players are demoted or sidelined or rendered into sacrificial helpers for other star players. Focusing just on heroic individualistic narratives misses the forms of male intimacy and care that create good teams.

Yet it cannot be denied that being good at video games requires a certain amount of knowledge and technical skill[30] and these become indicators used to measure masculinity. I do not want to play down the social status that a male gamer earns through killing opponents

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[30] Technical skill – means how well a human player is able to use and exploit the character or characters they are playing. In my understanding gamers use the term technical to refer to gamer knowledge, reflexes and response time which all underpin what is called skill.

in spectacular ways is a public aspect celebrated in esport competitions. Here professional players enjoy a higher social status and become elite players in large global tournaments that deliver not just trophies but increasingly large cash prizes. These are predominantly male esports competitors supported by a predominantly male audience and industry. It produces a digital masculinity that is showcased to the world through internet streaming and television broadcasts. I would argue that all kinds of masculinities emerge in esports teams and these include heroic violent warriors but also competent managers, altruistic players and caring shepherd and this is part of the intimacy and solidarity of computer games as a social sphere for men.

6.2: The Feminine

Where do women fit in the video game arena? The answer should be everywhere, but considering gamer identity and its indicators – how much you play (time), and what do you play (genre) – this is less probable. There exist different gaming environments for different participants and audiences. There are groups of male gamers who actively exclude women, either through ignoring them, not taking them serious, or in the worst cases harassing them sexually or violently using graphic forms of sound and video. Most gaming environments have female gamers who often need to negotiate their position in male environments by conforming to established identity indicators, time and genre, or find new ways of establishing their own indicators for belonging.

Royse et al (2007) recruited twenty women, age ranged from 18-37, for focus group research on video game habits. With her fellow researchers, they conducted in-depth interviews to find out how female video game users negotiate gender and gaming technology. They suggests combining Foucault's work of "technologies of the self" with that of the feminist model of "technologies of gender", creating "technologies of the gendered self" (ibid: 560) – which "refers to the dynamic relationship between women, gender and technological use (ibid: 571). Royse et al suggest using this to understand different play patterns between men and women and the "consumption of technology as a gendered practice" (ibid: 561). They separated their interlocutors into three groups based on levels of consumption: Power gamers, moderate gamers, and non-gamers. Their findings suggest explanations to how female gamers balance and negotiate a gamer identity. Power Gamers are

characterized as those who "place high importance in gaming and engage in it frequently" (Royse et al 2007: 563). They have the ability and desire to seek out different genres of games in order to fulfill different pleasures (ibid: 563). Female Power Gamers preferred genres like Role-Playing Games (RPG) and First-Person Shooters (FPS), some especially preferred FPS games as it tapped into their competitive side and allowed them to engage in masculine traits such as domination over others. By challenging gender norms through engaging in competitive video games dominated by males, these women experienced "tremendous pleasure" (ibid: 564) as they slayed male opponents over and over again. Power Gamers used Counter-Strike: Global Offensive[31] (Valve Corporation 2012) as one of the FPS games they liked. Its characters are all male, and so it involves symbolically men on men violence, and this is the case of many FPS games that often have a militarized game world[32]. In this kind of deep play, women can be seen undercutting, shooting down, and obliterating the everyday forms of male dominance they may experience at home and at work.

Another trait shared by the power gamers was choice and control (Royse et al 2007: 564), the ability to choose their avatar or create a character that allowed them to cater to their own fantasies and not the fantasies of the game's creator. The creativity and artfulness that emerges out of these detailed choices is a strong reason why many female gamers play Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). The feminine art of dressing up, of costuming the self of decorating in detail one's environment with careful, astute and often playful choices is part of the presentation of the feminine that is displaced into video games where it is also being reinvented and redeveloped anew. One of my key interlocutors was a young woman named Kathy who works at the University of California, Irvine, as the Arena Coordinator for the Esports program. This is a new program that started in fall 2016 and it gives scholarships to students who compete in university esport teams. Kathy has a long history in the video game environment in southern California, working as president for The Association of Gamers (TAG) at UCI. She started playing games at a young age, and played mostly MMORPGs such as Ragnarok Online (Gravity 2002) before moving on to another MMORPG – Final Fantasy XIV (Square Enix 2010) and Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (MOBAs) like League of Legends (Riot Games 2009). Growing up in the

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[31] CS:GO for short

[32] In CS:GO there are two teams playing against each other – Terrorist and Counter-Terrorist. The task of the Terrorist team is to place a fictional bomb on one of two bomb sites, A or B. The counter-terrorists task is to stop them, and disarm the bomb. A match is played in 30 rounds; a round can last from 30 seconds to 5 minutes. The game is won when the one of the team wins the fifteenth round. Other FPS games include historic militarized game worlds set during World War I and II. Vietnam war, Gulf war, and fictive wars in the future and present.

gaming environment she remembers having few female friends, so she would play with her male friends. As a young power gamer she fluently engaged in a male dominated sphere, earning respect through her skill and the gaming capital she acquired through the time that she spent on widely revered core genres. Kathy identifies as a gamer, and seen as well within her right to do so as she fulfils the key indicators set by the gaming environment and by herself.

When she started out in the online gaming environment she was aware of the scrutiny female gamers received and was hesitant to join voice channels, and instead preferred to communicate with in-game text-based chat tools. Though much slower and more cumbersome this gave her some distance from other players and the opportunity to control her interactions so as to and reject individuals she felt uncomfortable with, and especially those who disparaged or mocked her gendered identity. She found after a little while that her actions as an active skilled gamer earned her the trust and acceptance of her male peers, who also became protective and supportive of her. Kathy describes herself as competitive person. Her sense of individuality is also formulated through the gaming environment. She once told me that she had "*to be one of the first to explore and discover things, and clear content*", and this meant often sinking 8-10 hours a day into playing online. The online MMORPGs gave Kathy greater control over her character and communications which most importantly delivered greater control over how she wanted to imaginatively present herself, for all identity is imaginatively constituted, played out through dramatic performances (Goffman 1959). Video games reinvent the platforms for staging and living the dramatic interactions of life, and here women also discover their need and pleasure to temporarily obliterate and recreate the world around themselves and their imaginary possibilities.

Taylor (2006) suggests that women use online role-playing games to explore gender and other aspects of identity through their self-created in-game characters. Likewise, Royse et al (2006) write "[G]ames can provide women with a choice of characters, combined with control of their representation, games function as technologies for explorations of the gendered self, producing paradoxical enactments that challenge cultural norms" (: 565). A sentiment shared by many female power gamers was an awareness of the hypersexualization of female characters in some video games. This did disturb them too, but mattered much less if they had the ability to alter the look of their character to their own fantasies of sexuality.

Returning to Nardi (2010), she went further than just analyzing the language of men in *World of Warcraft*. She explored how the game's "design contained elements of strong appeal to women" (2010: 167). She notes how a multitude of bright colors, beautiful music, and

visually stunning landscapes appeals to many and gives *World of Warcraft* a sensory and immersive quality. Nardi documents that all activities in the game were cross-gendered, meaning a female character had access to everything a male character had and vice-versa. This included violent activities such as defeating monsters, killing other players, hunting animals for their hide or teeth – and it included peaceful activities such as explorations, gathering herbs and flowers, creating potions or armor, trading items and gold with other players. These activities are often gendered in the actual world, yet lose their gendered locks when moved into the virtual. Nardi writes:

> "Players chose activities because they made sense for the development of their characters, contributing to their performative abilities. This motivation obscured and downplayed, but did not remove gender attributions" (Nardi 2010: 171).

What Nardi means is that the gender your character has in *World of Warcraft* will not limit your character's choices and abilities. However, other games such as *Overwatch* and *Heroes of the Storm* come with characters that have a narrative background and fixed abilities, meaning that power gamers are less likely to care if their character are male or female, it is what the character can do is important when deciding who to play. This was true for my male and female interlocutors as they chose characters based on functionality and not gender, but this may be exclusive to competitive games.

Moderate gamers emphasized the need for control over characters and the game world. They chose less violent games and other games that offered environmental control such as Civilization (MicroProse 1991) or The Sims (Electronic Arts 2000). The moderate gamers of Royse et al's (2007) research believes that men can more easily fall into the fantasies of video games, and that men spend more hours playing because they enjoy being fully immersed in the game. They lose track of outside temporality as they immerse themselves in the temporal pace of the game. Both moderate and power gamers play video games to feel control and enjoyment. Like many other players, moderate gamers also view video gaming as a male domain. Here technologies become gendered, with female moderate gamers also viewing violent competitive video games as domains of the male. They excluded themselves from these kinds of gamer identity, whilst still playing and interacting with other versions of video games.

6.3: Context of Genders

The reason why I wanted to include a discussion of gender and gender performance in my thesis is that there has been a lot of discussion about it, both in media and among academics. As discussed above, within the community of gamers, there are consistent indicators of who can be qualified as a gamer, and who cannot be. However, many who meet the criteria of the gamer identity indicators still feel uneasy about their position in a video game environment, or they hesitate to identify as a gamer due to feelings of misrepresentation in mainstream society. My interlocutors often referred to gaming as an ecosystem, as a living breathing system of people who evolve together, industry, environment and players over time. This view of an evolving social milieu struck me as deeply personal to them. And while there was an abundance of men represented, I neither experienced, nor witnessed any misogynistic or sexist language or acts. As interlocutors kept informing me, Southern California was a very tolerant space, people here were eager to include as many as possible, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. And though this is hardly true for many other video game environments throughout the world, it seemed in my experience to be true for Southern California – a place where the esports ecosystem evolves.

Chapter 7

Time and Responsibilities

Royse et al's (2007) group of female non-gamers held many negative views on video games and video gamers. Their views reproduce wider stereotypes that stigmatize video games as juvenile activities that lead to anti-social behaviors, isolation, and addiction. Analyzing the female non-gamer group Royse et al (ibid) suggests that this group views themselves as productive members in society while gamers are not. The group sees itself as more in control of their daily lives, adhering to responsibilities and priorities that they choose, and maybe most importantly perceive themselves as in control of their time.

Video games can invoke many responsibilities on the players. During my fieldwork, I noticed that members of all male esport teams often discussed their obligations and how to best manage themselves and their team participation. Players had multiple obligations that they had to prioritize effectively. I spent most of my time with collegiate esports players who practiced in time in blocks of two-four hours, two-five days a week (depending on upcoming tournaments). This means they practiced a minimum of eight hours a week as a team. They were also expected to practice alone in order to maintain their knowledge, skill and rank within the game. The personal hours of playing were rarely recorded but were discussed at online team meetings where interlocutors also reviewed their informal match experiences. These games they played outside the team would produce new strategies, they were places to experiment with tactics in a way that did not jeopardize the ranking of the team. Team members often spent time on Twitch[33] watching professional players, or playing against them in ranked mode so as to uncover new clever ways to gain the upper hand. These forms of gaming capital are not just there to be picked up, instead they require a great deal of player time so as to modify the knowledge, reflexes and decision-making skills of players.

The balancing of practice and competition in esport tournaments with school, work, social life, and health was a clear challenge for all my interlocutors. They were often forced to take a break from one or more obligation in order to be successful in other obligations. They had to juggle priorities and obligations, and not always successfully. One of my key interlocutor admitted that during tournaments with large prizes he would often put his other interests aside so as to focus on the game. Likewise, when he had important schoolwork assignments or

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[33] Twitch is the largest and most popular streaming platform for games and gamer. http://twitch.tv

tests, he would be less attentive to video games. This constant shift in focus fragmented some players and affected their grades. One of my interlocutors was even put on academic probation due to him prioritizing his esport team over university obligations and work. A conversation during an online practice led to the *Overwatch* team to agree to respect the importance of allowing each other to focus on real life obligations and to call in substitute players when a permanent team member had to catch up on schoolwork. The *Overwatch* team was their own boss and needed to structure all try-outs, practices, enlistment into tournaments and arrange transportations to tournaments. Their love and interest for competitive gaming did at times triumph over school and other social and physical activities. However, in my own opinion, my interlocutors did not have an addictive or hazardous relation with their gaming life. They might have started their gaming careers as young children who progressively enjoyed playing as a hobby, but as young adults they began to balance their games against the needs of work and school, and indeed as a necessary counter-balance that provided fun. More than one of my interlocutors mentioned that when they were young, their parents expressed concern about their gaming habits, but not to the extent of removing gaming equipment from them. The parents understood those video games in context as necessary forms of play and stress-relief. They appreciated them as teaching their children the skill to be a competitive person, something that is especially valued in American society and in all capitalist societies. They also valued its self-improvement goal of perfecting the self and its capacities. Educating oneself about the game you play, and increasing one's own skill level to eventually compete in tournaments and competitions can be a source of pride where gamers find meaningful emotional and social rewards.

Video games can be a time consuming activity, and can be in opposition to the obligations of a mature woman to be a worker-provider, carer and a mother. Women can often be overburdened by competing social, economic and moral obligations more so than some men. This position has been documented by researchers such as Natasha Schull (2002 and 2005)[34], Donghe Yvette Wohn (2011), Jillian Winn and Carrie Heeter (2009). Winn and Heeter (2009) researched undergraduate students' time management in the US Midwest, and as they reviewed previous literature. They found that women generally have less leisure time than their male counterparts. This is often due to working full or part time jobs as well as the responsibilities of housework and caring for family members as part of their moral identities

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[34] Shull's focus was video poker machines, while different from video games they are still machine realities that function on random number generators – and persons engage in them for some of the same reasons as others engage in video games.

making it difficult to shift to other identities (Levison et al 2001; Mauldin and Meeks 1990; in Winn and Heeter 2009: 3). Winn and Heeters supported previous researchers who found that female students spent more time on school work, paid work, and other obligatory activities – 16 hours more per week (Ibid: 10). They noticed that female students reported spending less time with games the older they became, which may have led many to switch from core genre games to mobile games. Mobile games can be played in short instances of time, and can be played anywhere due to the mobility of the user – they are therefore well suited for people with time-restricting obligations. According to Wohn (2011) mobile games and casual games[35] are easier to engage in by those who are low on time, but enjoy consuming video games. Wohn states in her article that "sex representation in casual games is overwhelmingly female and gender representation is non-stereotypical" (ibid: 204). This also points to a shift in marketing strategies by an industry seeking to make the games safer and more acceptable for a larger audience. This marking strategy is especially aimed at incorporating younger children by appealing to their parents. However, statistics do show that the casual gaming audience is predominantly female (Casual Game Association 2010 in Wohn 2011: 199). Given that many female players play single player casual games for short periods of time, the analysis then need to ask why they choose games that involve more solitary forms of game play and their need to more rigorously control play time.

Royse et al (2007) found that many moderate gamers found an escape from their daily lives in video games; "[t]he moderate gamer negotiates gaming technologies in order to help cope with the routines of their daily life, yet they are not fully immersed in the gaming world" (ibid: 569). This differs from Schull who found that total immersion was necessary to temporarily escape from real life obligations, and was the prime motivation of many who engaged in the machined reality of video poker gambling machines in Nevada. To some extent the difference boils down to the different target groups being studied, for Schull was especially concerned with the growing addictive power of machined realities among women who sought out solitary forms of play. She still notes the growth of casual gambling and video game play but this was not her primary focus. Her point is that many addicted female gamblers had responsible jobs and were mothers and carers, and their consumption of video gambling games was not them seeking to escape or neglect their obligations and responsibilities, but to cope with them. They sought only temporary escape from work and

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[35] Casual games by my own definition are games that require short instances of time to play, that are repeatable, they often have simple goals but get progressively harder – and are often (not always) marketed towards mobile consoles such as smartphones and tablets.

private caring demands of which they needed to return. Schull's point is also that of total immersion and indeed addiction are being increasingly designed by an industry through choice of sound-visual graphics, reward patterns structures and casino layout.

Natasha Dow Schull (2002 and 2005) focused on female gamblers that used video poker machines in Las Vegas, and while gambling and playing video games are different, there are common structures of competitiveness involving machined realities with different levels of play and reward. Schull studied why female gamblers mostly chose video poker machines which were much more solitary game activities and not the blackjack card or dice tables which have much more face to face competition and were favored by men. Schull (2002) argues that Goffman (1961) in his work on play and games overlooks the gendered aspects of play, and instead overly generalizes using how men play competitive games (card and dice gambling) as a way to challenge and contest each other (Schull 2002:6). She criticizes Goffman for treating machines as a character whom one can compete against, thereby making the action of playing a machine similar to that of playing another person at a board or table, with the goal being to assert one's individuality and identity by symbolically defeating the other character (ibid:6). Schull (2002) argues that female gamblers are motivated, not by their need for interaction and competition against another person, but a need for social isolation. They seek isolate themselves with their machine in order to temporarily escape real life and the constant pressure to socialize and care for others at work and at home. What is addiction emerges from the desire and need to escape being emotionally overburdened in everyday life. This involves increased standards of care (cooking, cleaning, pedagogic and emotional) within the home, but also corporations using the emotional labor of women as smiling caring faces (waitress, airline hostess, insurance or bank loans assessor, youth worker, nurse, etc.). It is from this emotional exhaustion derived from the demand to always be smiling, kind and caring that women seek the non-human reality of the responsive machine. Schull's arguments help to explain why mature responsible women who are not marginalized but part of mainstream society seek and need secluded machine realities. Her feminist arguments analyze how women from a young age are groomed by marketing and societal influences to be emotional laborers in both family and working life, and these intense demands also need forms of time-out.

Schull's research is applicable as video games use many of the same technological advancements, and employ similar rewards structures, psychological inducements so as to immerse and engage a player. Many video games are built to constantly reward players when

they win with sounds and lights in rapid succession but also with resources such as cosmetics, power-ups, and in-game currency. This immerses players into the virtual reality as the sounds deafen the outside world, and the lights blur the surrounding environment, the escape from reality is supported by narratives that reward incorporation and participation in their reality. This may explain why many women, older rather than younger prefer these solitary casual games over fast paced FPS games of young men. This leads us back to the gendered choices of different genres of games. Schull argues that women's choices of games are solitary and machined while men prefer the social and interactive. Though this is true for her research on addiction, it may only be true for gamers in regards to age and gender. Young men and women are motivated differently than older men and women in their choices of media consumption and their reasons to escape daily obligations. Young men and women have more time, and are less burdened by the obligations of adult life. However, they are susceptible to immersive escape strategies of addiction and loss of control when it comes to consuming media such as video games. There are different stresses that perhaps do not come from the caring functions of older women. Those stresses may involve work, increasing youth unemployment, the increased casualties of new jobs, growing competition at school and university for places, as well as the growing cost of education, parental pressures, and the problem of youth creating their own separate identity – or even the stress of finishing a master thesis on time.

7.1: The Moral Panic of Addiction

Video games have at times been criticized for being addictive and dangerous. From time to time after major public events such as a spectacular suicide, murder or mass school shootings video game addiction have been blamed. These spectacles of transgression and deviancy have allowed the media on several occasions to use these events to create what Stanley Cohen (1973) describes as a "moral panic":

> "Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A
> condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat
> to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical
> fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops,
> politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce

their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible." (Cohen 1973: 1)

Cohen (1973) describes a moral panic as starting like a splash in still lake water and then the ripples can reach quite far away, this occurs when someone or some group does something that impacts on the surrounding society. Cohen's ethnography focuses on the Clacton event in England in 1964 where two different youth cultures, mods and rockers, ended up in street brawls and performed some small acts of destruction. The "invasion" of this coastal town by rampaging teenagers" led to a public sense of moral crisis about what was happening to modern youth in Britain. The next time these two youth cultures met at Clacton there was a massive media and police presence which created an "audience". Cohen (1973) suggests that the youth cultures became more inclined to act out, to play back what their audience was expecting. The arrests and visual mass media footage of fights and destruction led to a sense of panic, that the moral standards of youth has collapsed. Public discussion led to blame being thrown around and especially at the new youth subcultures which took up new styles of dress, music, hair, talking, gestures and even particular kinds of motor bikes so as to experiment with new ways of being young. The press transformed their new badges of identity into forms of deviancy much in line with Hebdige's (1979) theories on the interactive nature of provocative subculture styles and mainstream culture. Cohen is interested in how a "control agent" in society becomes empowered and authorized to attempt to correct the perceived anti-moral behavior. For Cohen this became the police and the judicial system in England who sought to respond and correct the moral threat posed by new youth cultures. Certain tactics were used such as limiting the movement of the youth, arresting and sentencing those who acted violently, and breaking up large gatherings. The emotional tensions that arose at the time were real but Cohen notes how despite some minor clashes the moral panic eventually passed, the wider society adapted to the existence of mods and rockers. For Cohen and Hebdige, the theatre of a moral crisis is sometimes staged and it has less to do with the actual threat of violence or disorder posed by a group and more with the need for society to imagine that threat. Both thinkers are interested in what the wider society gains from the perception of danger and how this often emerges during a period of rapid social and cultural change.

At several times over the last twenty years, video game addiction has made the news, where it assumes the same status of a moral panic. Some mass media headlines include *Chinese gamer dies after playing 'World of Warcraft' for 19 hours* (Ruddick 2015, March 4),

Man dies in Taiwan after 3-day online gaming binge (Hunt 2015, January 19), *Woman loses children to 'World of Warcraft' addiction* (Kauder 2013, October 21). Other articles tell of how game playing can be worse than a drug addiction; *Internet addict tells how 'World of Warcraft' gaming had become "like crack cocaine" after five week binge surrounded by filth* (Simper 2013, July 28)

These kinds of news stories treats video games as the source of anti-social behavior, poor health, moral decline, social isolation and a breakdown in discipline and even personal hygiene. The mass media, as Cohen predicted, plays on wider social stereotypes and in this case of video gamers who become anti-social and the easily manipulated slaves of a digital reality. The video game industry is criticized for making games too addictive and is called upon to take steps to prevent this occurring, for it is especially accused of undermining the social control of parents over their own children, but also undermining parents and adults' commitments to their own moral responsibilities.

Research about video game use and addiction has led the upcoming release of the 2018 International Classification of Diseases[36] (ICD-11-MMS 2018) to include two classifications concerning video games; *Hazardous Gaming* (ibid: QF12) and *Gaming Disorder* (ibid: 6C71). Neither of these classifications deals with video games directly, but rather the social problems persons have with their usage or availability. Hazardous gaming for example falls alongside the categories of "Lack of physical exercise" (ibid: QF10), "Problems with inappropriate diet or eating habits" (ibid: QF13), and "Problems with hygiene behaviors" (ibid: QF14) – all problematic behaviors that are the basis of the long standing stereotype of an avid video gamer; a person who isolates themselves with their game, who is often unhygienic, unfit, and eats garbage foods. Such classifications recognize that playing video games are not in themselves a hazardous activity, but argue that if a person struggles with life then video games can serve as a coping mechanism that then become addictive, leading the coping mechanism to become part of the problem and take on a contributing reality of its own.

The inclusion of gaming addiction as a "disorder" opens up the possibility of medicating persons who potentially suffer from it, and effectively medicalizing social problems. An early critic of medical labels such as mental illness or mental disorder was Thomas S. Szasz (1960). Szasz argues in his article *The Myth of Mental Illness* that calling something a mental illness

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[36] The ICD is a collaborating task-force assembled by the World Health Organization, tasked to identify and classify diseases and conditions.

invites the connotation that there is something bodily wrong, something that is tangible, and thereby curable. He believes this type of labeling turn our heads away from the real issue which is often found in the person's social life. Szasz argues that there does not exist an "enemy" within a person that doctors or psychologists can defeat or banish, but that deviant behaviors and maladaptive coping mechanisms stem from "*problems in living*" (Szasz 1960: 118). Persons who struggle with video game addiction have problems in other parts of his or her life that interferes with the desired way of living[37], be they "biological, economic, political, or socio-psychological" (ibid).

This is why video game critics can easily cause moral panics with every spectacular incident of persons harming themselves or others through direct or indirect means. It is also why with each incidence academic scholars, social and psychological researchers focus their efforts to find the truth in allegations caused by the moral panic. Yet Szasz (1960) makes a very good point that researchers and medical professionals must focus on people's way of life instead of trying to fix a coping mechanism to their life struggles, although coping mechanisms can become a major struggle in itself.

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[37] Wanted way of living being highly subjective.

Chapter 8

Good Game, Well Played

"GG's everyone" - Protoges.

The term "good game, well played" is spoken at the end of a match between esport players. It is a term of respect used between opposing players and fellow team members. As esport becomes even more popular and professionalized, so too do the social norms within it. As noted in my chapter on Goffman, esports and sports creates emotional experiences for players as they compete against each other. Things do not always go as expected, yet as a player you must become and prove yourself a "good sport". In this final chapter of my thesis I will review the main topics of each of the three parts. I will suggest subjects and interest for further study.

At the beginning I argued that being a gamer is a group identity that is too large to be a subculture but it nevertheless has subcultures within the overarching gamer culture. Those identities are created as individuals feel they share enough in common with other persons to be part of the same group. The gamer identity is associated with certain social and cultural qualities that individuals may or may not recognize as part of themselves. A person does not have to inhabit all identifying qualities, they may inhabit and recognize only some as legitimate and may context others. The amount of time spent playing games and the particular games a person plays are the identity indicators that have the most weight in the community. These indicate skill and commitment. Also important are social and cultural participation with others who identify themselves as gamers. Together these become part of an individual's gamer capital.

Gamer identity can be seen as conflicting with other ways of marking out identities involving gender and age. This is visible in the statistics shown in this thesis; 41 % of US gamers are female, yet in the public physical spaces where gamers gather the vast majority are men. This is due to certain conflicting ways of constructing identities, and as mentioned in part three, it is also due to the responsibilities of women and their ways of organizing time. Gaming takes up a lot of time, and when you are an adult your time schedule is stricter than that of a child or youth. Many adults have less time for particular leisure activities because they need to spend more time on responsibilities such as work and children and also because their leisure time has to be shared with family, an aged parent, children, relatives, etc. Further

study into the concept of gamer identity can see how it differs between those of children and of adults. While most people in the world now interact with video games in some form or another, the gamer identity is strongest in highly technological countries. Much work has already been done on gamer identity, but much of it has focused on the MMO communities or the gaming habits of children and youth. More could be done on how gamer identity is used and communicated in daily life, outside the games themselves.

The language that is created and worked upon by gamers and more intensely by esports players is of great interest for further study. I had the opportunity to research the American English version of it, and more specifically the Southern Californian gamer language, but further study can be done on the regional language of gamers in other countries and regions. I have discussed how collegiate players use abbreviated language and short phrases to communicate more efficiently with each other and this involves creating their own ways of navigating space. The shared language they create is normatively efficient, yet can be used to harm and dominate other players as gamers find ways to express their anger and dismay with enemies, team members, and even themselves. Gamers create their own ways of policing game-social interactions and these new technologies and forms of etiquette are also being institutionalized by the esport and video game industry which has an interest in further mainstreaming itself. There are rules of conduct being worked upon in the industry, as I found out my first day in the field when I visited the UCI Esports Arena; on the wall inside the arena hung a poster of rules of conduct (Fig 1.1, page 82). The poster outlined that no toxicity was allowed, nor harassment or any kind of negativity towards other players.

The thesis ties into the larger literature on social and cultural aspects of gamer culture, but also how society outside the gamer culture views it. I have discussed how stereotypes and particular stereotypical constructions are perpetuated and used both by internal and external actors, for this I dipped briefly into the concepts of moral panics and addiction. Much of what is defined as addiction is rooted in societal problems that manifest themselves in maladaptive coping mechanisms. It is therefore easy to mistake a coping mechanism for the actual problems of an individual. Yet it is also true that coping mechanisms can become part of the problem and take on a contributing reality of their own.

Video games have been and are at times still blamed for violent or anti-social acts, yet are seldom if ever the reason for it. There is sometimes a sense of moral panic about what youth are becoming as video games become associated with new forms of social and cultural change brought on by computers and the internet. However, the video game industry is not totally

innocent, it does take certain steps to incorporate psychological methods for rewarding players in quick succession in order to maximize playtime and thereby usage of their brand of games. Game developers create loyal and eager fans who will purchase the video games they produce, but also additional merchandise such as apparel, gadgets, and aesthetic ornaments and statues of game characters. More research can be done on these merchandise strategies of game developers and how large media corporations employ staff and incorporate individuals to sell their hardware and software.

Further research could investigate the gendered choices of games to see how traditional gender and age roles are being catered to by game developers, this can be of particular interest as some game developers are experimenting with adult societal themes such as civilians caught in war situations[38] or child abuse[39]. This is also a response to the criticisms of the video gaming culture and its constructions of masculinity.

Video games have grown from being interactive arcade machines to being the leading interactive media experience in the world. There are games that cater to almost every single motivation a person can have, and further progression in technology allows game developers to engage people in different ways. As more and more people engage with this medium it becomes important for social sciences and all academic disciplines to study its aspects. And as this thesis comes to a close I would like to take the opportunity to offer the readers some parting words.

<div align="center">Good Game, Well Played.</div>

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[38] *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios 2014)
[39] *Detroit: Become Human* (Sony Interactive Entertainment 2018)

Fig. 1.1: UCI Arena Rules.

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