

Disciplinary Identity of Game Scholars: An Outline

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ABSTRACT

There has been academic research work directed at games and play for decades, but the field has been somewhat scattered, and around the turn of the millennium the idea of establishing a new discipline, dedicated to the study of games in their own right gained prominence. The conference, journal and other publication activity in games research has expanded during the last decade, but it remains unclear how many contemporary academics working on games could be seen to represent a unified group, sharing a common disciplinary identity. This paper reports the first results from an international survey (valid $n = 544$), carried out among the DiGRA mailing list subscribers, as well as among the members of ECREA and ICA games research groups, aimed at probing the background education, orientation and academic practices of games researchers. The findings highlight the great diversity of educational backgrounds and of the current self-identified research fields, but also the dynamic interdisciplinary changes from one field to another, and how strong the identification as a “digital games researcher” is among the survey respondents.

Keywords

game studies, game researchers, identity, discipline

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advances of digital game development and gaming in the context of a society increasingly permeated by information technology were followed by rising academic awareness and interest particularly in the late 1990s. In 2001, in the inaugural issue of *Game Studies* journal, the editor, Espen Aarseth discussed the need for a new discipline to study digital games:

Today we have the possibility to build a new field. [...] Of course, games should

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also be studied within existing fields and departments, such as Media Studies, Sociology, and English, to name a few. But games are too important to be left to these fields. (And they did have thirty years in which they did nothing!) Like architecture, which contains but cannot be reduced to art history, game studies should contain media studies, aesthetics, sociology etc. But it should exist as an independent academic structure, because it cannot be reduced to any of the above. These are interesting times. (Aarseth 2001.)

The decade of game research that followed this invitation into disciplinary identity construction was an eventful one. There had been earlier research of games and play, of course, and Aarseth's claim that the existing fields had "done nothing" in terms of addressing games is a polemical one, targeted at inspiring young scholars to make a new start in researching games from a perspective that would take the unique characteristics of games as their starting point. In the following years, the research interest in games grew substantially. By way of illustration, an Ngram search of words and phrases as found in over 5.2 million books digitized by Google displays only sporadic occurrences for terms such as 'game studies' or 'game research' since 1900, but around year 2002, particularly the use of 'game studies' in English language book publications settled into a rapidly rising curve.

This paper will not deal with the issue of whether there should be a discipline called "Game Studies", or whether such a dedicated discipline would be a good idea in the first place. The aim here is both more modest and more concrete: to survey and discuss from what kind of disciplinary backgrounds and research traditions the current practitioners of digital games research are coming, and what we can say about the disciplinary identity of game researchers on the basis of such a survey. In particular, this study will provide some answers to how unified or diversified the field of games research Academia appears to be today. This article will report preliminary results from a larger survey that was targeted to probe the academic background and practices of games researchers.

The origins of the digital games research field have garnered their fair share of attention, and the "ludology vs. narratology debate" was probably the most visible contestation regarding the character and identity of game studies in its early phase (see e.g. Frasca 2003; Pearce 2005). Humanities and the scholarly framework based on the study of hypertexts (and 'cybertexts') and interactive narratives gained particular emphasis in this phase, but it is clear that there had been many different strands of research into games already long before the turn of the millennium. In his review of *The Study of Games* (Avedon & Sutton-Smith 1971); Jesper Juul (2001) refers to the "repeatedly lost art of studying games" and highlights how this seminal anthology features research carried out in anthropology, history and folklore studies, in social sciences, in developmental psychology, as well as in military and educational simulations research, just to mention a few academic areas featured in this book. What is clear from the work of Avedon and Sutton-Smith and other introductions to the history of games research as a field of scholarship, is that there has been no unified disciplinary center, and that it has been characterized by the work of practitioners coming from multiple different academic traditions (see e.g. Mäyrä 2008, 1-11).

The strongly multidisciplinary character of games research that a volume like *The Study of Games* epitomizes can also appear as somewhat problematic for a representative coming from a perspective of an established discipline. For example, Robert A. Georges, a professor of folklore, suggests in his review of Avedon and Sutton-Smith's collection "that the phenomena identified as games have yet to be clearly and systematically conceptualized

and characterized by those who have made what they call games the subject of study”, and also that the editors have picked up atypical work from the field of folkloristics, misrepresenting it to be preoccupied exclusively with children’s games (Georges 1975). There is thus, according to Georges, danger of conceptual fuzziness, lack of focus and the threat for a researcher of becoming a dilettante of many fields, rather than a credible expert in a single one, if all kinds of phenomena and approaches are accepted to belong to the field of game studies.

The need to focus on “games themselves” and to provide a clear definition for games as a subject of study is something that can be pointed to as one of the stimuli behind ‘ludology’ and contemporary digital game studies. On the other hand, the multidisciplinary and also increasingly integrated, interdisciplinary character of games research as a field appears to be one of its key characteristics. This tension between the pursuit towards definitional clarity and a more unified body of learning on the one hand, and the often fruitful (sometimes frustrating) encounters that take place between several, usually separate fields of learning that collide in the academic study of games on the other, is something that should be taken into account while interpreting the contemporary character of the game researcher community.

The sociology of knowledge has attempted to describe and explain processes that relate to the establishment of new ways of thinking, including such works as *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966). While Berger and Luckman describe in broad terms how the processes of socialization lead members of a particular society to internalize the norms, and interpretative schemes that become accepted as objective reality (ibid., 77, 149-182), emphasizing particularly the role of language, the work of Thomas S. Kuhn aims to understand how academic knowledge is constructed. His book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) was influential in establishing the view that the periods of more or less steady, incremental progression of “normal science” were occasionally transformed by a rapid “paradigm shift”, which changes the fundamentals of the underlying organization of knowledge. A central strain of criticism of Kuhn’s work has maintained that the actual conceptual changes in academic practice are more evolutionary than revolutionary (Toulmin 1972). Contemporary accounts of knowledge (scholarly or other) often approach knowledge as culture: various forms of knowledge constitute meanings, create objects for attention, and powerfully influence our social practices (see e.g. McCarthy 1996, 1-10). This is a valid perspective for games research as well, regardless of whether there are any clear “paradigms” of game studies to be identified, and of whether the progression of scholarship in the field appears cumulative, revolutionary, or more diverse and incidental.

There are multiple ways to conceptualize the wide multi- and interdisciplinarity that has characterized the history of games and play research: that it is based (as critics like Robert A. Georges would say) on imprecise theorization or sloppy and incomplete delineation of the object of study. Or, that games are indeed so complex, used for so many different purposes, and multidimensional, particularly in their digital, Internet era versions, that there is an inherent need for plurality of scholarly approaches. The proponents of some single disciplinary identity or core focus for game studies see this situation probably differently from those who approach games as parts of ongoing research interests that are not solely focused on games as an interactive cultural form. When approached from the perspectives opened by the sociology of knowledge, the academic debates and affiliations of games scholars reflect wider concerns relating to such general questions as:

- What is the role and status of games and play in culture and society?
- How, and from what kind of starting points should they be researched?
- What kind of knowledge about games and play is relevant or valuable knowledge?
- What kind of purposes should the knowledge about games primarily be used for?

Such decisions bear important consequences for the work of university professors, researchers and students who decide to focus on games, but they also have broader implications for society – for the lives of gaming individuals and groups, as well as through the value and significance attached to different games- and play-related activities, to the games industry and beyond.

Between countries and regions, the academic cultures have often differed in what kind of research traditions regarding games have been of central or of marginal concern. We will provide three examples here, briefly introducing the outline of games research in three European countries.

In Finland there has been early twentieth century interest into the study of games and play particularly from folkloristics, and later from developmental psychology and educational perspectives. Starting from the late 1990s, the young generation of Finnish game researchers has participated actively in humanities and cultural studies based approaches to game studies, as seen in their involvement in journals like *Game Studies* and *Games & Culture*, as well as in the establishment of DiGRA. (Sotamaa 2009.)

As for German games research, there are several disciplinary roots – as in other countries, young scholars from humanities, cultural studies and communication research approached the topic from various angles, starting in the late 1990s. However, the psychological tradition, focusing on (negative) effects of digital games, was – and is – still strong in Germany. There has been an ongoing societal debate about the effect of violent content and addictive effects (especially of MMORPGs), and research has somewhat mirrored that heated debate with multiple studies into these effects. In recent years, the focus of research has been widened considerably, though, with a growing interest in other aspects of digital games, like social interaction in games, learning and education, and the place and meaning of digital games in everyday life.

From the 2000s onwards, games research quickly grew to become a major interest of both academia and government in The Netherlands and later also in Belgium. An increasing number of innovation projects involving both research and industry and at least partly funded by the government gave and are still giving the field a major boost in several subdomains. Computer scientists work on improving the tools available to designers while these designers seek new game concepts and design theories. Currently, research into games in The Netherlands and Belgium is practiced by educational scientists, social scientists and media psychologists as well as game scholars coming from the humanities.

Some of the key differences in the various approaches to games relate to such tensions as whether the researcher is interested in games as an *influence* or impulse for particular kinds of thought or action, versus as a *tool*, that is used by competent cultural subjects to meet the needs and goals that are important in their life contexts (the “media effects” versus “empowerment” perspectives). This is something that has traditionally differentiated

researchers from, say, media psychology or psychiatry, as contrasted to those coming from cultural and media studies.

Furthermore, there are differences between and within humanities and social sciences between approaches that are based on empirical methodologies as contrasted with those which rely on theoretical reasoning, or conceptual or hermeneutical analyses of the subject matter. The fundamental differences between *quantitative* and *qualitative* perspectives to game research are often also something that differentiate between researchers coming to game studies from different disciplinary backgrounds. The differences between research that aims towards *description* and *explanation* versus those kinds of scholarship which primarily aim at *interpretation* and *understanding* are usually associated with such key differences in methodology (von Wright 1971). Rather than aiming towards the representative or typical truths about how games function or are played, the researcher might be aiming towards highlighting atypical or original ways of approaching the game, thereby expanding our understanding of the artistic potential in the game form (cf. Aarseth 2007).

Another fundamental difference in the game scholarship relates to the role of *design* and *construction* in games research. For those academics that come from art schools or technical universities, or from certain Computer Science fields, for example, the construction of a prototype, gameplay demonstration, or some similar artifact is a natural part of research, and often a central, tangible outcome to which much of the attention and energy is directed. In contrast, many researchers who have their background in social sciences or humanities see the existence of a game as a starting point for “real research” through which analytical, critical and theoretical contributions to our knowledge concerning the form, operation and experiences associated with various kinds of games can be achieved. The role of knowledge in design research in general is different from that of many other fields of science and scholarship. Much of the knowledge that is relevant to game design is “tacit knowledge”, meaning that the non-conceptual or non-propositional element plays an important role in it, and understanding the quality of design may also relate to “sensual knowledge” which has been discussed as an area in design that often resists explicit conceptualization – yet such areas of knowledge can be systematically approached through design research inquiry (Niedderer 2007). A notable area in this regards for games research has been the wide field of Computer Sciences, which has from early on featured experimental game designs, either as enthusiastic hobby projects in game programming, such as the classic *Space War!* (created by the MIT students in the early 1960s), or as part of systematic research work carried out for example in artificial intelligence (AI), computer animation, user experience (UX) or human-computer interaction studies (HCI). In this sense the Computer Sciences have made important contributions to the underpinnings of digital games as an art form.

There are also differences in the *political orientation* of games research that has been carried out. While some researchers prefer to work in close collaboration with the industry and aim to have an impact on the industry practices and products through their contributions, some prefer to maintain a critical distance. The role of Media Studies and Cultural Studies has particularly been notable in questioning the inherent ideology encoded in digital games and media, raising awareness about the stereotypical gender characterizations in commercial game products, for example. Feminist, gender and queer studies have contributed to the discussion about the role of women and girls in the game industry and game culture in general. The political allegiances cut through other areas of games research as well. For example, in economics, it is possible to find both economists

who work closely with the industry in working out the optimal pricing or business models, while some (leftist) political economists direct attention towards the uneven power relations between consumers, producers, distributors and advertisers of games.

Even such a quick overview into the historical developments in the games research scholarship will point towards the inherent need for interdisciplinary dialogue: as is often noted in research, the “digital game” and “game play” are complex, multidimensional and multifaceted phenomena, which invite approaches that take into account their character as created artifacts, playful performances, designed affordances, as well as economic, social and cultural phenomena, among other things.

This overview into the diverse history of games research leads to questions like: how multidisciplinary is the field of game research today? What kind of academic background are today’s game researchers coming from, and do they identify themselves as “game researchers”?

GAME RESEARCHER SURVEY

Some answers to the above questions are provided by an international survey carried out in October 2012. Designed by scholars from multiple backgrounds and rather substantial in length (with 46 questions, some of which included multiple statements), it was distributed to the mailing lists of DiGRA, as well as to the ECREA and ICA game studies groups via email as well as in groups’ Facebook pages. The survey gained 808 responses, with 561 respondents (70.8 %) completing the entire survey. After removing some invalid entries (including all those cases where an incorrect response had been given to at least one of the control questions), 544 valid responses (67.3 %) formed the data that was used in the following analysis and discussion.

The distribution of the invitation to participate in this survey primarily within these three communities of scholars makes this survey by no means exhaustive or representative of game or play research more generally. Yet, these are already sizable communities in themselves; for example, during the semester 2012-2013, at the time of this survey, the number of subscribers in the DiGRA mailing list (GAMESNETWORK@uta.fi) was close to 1500 members. This mailing list had been established in June 2002, and during its more than a decade of operation has attracted a selection of active game researchers from multiple disciplines, around the globe. The internationalization and diversification of these kinds of academic communities has been further supported by the international spread of academic conferences and seminars. In the case of DiGRA, there have been five bi-annual DiGRA conferences in 2003-2011, taking place in Europe, Asia and North America.

This paper is the first publication coming out of this survey, and the aim here is to provide an overview of only part of its results, with attention primarily directed at the responses to questions or statements that probed the educational background, the research traditions where the respondents situate their current work, as well as whether they see themselves as “digital games researchers”, or “gamers”, and a look into their research partnerships.

RESULTS: AN OUTLINE OF A GAMES RESEARCHER COMMUNITY

The first question which we will examine here is a query about the academic background of the respondents (see below, Figure 1).

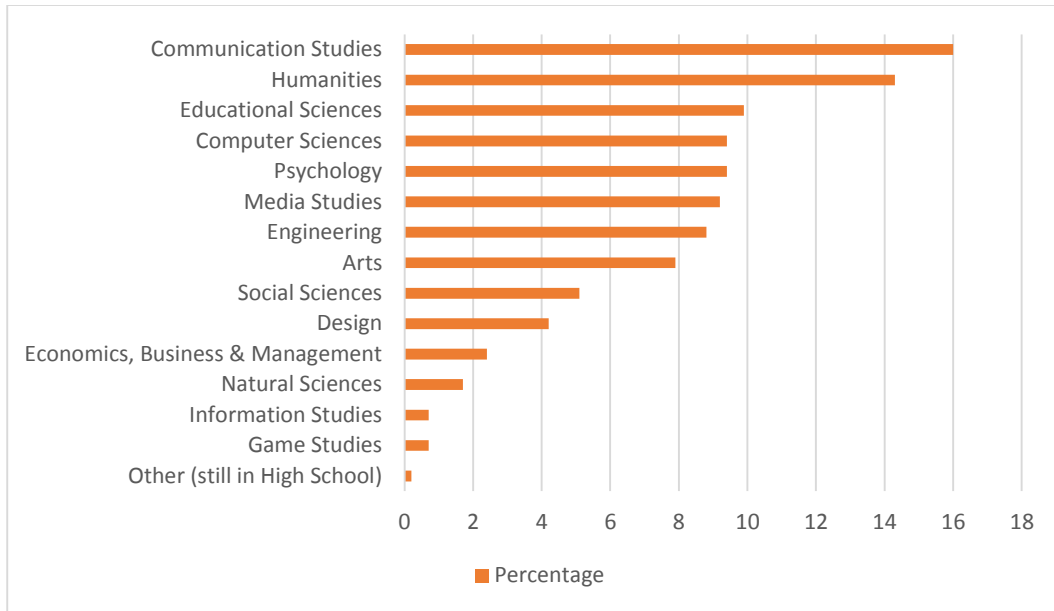


Figure 1: Disciplinary background.

Considering the distribution of the survey among the ECREA and ICA games research groups and the researchers subscribing to the DiGRA mailing list, a strong representation of respondents with a Communication Studies and Humanities background was expected. Looking at the results, our expectations were largely confirmed: Communication Studies (16 %) and the Humanities (14 %) are the two largest categories – however, their share among the respondents is far from dominant: c. 70 % of the respondents are coming from other disciplinary backgrounds. It should also be noted that even these two groups are far from unified in their educational background; some of the Communication Studies degrees are majors from Journalism, some from Speech Communication, some have their degrees in Mass Communication. Likewise, the disciplinary category of Humanities is constructed here to include degrees in such diverse fields as History, Linguistics, Law, Musicology, Religious Studies, and Philosophy. Also broad in disciplinary range, the Natural Sciences category includes degrees from Biology, Medicine, Nursing and Kinesiology. Similarly, Social Sciences includes degrees in Sociology, Social Work, Public Health, Science and Technology Studies as well as Political Science.

The category for Computer Sciences was missing from the survey form, which itself is perhaps a revealing oversight (in reality, this was simply due to a technical mistake). But the strong presence of Computer Sciences emerged nevertheless from the open text responses. The degrees in Computer Sciences mentioned in the open answers included several subfields and more or less closely related fields, such as Information System Science, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Games Development, Virtual Reality, and Media Technology. Together representing 9 % of respondents' background degrees, the Computer Sciences form as large a group in this survey as Educational Sciences, Media Studies and Psychology. The Arts, Engineering and Social Sciences also constitute more than 5 % of the survey respondents.

Only four respondents (less than a percent of survey participants) have explicitly chosen to enter their background degree as being from Game Studies or Game Research. However, it should be noted that the survey form did not include the option of Game Studies or Game

Research, and that must have lead some people whose degree could have fit into this category to select another option. However, when the overwhelming majority of those who have chosen to specify the exact name of their degree in this question had entered some other specific discipline, it appears unlikely that people coming from such dedicated game degrees is currently very large. In this sense, it appears that Game Studies has not yet established itself as an academic discipline in the role of providing the dominant university degrees for those wanting to research games in academia. The scope of disciplinary range is great, and among those 124 respondents who had chosen to enter text to the “Other” category (rather than choosing from the 11 pre-given options in the survey form), there were over 70 different degrees mentioned.

The academic identity of a researcher is, however, not limited by the field in which they gained their formal degree. It is possible, and rather common, to change one’s area of study, theoretical starting points or preferred methodologies. For this reason, it is also insightful to have a look at a question where the respondents were asked to pick a single research tradition that would characterize their current research work (see below, Figure 2).

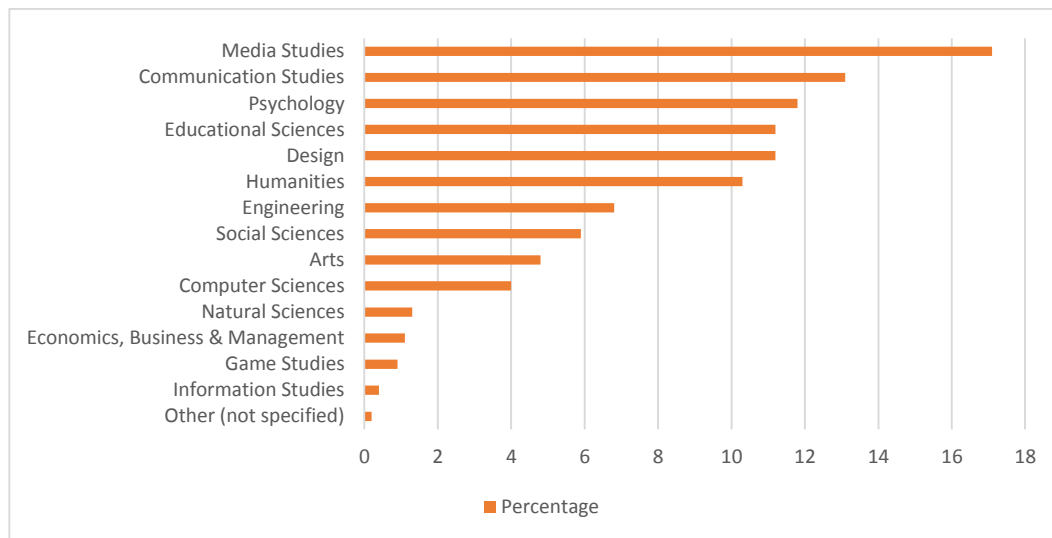


Figure 2: Current research field.

The distribution into different scholarly fields is still broad in these answers and there is no single dominant discipline. However, the distribution of responses is somewhat different in this case, and the Humanities and Communication Studies are no longer in the lead. There have been many changes from the field of origin to a different one. A closer analysis reveals that 55 % (300 respondents) reported to still be working in the field of their highest degree. Almost as many, 45 % (244 respondents) had changed their research field, however. It is interesting to see where the flows of “disciplinary immigration” have been coming from and where they have moved towards (see below, Figure 3).

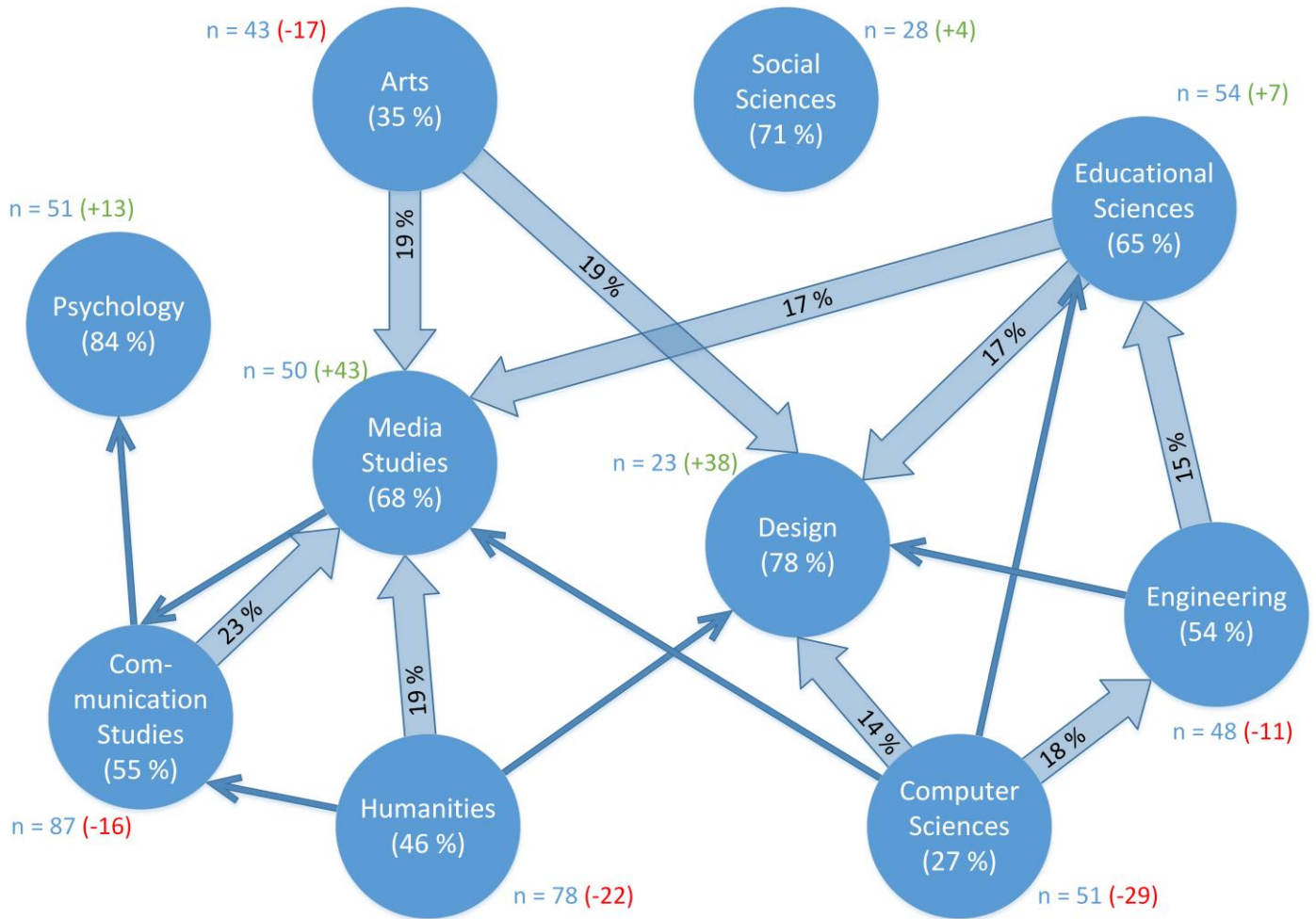


Figure 3: Transfers between the field of highest degree and the current primary research field.

In Figure 3 we can see how many respondents had reported staying within the field of their original degree (percentages within the spheres), and how much transfer (leaving and arriving) there had been in relation to other research fields. N-values denote the numerical change within the field.

It should be noted that this picture is designed just to illustrate how the respondents in this survey have changed their disciplinary affiliations rather than making any claims about representativeness more generally. However, even in a cursory observation there are a few notable changes in several categories. Areas from which there been significant migration to other fields include Computer Sciences, Humanities, the Arts, Communication Studies, and Engineering. In contrast, those fields who have received the highest influx of graduates from other disciplines include Media Studies, Design, and Psychology. It is, however, difficult to pick up any general trend, and the changes in approach or research tradition while moving on from the degree studies is probably a relatively common feature in contemporary academia. There has been identified a trend from “linear” to “multilinear career systems” more generally in the labor markets – there is no more long-time security

of jobs, and people need to constantly improve their “employability” in order to increase their chances of landing in jobs in the changing labor market, academic or other (Baruch 2004). Picking only a single, primary label for the research one is carrying out is also likely to distort the situation, as many respondents reported doing multi- or interdisciplinary research. Also, it is important to note that movement away from a field of previous degree can also be interpreted positively as an indication of how useful, or “employable” this degree has proved to be for the later researcher career.

Since both the background degrees and current research affiliations of the respondents are overwhelmingly identified as something else than Game Studies, does that mean that research of games is insignificant to researchers’ professional identity? To find answers to that question, it is interesting to have a look at the responses to the survey statement “I see myself as a digital games researcher” (see below, Figure 4).

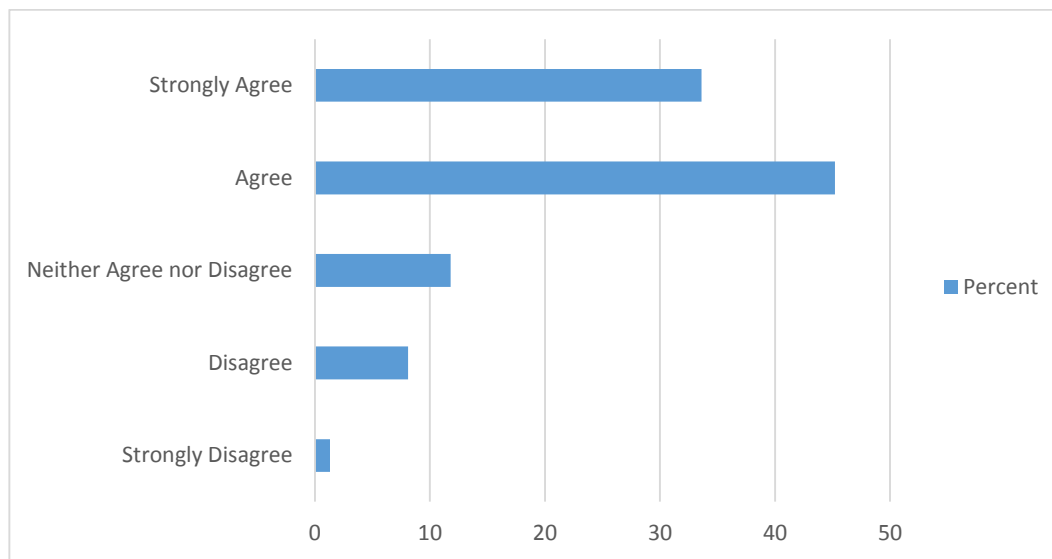


Figure 4: Identification as a “digital games researcher”.

The self-identification as a “digital games researcher” appears to be strong among the respondents (79 % agree or strongly agree to this statement). As the respondents were part of special interest groups and email lists dedicated to games research, this was expected, while it is also worth noticing that there are over 20 % of respondents that do not see themselves as digital games researchers. Nevertheless, it seems that for most respondents being a digital games researcher is an inclusive, rather than exclusive part of their academic identity. It is perfectly possible to be a Historian, Psychologist or Computer Scientist, while also being a games researcher. For the academic organizations promoting the field of Games Research, or Game Studies, this nevertheless identifies an interesting challenge: it is hard to find a “typical” game researcher, and while most of the academics in this survey claimed to be games researchers, they do not form a unified group.

There is some variance in how strong the identification as a digital games researcher is among those coming from different disciplinary backgrounds (see Figure 5, below).

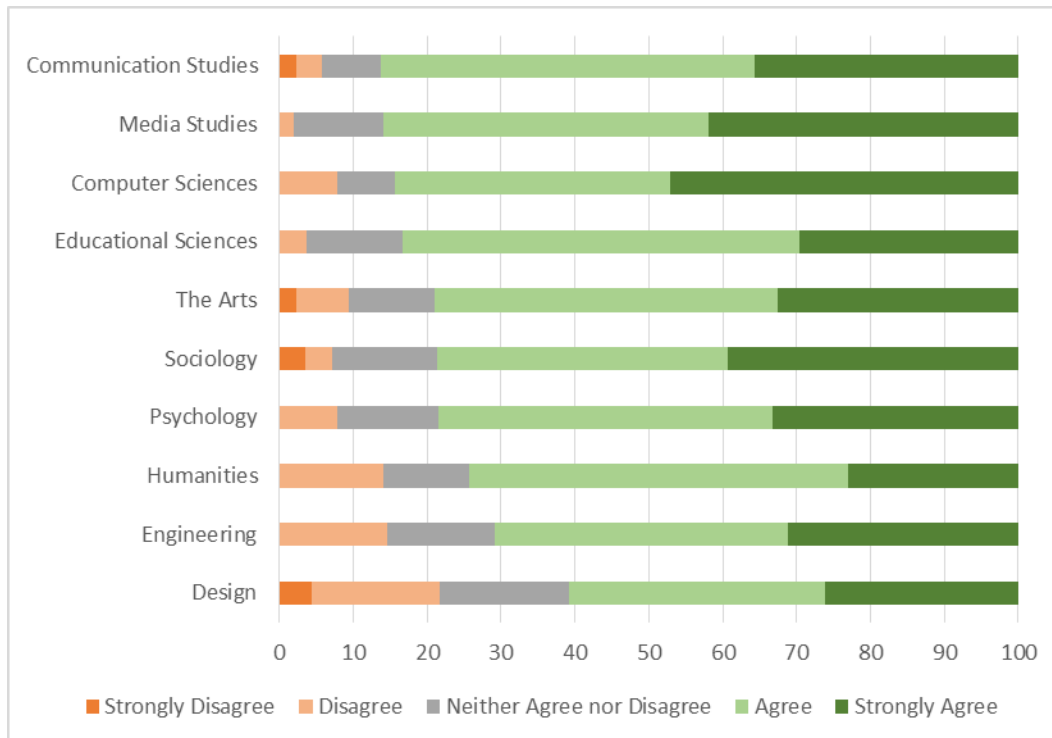


Figure 5: Identification as a “digital games researcher” by original degree.

The results show minimal differences between respondents; e.g. those with their highest degree in Design, Engineering or Humanities fields appear to be somewhat less likely to agree with the statement “I see myself as a digital games researcher”, than those coming from Communication Studies, Media Studies, Computer Sciences or Educational Sciences. The differences are not statistically significant (ANOVA $F(9, 503) = 1.896, p = .05$) and post-hoc analysis (Tukey’s HSD) revealed no significant differences between any of the disciplines. Overall, most researchers who had chosen to participate in this study strongly felt that they were digital games researchers.

The issue whether a games researcher should always also be an active game player, or “gamer”, is something that has also been debated in the past, so it was interesting to see how many of the respondents self-identify as gamers (see below, Figure 6).

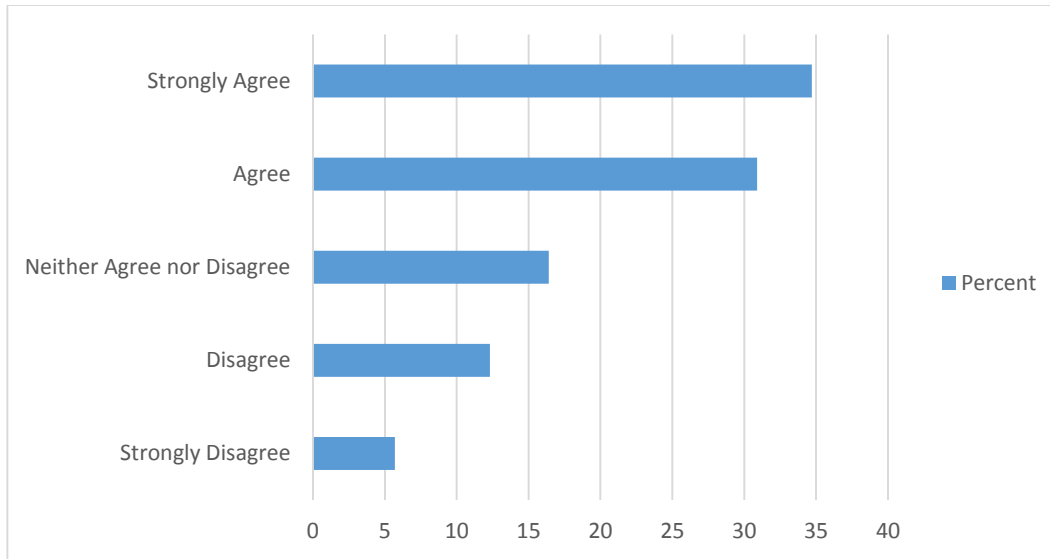


Figure 6: Identification as a gamer.

In this survey, a clear majority, 65.6 % either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. It should nevertheless be noted that the number of those who did disagree, or neither agree or disagree was also prominent and constituted over a third of the respondents, 34.4 %. Those who self-identified themselves as a “gamer” were also more likely to identify themselves as a “digital games researcher” ($r = .295, p = .000$).

In the disciplinary context for games research it is also important to see how much of the research work is carried out alone, and how prominent role the different kinds of collaborations have in this field (see below, Figure 7).

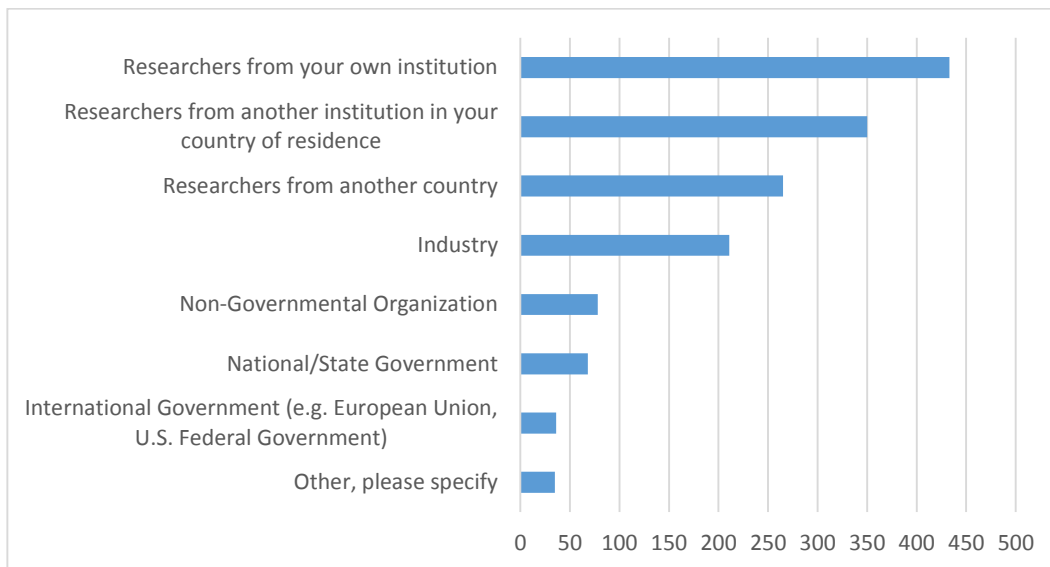


Figure 7: Research collaborations.

A large majority of the respondents (433 out of 544, 76 %) had engaged in research collaboration at least within their own institution, approximately half had done

international collaboration (49 %), and 39 % reported having collaborated with the industry. The survey does not give direct answers to how interdisciplinary these collaborations are, but it is likely that active collaboration will also be more likely to lead to encounters with the representatives of other disciplines than carrying out solitary scholarly work. It should also be noted that the responses given in the “Other” category include collaborations particularly with students, gamers, school teachers and game developers (working as indie developers as well as in the mainstream game industry). Further, as a more general comment on the trend towards increasingly collaborative research, it should be noted that there are funding reasons which favor collaborative research projects (e.g. through the EU research funding), and that thereby the different forms of research collaboration and their impact on researcher productivity, for example, are not always completely recognized or understood (Katz & Martin 1997; Lee & Bozeman 2005). This is probably even truer in the case of a new and rapidly evolving research field such as digital games research.

DISCUSSION: MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH OF GAMES

In light of the findings, it appears clear that a) there is no single disciplinary field that would play a key role for organizing the academic identity of contemporary games researchers, and that b) the research on digital games and play is in fact highly multidisciplinary and highly dynamic as almost half of the survey respondents reported currently working in a different field than from which they gained their highest degree.

On the other hand, the respondents also predominantly identified themselves as “digital games researchers”, which appeared not to be an exclusive feature of their academic identity, but rather something that they were capable of combining with other academic affiliations. Research collaboration was also very common, probably contributing to more interdisciplinary contact among those academics who are interested in researching games, but are originally coming from different academic fields. It was also interesting to note that, whilst the majority of the respondents agreed to a statement of being gamers themselves, over a third did not.

It is possible to critique the distribution of this survey only among those belonging to DiGRA mailing list, or to the ECREA or ICA games research special interest groups, but it is unlikely that the basic finding about the multidisciplinaryity of games research would have changed. It is more likely that the inclusion of groups of researchers working primarily with game design, programming, or player experience evaluation areas, for example, would had led to even more diverse results.

There seems to be some consensus that for a field of knowledge and learning to become organized in a manner that would generally be recognized as a “discipline”, some level of continuity and coherence would be required, through a shared focus of study, established publication channels, academic practices such as conferences as well as institutionalized education and work opportunities within the academic context (cf. Liles et al. 1995; Camarinha-Matos & Afsarmanesh 2005).

While there are now journals and conferences that provide some publication venues for people who are specializing in games research, the results of this survey suggest that the work to establish full academic disciplinary structures in this field is still very much a work in progress. The academics who responded to the call to participate in this games researcher survey are most likely among those who hold the most active interest in this field, yet the

educational background and identification of the primary current research tradition display a large diversity rather than any cohesiveness in approach. While no doubt enriching to the field at large, this inevitably also creates its challenges for accumulation of expertise or ability to carry out professionally competent evaluations of fellow game researchers' work during peer reviews, for example.

Particularly at the time when DiGRA was established (around 2002-2005) there was much discussion about the need for better institutional support and establishment of Game Studies as a disciplinary core for this field. There have also been counter-reactions, and Ian Bogost (2006), for example, has maintained that the pursuit for disciplinary identity for Game Studies is essentialist and isolationist by character and that "comparative video game criticism" would be needed instead. However, maybe the need for some coherence and clarity on the one hand, and for openness and fruitful contacts between multiple research areas are not necessarily mutually exclusive in game research. Frans Mäyrä (2009) has written that, while some kind of disciplinary identity is necessary for the field for practical academic reasons, the search for identity is also good for supporting interdisciplinary collaboration: the prerequisite for engagement in interdisciplinary dialogue is awareness of the distinctive contributions each disciplinary position carries with them to the dialogic encounter. Such identity need not be suppressive or dogmatic, however, but can rather be conceived as something that fosters clarity and coherence in terminological and conceptual level, continuity in scholarly argumentation and dialogue, while also being supportive of interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation.

The conducted games researcher survey included also a question whether the respondents had any ideas or suggestions they would like to present to the research organizations (ECREA, ICA, DiGRA) dealing with digital games. While a full analysis of these responses goes beyond the scope of this paper, there are some general observations we can make here, to promote discussion. The first observation concerns the conflict of opinion and priorities: some respondents complain about how there has been what they see as overt emphasis on ludology or formalist analysis of games, which to their mind has stifled the progress of really relevant research, particularly in terms of trying to understand societal impact and back up the game research by quantifiable evidence. Others, however, believe that it is time to move beyond descriptive frameworks and that more and better theory is what is needed, or support more qualitative research, or state that there should be more emphasis on the cultural significance of games. Few responses recognize the divided and diverse character of the games research field and suggest that the organizations should try to find a means of finding a balance between "becoming a discipline" and "reaching out" to other fields. The apparent incompatibility of goals and evaluation criteria for scholarship in different subfields or approaches led some respondents to suggest more clearly dividing the game scholars working within these organizations into narrower special interest groups of their own.

Jean-François Lyotard published his influential study *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in 1979 and there are elements in the field of contemporary game research that evoke this description about the collapse of "grand narratives", emergence of multiple competing "language games", and the need for "paralogy" – changing the rules of academic language games and invention of new games (Lyotard 1984, 60-67). However, like the critics of Lyotard have remarked, there is also need for areas of consensus as a force that is necessary for communication to be possible within and between fields of knowledge (see e.g. Williams 2003). The key finding of this survey – that there is an internal tension in games research between the perceived dominant self-identification as a digital games

researcher, and the great diversity of educational backgrounds and current research traditions – suggests that the institutions and individuals working in this field need to be aware of the particular tensions and challenges that such a dialectic of identity and difference in game research carries with it.

The fact that the people doing games research are coming from multiple different academic traditions has probably not escaped the attention of anyone who, for example, has organized a games research conference and struggled with organizing the peer review process. Yet, it is important to now have a study that actually starts mapping out these multiple disciplinary backgrounds, and which also reminds us that despite all this diversity, the clear majority of respondents also identified themselves as digital games researchers. It is also valuable to see how much movement and change there is taking place between different research traditions in contemporary games research, suggesting that a vibrant, interdisciplinary interplay is currently ongoing, as scholars driven to study games and play collaborate, innovate and grow new competencies. The challenges and potentials related to this, internally divergent research field clearly also require more self-reflective thought and studies of different kinds to continue and complement this one.

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