

**THE TRAVELLING GAMER:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF
VIDEO GAME EVENTS**

Ying-Ying Law

Ph.D. Thesis

2016

**THE TRAVELLING GAMER:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF VIDEO GAME EVENTS**

Ying-Ying Law

School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work
& Social Sciences
University of Salford, Salford, UK

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 2016

Table of Contents

	page
Table of Contents	ii
List of Figures	v
List of Tables	ix
Acknowledgments	x
Abstract	xi
<hr/>	
1. Press Start to Begin	1
<hr/>	
1.1. The Rising Popularity of Video Games	2
1.2. Video Game Events	4
1.3. Defining Video Games	6
1.4. Studying Video Games	7
1.5. Aims and Objectives	9
1.6. Thesis Structure	10
1.7. Conclusion	11
2. Playing with Video Games	13
<hr/>	
2.1. Considering Play	14
2.2. Defining Play and the Magic Circle	17
2.3. Challenging the Magic Circle	20
2.4. The Almost Magic Circle	25
2.5. Critical Play	26
2.6. Frame Analysis	28
2.7. Conclusion	30
3. Studying Video Gamer Culture	32
<hr/>	
3.1. Conceptualising Video Game Culture	33
3.1.1. Habitus	33

3.1.2.	Subcultures, Neo-Tribes and Scenes	36
3.1.3.	Fans and Fan Activity	41
3.1.4.	Knowledge Communities	47
3.2.	Video Gamer Productivity	48
3.2.1.	Game Communities	49
3.2.2.	Considering Metaculture	60
3.2.3.	Considering the Meta-Game and Everyday Life	63
3.3.	Communities, Exclusion, Oppression, and Conflict	64
3.3.1.	Considering Gender	68
3.4.	Conclusion	75
4.	Research Methods	78
<hr/>		
4.1.	Doing Ethnography	78
4.2.	The Research	82
4.2.1.	The Video Game Events	82
4.2.2.	Choosing the Video Game Events	88
4.2.3.	Sampling Procedure	90
4.2.4.	Triangulation	91
4.2.5.	Data Collection	91
4.2.6.	Data Analysis	106
4.2.7.	Ethical Issues	107
4.2.8.	Problems and Limitations	108
4.2.9.	Timetable	111
4.3.	Conclusion	112
5.	Characteristics of Video Gamers and Video Game Communities	114
<hr/>		
5.1.	Video Games and Motives	118
5.2.	The Three Characteristic of Video Game Attenders	120
5.2.1.	The Socialisers	124

5.2.2.	The Participators	136
5.2.3.	The Competitors	166
5.3.	The Four Stages of Competitive Gaming	179
5.4.	The Hearthstone Metagame	186
5.5.	Patterns of Video Game Communities	191
5.6.	Conclusion	196
6.	The Embodied Experience	201
<hr/>		
6.1	Sensory Ethnography	202
6.1.1	Sight	203
6.1.2	Sound	205
6.1.3	Smell	212
6.1.4	Taste	215
6.1.5	Touch	226
6.2	Conclusion	228
7.	Conclusion	231
<hr/>		
Appendices		240
<hr/>		
A	Terminology	240
B	Questionnaire Methodology	244
C	Interview Methodology	263
References		274
<hr/>		
Epilogue		298
<hr/>		

List of Figures

Figures

		page
Chapter 2		
Figure 2.1	The King of Kong – Drawing markings on screens to practice timing and precision - Gordon, S.(Director). (2007). <i>King of Kong</i> . [Film]. United States.	24
Chapter 4		
Figure 4.1	Photographs of the researcher doing push-ups and getting stuffed into ‘The Box’ (Taken by Multiplay Photographers) https://www.flickr.com/photos/mpuk/albums	101
Figure 4.2	Gold’s (1958) classification scheme of participant observer roles	102
Chapter 5		
Figure 5.1	A diagram showing three types of video game attenders	121
Figure 5.2	The ‘after-party’ pub gathering after London MCM Comic Con [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	133
Figure 5.3	The exhibition hall of Insomnia57 (i57)	137
Figure 5.4	The Distant Worlds (2014) Meet & Greet [left], and ‘The hands that touched Nobuo Uematsu and Arnie Roth’ [right] [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	146
Figure 5.5	Signed items from the Distant Worlds (2014) Meet & Greet [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	147
Figure 5.6	Photographs of Final Fantasy fans at a social gathering, posing with the Louis Vuitton advert, featuring Lightning from Final Fantasy XIII [Photographed by Final Fantasy Fans]	148
Figure 5.7	The researcher in cosplay – Character: Hanji (Attack of Titan) [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	149
Figure 5.8	Cosplay trend in 2012 (Sword Arts Online), 2013 (Attack on Titan) and 2014 (Frozen) http://static.fjcdn.com/pictures/Cosplay+trends_f851b4_5082824.jpg	150
Figure 5.9	A photograph of the researcher making 3D manoeuvre gear [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	152

Figure 5.10	A group photo of Attack on Titan cosplayers (London MCM Comic Con, 2013) http://foxseye.deviantart.com/art/All-the-Attack-On-Titan-410848325	153
Figure 5.11	The researcher and Attack on Titans cosplayers role-playing [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	154
Figure 5.12	Opening Ceremony at i50 – BYOC gamers trying to obtain ‘The Box’	157
Figure 5.13	Pub Quiz – i56	159
Figure 5.14	Building the biggest beer and pizza box tower [left], and competing in the boat race [right]-	160
Figure 5.15	LAN treasure, an extension cable (left) and a grimy keyboard (right) [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	163
Figure 5.16	A photograph of seven pairs of shoes outside the hosts flat [Photographed by Ying Ying Law]	168
Figure 5.17	Insomnia Gaming Festival Event Crew Application	170
Figure 5.18	Play Expo Blackpool (2014) staff photo with Jesse McClure	172
Figure 5.19	A diagram showing rules on how to play ‘man hunt’ (Cabin Fever 1, 2014)	174
Figure 5.20	FalcoMaster3000 playing in tournament (left) and a short animated video of FalcoMaster3000 on YouTube (right)	180
Figure 5.21	Group stages (Insomnia53)	182
Figure 5.22	The career of a sport fan/ video gamer (Crawford, 2012, p.63)	183
Figure 5.23	Researcher hitting Legend in Hearthstone	184
Figure 5.24	A ‘painted’ customised controller (left) and GCC mod controller (right)	187
Figure 5.25	A Hearthstone player receiving a cheque for coming third at Insomnia52	188
Figure 5.26	Prof Pro vs. Rolex \$100 money match – Prof Pro’s ‘salt dance’ from winning the first game https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3VQUEmsO8M	189
Figure 5.27	Prof Pro vs. Rolex \$100 money match – Rolex’s ‘salt dance’ after winning the second game https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3VQUEmsO8M	190
Figure 5.28	Video game-goers queuing at Eurogamer Expo [2013]	191

Chapter 6

Figure 6.1	Photograph of Distant Worlds [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	206
Figure 6.2	A photograph of a BYOC gamer's dinner (Insomnia i53 – LAN) [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	219
Figure 6.3	A photograph of the researchers' neighbours 'food supply' at Insomnia53	222
Figure 6.4	A photograph of a tower made from energy drinks (Insomnia i53) [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]	224
Figure 6.5	A photograph and eating chicken together	225

Appendix B

Figure B.1	The information section of the <i>Typeform</i> questionnaires.	251
Figure B.2	Question 1 - The consent form section of the <i>Typeform</i> questionnaires	252
Figure B.3	Question 2 – How old are you?	252
Figure B.4	Question 3 – What gender are you?	253
Figure B.5	Question 4 – Where have you travelled from?	250
Figure B.6	Question 5 – What is your current occupation?	254
Figure B.7	Question 6 – What is your marital status?	254
Figure B.8	Question 7 – What is your yearly income?	255
Figure B.9	Question 8 – How did you hear about this event?	255
Figure B.10	Question 9 - Who do you attend to these video game events with?	256
Figure B.11	Question 10 – What is your main reason for attending video game events?	256
Figure B.12	Question 11 – Have you considered doing any of the following when attending gaming events?	256
Figure B.13	Question 12 – Is there anything you intend to purchase specifically from this event?	257
Figure B.14	Question 13 – Do you attend to other gaming events?	257
Figure B.15	Question 14 – Follow up question (from question 13)	258
Figure B.16	Question 15 – Follow-up interview or follow-up interview	258

Figure B.17	Additional Question 1 – How does playing games at video game events differ in comparison to playing at home?	259
Figure B.18	Additional Question 2 – Do you consider meeting face-to-face with other gamers important? And why?	259
Figure B.19	Additional Question 3: Please write a short description of your experience at certain video game events	260
Figure B.20	Additional Question 4: what does attending certain video game events mean to you?	260
Figure B.21	An example of a ‘Typeform’ result and general report, from one of the research questionnaires	261

List of Tables

Tables

	page
Chapter 1	
Table 1.1	The five major types of analysis and their characteristics (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2013., p. 10) 8
Chapter 4	
Table 4.1	List of the Video Game Events 83
Table 4.2	Pilot Study Questionnaire – What is your gender? 93
Table 4.3	Pilot Questionnaires – What is your age? 94
Table 4.4	Pilot Questionnaire – What is your current occupation? 94
Table 4.5	Pilot Questionnaire – Have you considered doing any of the following when attending gaming events? 95
Table 4.6	Interview Participants 98
Table 4.7	Group Interview Participants 99
Table 4.8	Timetable 110
Chapter 5	
Table 5.1	The Typology of Video Gamer Roles – Mundane and Spectacular Moments 123
Table 5.2	The first episode from the series of video game events in the UK 138
Table 5.3	The Four Stages of Competitive Gaming 179
Appendix C	
Table C.1	Interview Participants 265
Table C.2	Group Interview Participants 267

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors Prof. Garry Crawford, Dr Victoria Gosling and Dr Daniel Muriel for all the advice, invaluable guidance, and support provided throughout this research. I would like to thank my personal tutor, Dr Andrew Clark for providing guidance and support. I would also like to thank my family and friends, especially my Mum and Dad, two sisters, Yuen-Man Law and Po-Yee Law, and last but not least, Anthony Lee for the support and encouragement they have given me over the last four years. Finally, I would like to thank anyone and everyone who participated, contributed or commented on this research – in particular, this memorable comment:

‘Keep writing, do it for us’

Throughout this research, I have travelled a lot - hence the title of this research, ‘The Travelling Gamer’. However, the title does not represent my efforts for travelling to numerous video game events, but the thousands of people, who are usually separated by distance, coming together to pursue their interests in video games. Video game events are not just about playing video games, it is about the gamers, the organisers and the volunteers who make it happen - without your dedication, socialisation, and tuition, this research would not have been possible.

Thank you.

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnography of video gamers and video game events. It considers the social and cultural practices of video gamers away from the video game screen, and in particular focuses on those who participate in, and attend, various video game related events. Previous studies on video games have often focused on the isolation of video gamers (in small groups) or the textual analysis of video games themselves. However, these focuses have often been too closely aligned with a very narrow understanding of (direct) play, which often ignore the social aspect of video gaming away from the video game screen.

Using an ethnographic approach, consisting of questionnaires, interviews, group interviews, and extensive observational research, this research considers the social significance of video games in enabling and maintaining social networks, patterns and the identity formations of those who attend various video game events across the United Kingdom; including video game conventions [MCM Comic Con, Eurogamer/EGX Rezzed, Play Expo], tournaments and competitions [Edmas 2, Edintines, Manchester Monthly Regionals], local area network parties [Insomnia Gaming Festivals i50/i51/i52/i53/i54/i55/i56], game related musical events [Video Games Live, Final Fantasy Orchestral concerts and Legend of Zelda Orchestral concerts] and other video game practices away from the video game screen.

The research findings suggest that video game events are not just about playing video games. Video game events provide a unique opportunity for video gamers, who are usually separated by distance, to come together and interact in meaningful ways, besides gaming itself. Many of those who attend video game events often engage themselves through various forms of socialisation, tuition, and social progression, that are often taken for granted. Therefore, this research seeks to provide an understanding of an important, but largely under-researched aspect of video gamer culture.

Supervisor: Dr Victoria Gosling

Co-Supervisor: Prof. Garry Crawford & Dr Daniel Muriel

Chapter 1

Press Start to Begin

Introduction

To date, video game studies have often focused on the isolation of video gamers (either individually or in small groups), or the textual analysis of video games themselves. However, these studies have often been too closely aligned with a very narrow understanding of (direct) play, which often ignore the wider social-aspect of video gaming away from the video game screen. Newman (2008) argues that it is important to consider not just the act of *playing* a video game, but also how people play *with* video games. Newman (2008) highlights various video game related practices that take place away from the video game screen; these include talking about video games, creating video game stories, and things to make and do, such as fan-art, music, cosplay, game guides, walkthroughs, FAQs, speed-runs, mods and hacks. This suggests that playing *with* video games can involve various video game related practices suffused in talk, sharing, and collaboration through social interaction, which can provide a pathway to various opportunities and communities (Newman, 2008). In comparison to a number of video game studies that focuses on the instances of play in front of a video game screen, this thesis considers the social and cultural practices of play *with* video games (Newman, 2008), with particular attention to those who attend video game events and participate in various video game related practices within video gamer culture.

With the rising popularity of video games, there has also been a rising popularity for video game events. Today, video game events consist of a wide range of activities, such as playing the latest video game demonstrations, participating in tournaments and competitions, spectating live matches, purchasing merchandise, attending workshops, signing sessions, socialising with others through networking, cosplay and much more.

Video game events including video game conventions, video game exhibitions, local area network (LAN) parties, video game-related musical events, and social gatherings organised across various locations all share some common features. These are real time events where people meet face-to-face to share their interest in video games and collaborate together in a meaningful way. For instance, video game events can provide a unique opportunity for video gamers to escape from their 'routine' everyday life and

venture into the temporal space of video game events. This allows them to participate in various video game related practices (besides gaming itself) within video gamer culture. In particular, the range of video game related practices, and the meanings attached to them, suggests a significant and specific culture. Overall, this research hopes to provide a greater understanding of an important, but largely under-researched, aspect of video gamer culture.

1.1. The Rising Popularity of Video Games

The origins of video games can be traced back to the 1950s, although it was in the late 1970s and 1980s that it began to develop as a common leisure activity. In 1975, Atari re-released *Pong* (originally an arcade game created in 1972), *Atari's Home Pong console* (Atari, 1975), as a home computer game, which sold over 150,000 units (Dillon, 2011). Subsequently in 1978, they launched the first mainstream home-based video game console, the *Atari 2600* (Atari, 1978), which became a major contributor to information technologies appearing in most households. Today, video games have a global market value exceeding billions of pounds annually and growing. For instance, the UK games industry was worth over £3.94 billion in consumer spend in 2014, with £5.5 million spent on video game events (Ukie, 2014). In addition, video game sales are now worth comparable amounts to film, music and television (Ukie, 2014). The commercial success of this entertainment industry is noteworthy. What was once a province of enthusiasts and bedroom coders evolved to what we now recognise as a major global entertainment industry, where licences, development and publishing costs exceeds millions (Rutter and Bryce, 2006). The global video games industry draws on a highly skilled labour force that produces a variety of games to attract both hard-core and more casual gamers in order to thrive and develop further. However, the significance of video games cannot be captured from sale statistics alone. For instance, Crawford (2012, p. 1) suggests that video games matter in many ways, '...educationally, socially, culturally and theoretically', and not just to those that play them. For example, video games are providing a useful way to engage learning among children – such as using *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011) and *World of Warcraft* (WoW) (Blizzard Entertainment, 2005) in the classroom (Short, 2012). Video games can provide a source of identity, conversation and friendship networks and also have a significant impact on other cultural forms, such as films, books, music and much more

(Crawford, 2012). In addition, whether we are gamers or not, the growing visibility of video games within popular culture have also become part of our broader media-scape, to include advertisements on television, radio and billboards, previews advertised on cinema-screens, films based upon game narratives, and game-related-merchandise from guide-books, figurines and other collectable items (Poole, 2000).

Previously, many forms of popular media have often linked video games to be an antisocial activity that was separated from 'normal' contexts of everyday life (Rutter and Bryce, 2006). Video gaming has often been considered to be an isolating activity where gamers are sat 'glued' to their video game consoles, producing a new generation of 'couch potatoes' (Crawford, 2005). For instance, video gamers have often been considered to be profoundly limited in their development of friendships and a fully rounded personality, due to the lack of social and face-to-face interaction (Vanderwater et al., 2004). Therefore, the common practice of playing video games has often been interpreted to be an individual, or small group of individuals, solely engaged with a game in front of a gaming screen. This has frequently been reflected in the focus of many video game studies, rather than considering the meanings attached beyond the video gaming screen.

However, Bryce and Rutter (2001) (amongst others) argue against this view of video gaming as isolating, and suggest that video gaming is not necessarily an individual activity, but rather can be very 'sociable'. Research suggests that video gaming is performed in the context of existing social and cultural networks, friendships and relationships and other forms of cultural activity (Hand and Moore, 2006). This suggests a need to explore the social perceptions of video gaming; where various video game practices often involve talk, discussion, sharing, and collaboration. For instance, it is important to recognise that video gaming involves more than the elements of repetitive gameplay among one or two people in front of a gaming machine. As Crawford (2012, p.143) writes; '...video gaming is not just the act of playing a game, but also a source of memories, dreams, conversations, identities, friendships, artwork, storytelling and so much more'. This suggests that video gaming can also involve various forms of socialisation, tuition, and social progression that do not necessarily take place in front of a gaming screen; through conversations, meeting face-to-face with other gamers, and attending video game events. For these reasons, it is important to consider the various video game practices away from the video game screen and how video gamers contribute to the construction of video game communities.

Today, video games have become a ubiquitous part of many peoples' everyday lives – in particular, video games are increasingly becoming a mainstream, ordinary and everyday activity for many. Authors such as Jenkins (1992), Newman (2004) and Crawford and Rutter (2007) have repetitively called for the study of video games to significantly widen its scope beyond a primary focus upon video gamers' direct and immediate use of the game text and interface. Recently, writers such as Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca (2008), Newman (2008), Crawford (2012) and Taylor (2012) are considering in detail what video games mean in a wider social setting and what a video game culture entails. For instance, Crawford (2012) considers the importance of how video gaming and its culture can extend into everyday life, which can often refer to the ordinary, and at times mundane, patterns of social life – such as using a mobile device to play games while commuting. However, for many others, and at certain times, there are still moments of the spectacular in the midst of the everyday and the mundane. This suggests a need to consider video game cultures and practices beyond a primary focus upon video gamers' direct and immediate use of the game text and interface. Hence, the study of video gamers attending video game events and their participation in various video game related practices.

1.2. Video Game Events

To date, there is a small, but important, literature that has considered video gamers attending video game events. An early observation on video game events dates back Poole's (2000) documentation on the biannual video games industry festival, Tokyo Game Show. Poole (2000) observed that within the vast national exhibition, Makuhari Messe, more than 160,000 Japanese men, women and children attended the two-day public exhibition in March 1999 to see and play the newest video games that launched in the next six months:

Each hardware or software company has its own stand in the enormous, roaring halls, all competing with their neighbours to attract the gamers' attention with gigantic neon signs, hundred strong ranks of TV monitors with consoles lined up underneath them, constant blasts of game sound effects and music, and professional software 'spokespeople': glamorous Japanese women dressed in skin-tight PVC, silver miniskirts or Lycra bikinis, who smile, hand out leaflets and pose for batteries of photographers (Poole, 2000, p.150)

Poole's (2000) observations were conducted over a decade ago. Since then, video game events have vastly increased in number and popularity. For instance, Tokyo Game Show has increasing numbers of visitors year-on-year, with a record-breaking attendance of 270,197 attendees in 2013 and 268,446 attendees in 2015 (Hindman, 2015).

Over previous decades, video gaming has become an increasingly noticeable and public activity. In South East Asia, Internet cafés, PC bangs (Korean Gaming Centres) and Wangbas (Chinese Internet Cafés) are popular places to play computer games and to socialise with friends (Lin, 2005; Chee, 2006; OK, 2011). In the UK, there has also been a noticeable rise in popularity of various video game events including Eurogamer Expo, MCM Comic Con, Insomnia Gaming Festivals (Insomnia or i-Series) and Play Expo. These video game events often provide a range of activities, from exhibitions showcasing products and selling goods, workshops, video game tournaments, cosplay competitions, and much more. For example, Play Expo [2013] attracted several thousand visitors and featured four distinct events: re.play (retro systems and arcade/pinball machines), now.play (previews of the latest games and hardware), pro.play (casual and competitive tournaments), and cos.play (costume competitions and dealers/traders). The UK's first LAN event, organised by Multiplay, began in 1995 with only 20 participants from a particular community of gamers featuring Doom 2 League. Following this from 1999, Multiplay organised its LAN events under the banner of 'i-Series', abbreviated from the 'Insomnia' series. The second Multiplay event, Insomnia2 (i2) [1999], hosted more than 200 participants, but by Insomnia50 (i50) [2013] there was reportedly over 25,000 visitors, which featured over 50 exhibitors and qualifying rounds for the franchise's e-sport competitions within an activity-packed environment. In addition, Eurogamer Expo [2013] sold 70,000 tickets for a four-day event, where visitors were able to get their hands-on the latest video games and technologies. Meanwhile, MCM London Comic Con [2013] attracted over 88,000 visitors, which consisted of a wide range of activities: from special guests, memorabilia, dealer stalls, games expo, MCM eSports, Vidfest UK, Japan EX, comic village, EuroCosplay Championships, MCM fringe festival, party, and retro gaming.

However, in relation to video game studies, there has been limited research exploring video gamer culture *within* video game events; and in particular, video game events within the UK. Some examples that do exist include Swalwell's (2003) analysis of gaming at a US LAN event (QuakeCon – Texas, USA), which was conducted using interviews with a

sample of interviewees and observational research. Other studies include Jansz and Martens' (2005) study on LAN gamers (at Campzone 2 – Netherlands) using quantitative surveys and Taylor and Witkowski's (2010) study on LAN gamers at DreamHack (LAN event) in Sweden, which focused on the role of spectatorship in computer gaming and the growing presence of women in game culture. These studies have most commonly focused on LAN events where gamers often bring their own PCs, which are linked to a high speed local area network, in order to play together. Few have considered other in depth forms of video game related events such as video game conventions, local gaming community tournaments, and video game-related musical events.

It is clear that video game events are about video games and playing them. However, it is important to highlight that video game events are not solely about playing video games – there are also other opportunities to do many other things. For instance, video game events provide a unique opportunity for gamers, who are usually separated by distance to come together to socialise and interact in meaningful ways. Video game events have become a popular and meaningful form of social activity – but it is also a significantly under-researched culture. Hence, this study looks to provide a wider understanding of video gamer culture and video game related practices within various video game events across the United Kingdom.

1.3. Defining Video Games

It is important to understand that defining video games is often not necessarily straightforward. For the purpose of this research 'video games' will refer to all types of electronic gaming played on game consoles, arcade machines, computers, mobile phones and other gaming hardware (Blackshaw and Crawford, 2009).

The definition of video games can provide an important direction towards how we understand video games and also what falls within this particular domain of analysis (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). Therefore, defining the key characteristics of what a video game is, often relates to what theoretical tools and perception we can, or should, employ to understand them.

There has been a great deal of academic debate on the definition of video games. An early and important debate revolved around the categorisation of video games as either

(primarily) ‘media’ or ‘games’. For Murray (1997), and in particular within her book *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, she takes a media (or as it is sometimes referred to ‘narratological’) approach to video game research. Murray (1997) suggests that video games offer a new form of storytelling. Hence, theories of literary and media analysis were seen as useful in characterising and analysing this new media form. However, this perspective has been challenged by a ‘game studies’ (or ‘ludology’) perspective, which seeks to understand video games, not primarily as a form of media, but rather as a form of game. Aarseth (2001, p.1) stated that:

Games, however, are often simulations; they are not static labyrinths like hypertexts or literary fictions. The simulation aspect is crucial: it is radically different alternative to narratives as a cognitive and communicative structure. Simulations are bottom up; they are complex systems based on logical rules.

For Aarseth (2001), the focus of game studies should be on the rules of a game, not on the representational elements, which are only incidental. Therefore, the ludological position suggests that games should be understood on their own terms, and not simply as another form of media.

The narrative vs. ludology debate has been widely discussed elsewhere, and highlights the complexity and difficulties with defining and categorising video games. This is further supported by Newman and Simons’ (2004) book, *Difficult Questions About Videogames*, which offers several definitions of video games, and suggests that defining video games can become complex when video games are considered as an area of academic study. In relation to this research, the definition of video games is of less importance; rather, it is the recognition of events as video game events that matters here – hence the use of a broad definition of video games for this research.

1.4. Studying Video Games

The study of video games has been undertaken from a wide range of academic perspectives and employed with a number of different methodologies. In particular, in the table below (Table 1.1), Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008, p.10) sets out Salen and Zimmerman’s (2004) three units of analysis (game, player and culture), and suggest the addition of *ontology* and *metrics*, therefore offering five main perspectives of analysis.

Table 1.1: The five major types of analysis and their characteristics			
Type of Analysis	Common Methodologies	Theoretical Inspiration	Common Interest
Game	Textual analysis	Comparative literature, film studies	Design choices, meaning
Player	Observation, interviews, surveys	Sociology, ethnography, cultural studies	Use of games, game communities
Culture	Interviews, textual analysis	Cultural studies, sociology	Games as cultural objects, games as part of media ecology
Ontology	Philosophical enquiry	Various, e.g. philosophy, cultural history, literary criticism	Logical/philosophical foundations of games and gaming
Metrics	Statistical analysis of logged data	Software development, behavioural psychology	Game design

Firstly, *game* analysis approaches video games from the perspective of the game, which often refers to one or more particular games that are the subjects of analysis. This approach focuses on the games themselves, particularly on the structure of the game design and how it employs certain techniques to enhance the gaming experience and/or to retain players. Secondly, *player* analysis relates to studies focusing on the players, and commonly explores the use of games as either a consumption of media, a social space, or as an act of gaming. This suggests that the activity of playing games is more important than the games themselves. Thirdly, *culture* analysis approaches the subject from a cultural perspective and provides an understanding of how games and gaming interact with wider cultural patterns. This approach may consider the discourses surrounding video gaming through subcultures, or such as looking at public outrage at violent games, or similar social and cultural relationships. Fourthly, *ontology* analysis examines the philosophical foundations of games. These studies usually seek general statements that apply to all games, and may enable us to better understand their nature. Finally, *metrics* analysis has in recent years seen a growing interest in data driven design research, focusing on ‘metrics’, in particular

quantitative measures of player behaviour. This approach often examines the relationship between game design and player behaviour (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). Overall, these five units of analysis indicate general trends that previous researchers have used in their studies of video games.

However, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) suggest that research often disrespects such neat reductionism, and can span multiple categories, where the connections between theories and methodologies may not necessarily go together. In relation to Salen and Zimmerman's (2004) three units of analysis and Egenfeldt-Nielsen's et al. (2008) addition units of 'ontology' and 'metrics', this study primarily utilises the *players* and *culture* methods – in particular an overlap of two units of analysis. This research considers what players do when 'playing *with* video games' (Newman, 2008) and the social-aspect of video games that can continue beyond the video game screen within video gamer culture. The five units of analysis (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004; Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008) may not necessarily be singular types of analysis, but instead, these types of analysis can crossover and overlap with each other.

1.5. Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research seeks to explore the social significance of video gaming and its culture away from the video game screen, specifically at video game related events.

In particular, this research explores the diversity of video game related practices that take place at several video game events across the UK; from video game conventions (such as MCM Comic Con, PlayExpo, Eurogamer Expo), tournaments and competition (such as Super Smash Brothers Events: Manchester Monthly Regionals 1, Manchester Monthly Regionals 2, Edmas, Edintines, Cabin Fever 1, Cabin Fever 2), LAN parties (such as Insomnia Gaming Festivals i50/i51/i52/i53/i54/i55/i56), and game-related musical events (such as Video Games Live, Final Fantasy orchestral concerts and Legend of Zelda orchestral concerts).

The objective of the research are therefore:

Objective 1: To explore the reasons for video gamers coming together to participate in various video game related practices away from the video game screen – in particular, within video game events;

Objective 2: To examine how common interests of video gamers enhance and support eh social interaction between regular and irregular gamers when attending various video game events;

Objective 3: To analyse the identity of video gamers, in particular, how individuals identify themselves and each other and what being a gamer entails.

All of these aims are addressed throughout this thesis, but specially each of these are dealt with in turn in the conclusion and related to the findings of this research.

1.6. Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 introduces the research and the study of video gamer culture, and in particular the importance of video game events. It considers the patterns of analysing games, players and culture, as well as the gaps within the literature. This chapter also outlines the rising popularity of video game events and the importance of exploring the various practices that take place away from the video game screen.

Chapter 2 examines the importance of ‘play’ with video games. Using classical theories of play, it considers the notion of the ‘magic circle’, and its confined boundaries that separates itself from our ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary lives’. In particular, it examines the definitions of play, the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘magic circle’. This chapter will begin examining the more binary works of play, and then integrate newer debates of play that specifically lead towards player activity – in particular, ‘critical play’ (Flanagan, 2009), as well as an alternative theoretical framework commonly applied to the study of play, ‘frame analysis’ (Goffman, 1974), to consider the location of play within a wider social context.

Chapter 3 considers video gaming culture and video gamers as part of a community. Firstly, it considers the conceptualisation of video gamer culture through the consideration of video gaming as a culture and video gamers as part of a community. Secondly, it considers video gamer productivity. It is important to consider that video games have now

become a way for people to identify themselves, to find like-minded individuals, and participate in a world that merges with their 'real life' in new and exciting ways. Using the literature within video game studies, it focuses on issues concerning video game communities and meta-culture. It also considers the relationship between gender and video games within video gamer culture.

Chapter 4 outlines the methods of this research. This chapter is separated in two sections. The first section considers the justification of using ethnographic research and how it can be applied in social science. The second section explores the methodological approach of this research; from choice of video game events, sampling procedure, triangulation, data collection, ethical issues, problems, limitations and timetabling.

Chapter 5 considers the characteristics of video gamers and video game communities. Using the findings, it examines the three types of video game attendees; this includes the 'socialiser', 'participator', and 'competitor'. It also considers video game communities for comparative purposes, as well as to provide some context amongst them.

Chapter 6 examines the embodied experience of video gamers at video game events through the five senses; sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch (feel). Drawing on the findings, it considers the patterns of embodied experiences that take place within video game events.

Chapter 7 summarises the conclusion of this thesis. This chapter re-examines the aims and objectives of this thesis, and considers its contributions towards academic research.

Throughout this thesis, words in bold are defined within the terminology located in the Appendix (see Appendix A). These include terms used amongst the participants, from video gamer culture references, including game knowledge (such as game references, game terms, and memes), and game language (such as informal phrases and slang words).

1.7. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the introduction to this thesis and set out its aim to explore the social significance of video gaming and its culture away from the video game screen, specifically at various video game related events.

To date, the study of video games has undergone analysis from a wide range of academic perspectives and researchers have employed a number of methodologies. However, most of these have often focused on the isolation of video gamers (individually or in small groups), or the textual analysis of video games themselves. Therefore, these focuses often ignore the social and cultural practices of video gaming away from the video game screen. This suggests the need to consider not just the act of *playing* a video game, but also how people play *with* video games (Newman, 2008).

With the rising popularity of video games, there has also been a rising popularity of video game events. It is evident that video game events are about video games and playing them; however, it is important to highlight that video game events are not just about playing video games – there are also opportunities to do other things as well. For instance, video game events provide an opportunity for gamers from all over the country to come together to socialise and interact in meaningful ways. This suggests that video game events have become a popular form of social activity, which presents an important area for research. For instance, with increasing numbers of video gamers attending video game events, it raises questions relating to reasons for attendance, the range of video game related practices, and the meanings attached to them. Hence, the literature review that follows will focus on the importance of ‘play’ (chapter 2) and the importance of video gamer culture and community (chapter 3).

Chapter 2

Playing with Video Games

Introduction

This chapter will examine the importance of play and video games. Play is something that is often defined as spontaneous and an active process, which is essential in our daily lives. For many writers, such as Salen and Zimmerman (2004), Juul (2005), and Myers (2009), understanding and defining play is seen to be central to our understanding of video games. In doing so, these theories of play writers frequently draw on, and/or seek to develop from the works of Johan Huizinga (1949), Roger Caillois (1962) and Brian Sutton-Smith (1997). Hence, this chapter will begin examining the more binary works on play, and then integrate newer debates of play that specifically lead towards player activity – in particular, ‘critical play’ (Flanagan, 2009), as well as an alternative theoretical framework commonly applied to the study of play, ‘frame analysis’ (Goffman, 1974).

In relation to video game studies, many writers have often utilised Huizinga’s (1949) idea that play takes place outside of ‘ordinary life’. Huizinga’s (1949) work suggests that there is a ‘divide’ between play and ordinary life. This then sets up an opportunity for analysing what takes place within these arenas of play (often referred to the ‘magic circle’) and how this may differ, or share similarities to the world outside of play. However, this separation has sometimes been taken too literally, and it continues to be a highly contested theorisation. As mentioned earlier (in chapter 1), video game studies have often focused on the immediacy and direct involvement with video games (within the ‘magic circle’), which often overlooks the wider culture. This separation sometimes assumes that playing with video games is confined to the instances of play in front of a video game screen. This suggests that studying video games as something separate from the rest of the world has its limitations in exploring the video game practices and the culture beyond the video game screen.

However, rather than rejecting the magic circle, it may be useful to consider how the boundaries between play and wider social life can at times seem quite clear-cut and at other times, quite ‘fuzzy and permeable’ (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). The boundary of what lies within the game and what is outside can become blurred – this concept is also described as ‘boundary work’ (Taylor, 2006) or ‘bleed-through’ (Boellstorff, 2008). An

example of this includes residents of a virtual world meeting in ‘real life’, or ‘real life’ money showing up in the virtual world (Castronvoa, 2005).

It is often assumed that if a boundary is transgressed then it is therefore weakened. However, Boellstorff (2008, p.23) suggests that ‘...crossing a boundary can strengthen the distinctiveness of the two domains it demarcates’. For instance, virtual worlds sometimes bring video gamers together in the ‘real’ world. This suggests the need to consider the migration between the virtual and ‘real’ worlds - where video gamer culture is born, and where it expands further and further. This chapter therefore considers the definitions of play, the strengths and weakness of the ‘magic circle’, and added to this, a consideration of newer debates of play that specifically lead towards player activity, and how frame analysis can be used to analyse the location of play within a wider social context.

The study of video games has matured and expanded, which suggests the need to consider video games within a wider social context; such as studies from pervasive play (McGonagall, 2003), transgressive play (Espen, 2007), situated play (de Kort, Ijsselsteijn and Gajadhar, 2007) and playbour (Kücklich, 2005). For instance, video game events consist of various social and cultural practices of play *with* video games (Newman, 2008). This suggest a need to recognise that the notion of ‘play’ does not confine itself within specific places and boundaries; it can also involve other forms of ‘play practices’ that might occur outside the bounds of the game itself, and not necessarily take place in front of a video game screen. It is important to consider studies of play beyond the confined boundaries of the magic circle, which separates play from our ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary lives’.

2.1. Considering Play

‘When you play, play hard; when you work, don’t play at all’

– Theodore Roosevelt

Play is something that we all do, it is often easy to recognise, but also remarkably difficult to define; ‘...we seem to intuitively know what play is, but we still have difficulty defining exactly what factors are involved in the play process’ (Lentz, 1982, p.68). Many theories of play have been developed in the past, which suggests that the phenomenon is difficult to understand and may not necessarily have a maintained consistent definition (Piaget, 1962).

Until the eighteenth century, there were primarily deterministic and utilitarian definitions of play. Classical theories provided a description on the reasons and functions of play; from surplus energy (Spencer, 1855), recreational or relaxation (Lazarus, 1984), practice or pre-exercise (Groos, 1989), and recapitulation theories (Hall, 1906). These concepts of play were often closely linked with ideas of leisure and its separation from work. For instance, leisure time becomes defined as non-work time in which it is considered to be 'free-time' for recreation, hobbies or self-cultivation, and work often refers to reality, with earning a living and production. This implies that play has often been considered to be an action performed for its own sake, in contrast to work, which is an activity done for external reward or requirement. It has been suggested that play fades away towards the end of childhood, where it is then replaced by real work and recreation (Piaget, 1962). Hence, play was most commonly associated with children and their juvenile-level activities. In particular, many video game studies have often focused on play among children, rather than adults, reinforcing the frame as 'a children's medium' or a 'mere trivial' (Rutter and Bryce, 2006). This suggests that video games have been commonly associated with children, where the activity of playing video games is often seen to be meaningless and offers no value or skills for real life (Newman, 2008). For instance, Caillois (1962) suggests that play is often considered to be childish among adults, a waste of time, a meaningless task and a degradation of real living. Caillois (1962, pp.5-6) writes;

...play is an occasion of pure waste; waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money for the purchase of gambling equipment or eventually to pay for the establishment

This suggests that play occurs when there is a desire to play the most absorbing, exhausting game in order to find diversion from responsibility and routine (Stephenson, 1967). Therefore, play is often seen as largely unproductive, except to provide self-satisfactional purposes; video games are also no exception; '...gameplay itself is meaningless, it offers nothing to take away that can be of use or value beyond the continued world of the game' (Newman, 2008, p.6). This suggests that one of the hallmarks of the varying definitions of play is that play activities are 'unproductive' (Pearce and Artemesia, 2009).

However, it is important to highlight that play still remains to be a critical aspect of childhood and child development. Definitions of play among children were often categorised into three criteria; the categories are freedom of choice, personal enjoyment,

and focus on the activities itself rather than its outcomes (Hughes, 2003). These three criteria are foundational to the play process and in children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, the development of parent-child bonds, cultivating the moral or cognitive skills necessary for a 'normal' adult life, and in building up and sustaining a coherent ego identity.

In addition, video games should not necessarily just be associated with children, but can be, and are, played by all ages. According to Entertainment Software Association (ESA, 2015) statistics show that the average gamer is around 35 years old, as many in their 30s, 40s or even 50s, have grown up with video games and continued to play into adult life (Oosting, Ijsselsteijn and de Kort, 2008; Molesworth, 2009). Even older people in the UK are now becoming gamers, where 42% of people over 50 years of age spend more time gaming than reading magazines (1000Games, 2011). This suggests that playing video games has become a mainstream activity for all age groups, for both children and adults. For instance, McMahon (1992, p.24) writes:

Yet adults have play needs beyond recreation from work. We do well to recognize this and to understand that play is not just a filling in of time before real work and learning begun but as essential element of growing and being fully human. As we have seen, play is spontaneous and creative, free from the inhibition produced by fear of failure

McMahon (1992) suggests that adults have play needs too. Play offers adults the opportunity to practice concepts that may not have been explicitly or formally taught such as, how to manage misinformation or deceit. Other examples include teamwork, competition, cooperation, transfer of skills and leadership (Lieberman, 2006). It can be concluded that although play is just one of many tools used by adults, it remains a necessary one. For instance, Sutton-Smith (1997) suggests that there are multiple cultures of play, games, sports, and festivals, and so on within society, where these forms of human engagement provide participants with solidarity, identity, and pleasure. As Sutton-Smith (1997, p.106) points out, '...constant modern tendency to think of play as simply a function of some other more important cultural process (psychological or sociological) tends to underestimate the autonomy of such cultures'. This suggests that play can be considered productive; hence the notion of 'productive play' (Pearce, 2006).

Pearce (2006) considers the notion of play as an act of production, through the inter-game immigration between virtual worlds (mostly MMORPGs). Pearce (2006) suggests that the inherent definition of play as 'unproductive' often overlooks the level of creative

production integral to many play activities, particularly those enabled within social networks. Therefore, productive play refers to the creativity involved in play. As Pearce and Artemesia (2009, p.141) writes:

Productive play is a form of emergent gameplay that is strongly aligned with contemporary web 2.0 practices, with one vital difference – it originates with play activities and players continue to perceive what they are doing, even if the activity becomes extremely demanding and laborious, with their play practices.

Pearce and Artemesia (2009, p.141) continues:

Examples range from artefact production to community leadership to events planning to organizing and managing large-scale collaborative projects to serving as community representatives on advisory boards

Productive play is not an entirely new phenomenon. For instance, Newman (2008) considers productive play through the emergence of productive practices and the extensive ‘shadow economy’ of player produced walk-throughs, FAQs, art, narratives and event games, not to mention the cultures of cheating, copying and piracy. The term describes the metamorphosis from play to creative output or work-like activities – sometimes referred as post-industrial unwaged labour or ‘playbour’ (Küchlick, 2010). In addition, Pearce and Artemesia (2009) consider manifestations of it in cultural practices and rituals, such as Mardi Gras, historical re-enactment, cosplay, and the Burning Man festival as well as hobby cultures such as model railroading and table top role-playing games. What all these practices share, however, is that players continue to perceive what they are doing a part of a play practice, even if it transitions into professional activity (Pearce and Artemesia, 2009). Hence, this suggests an importance to consider the boundaries between production and consumption through the various forms of productive play – in particular, the social and cultural practices of play *with* video games, which can involve various video game related practices, within video game events.

2.2. Defining Play and the Magic Circle

In 1938, Johan Huizinga [1872-1945] published a radically new understanding of play as an essential characteristic of human nature and culture, in his book, *Homo Ludens* - which roughly translates as ‘human player’ or ‘human play’. According to Huizinga (1949), culture depends on play, where play is the one bases of civilization. For instance, ‘play’ is a source of culture, giving rise to useful conventions that permit culture to evolve and

stabilize – it teaches loyalty, competitiveness and patience (Huizinga, 1949). This suggests that civilization cannot exist in the absence of a certain play-element, in which it must be played according to certain rules and demand for fair play – hence the cheat or the spoilsport shatters civilization itself (Huizinga, 1949). This suggests that play is a fundamental expression and basis of human culture, where play is the core element of culture and it is born in the form of play.

Huizinga (1949) describes play as a free and meaningful activity, carried out for its own sake, spatially and temporally segregated from the requirements of practical life, and bound by a self-contained system of rules that holds absolutely. Huizinga (1949) claimed to identify three primary characteristics of play. Firstly, ‘...all play is a voluntary activity... it is free, is in fact freedom’ (Huizinga, 1949, pp.7-8). Huizinga (1949) links play to the imaginary condition of absolute freedom in which choices are made without external constraint. This suggests that a focus on the activity itself, rather than its outcomes, where no profit is usually gained. Secondly, play is ‘...a stepping out of ‘real’ life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own’ (Huizinga, 1949, p.8). Thirdly, play is ‘...played out within certain limits of time and place’ (Huizinga, 1949, p.9). In these second and third characteristics lie the origins of Huizinga’s (1949) famous metaphor of the ‘magic circle’ of play; which defines play as constituting a separate and independent sphere of human activity:

All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course... The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e., forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart (Huizinga, 1949, p.10)

This suggests a ‘divide’ between play and ordinary life. However, one of the key weaknesses with the magic circle lies on the concerns of this (assumed) divide between play and the wider social world. To an extent, the various forms of play that expand beyond the confined arenas of play, outside the magic circle, would appear to indicate ways in which the circle is broken. This suggests that the division between play and ordinary life is ultimately invalid. Therefore, Huizinga’s (1949) divide between play and ‘ordinary life’ has often been considered to be too strict (Stenros, 2012). However, instead of rejecting the magic circle, it may be useful to reconsider the boundaries between play and ordinary life.

For Salen and Zimmerman (2004) the magic circle is the boundary of a game, which encloses the game's rules and creates a special set of meanings for the players of the game. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) suggest that game and rules lead to a 'closed circle'; '...as a closed circle, the space it circumscribes is enclosed and separate from the real world' (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, p.95). Therefore, the 'magic circle' refers to the free choice of play, where gamers are subject to rules and norms, while play is fixed at a specific time and space. However, Salen and Zimmerman (2004) argue that the boundaries between play and wider social life can at times be quite clear-cut and to others quite 'fuzzy and permeable' and suggests that, in certain types of games, there is a relationship between the game and its context (the rest of the world). This is illustrated as Salen and Zimmerman (2004, p.96) writes:

As a system, a game can be considered to have an open or closed relationship to its context. Considered as RULES, a game is closed. Considered as PLAY, a game is both open and closed. Considered as CULTURE, a game is open.

The boundary of what lies within the confines of the game and what is outside can become blurred – this concept was described by Taylor (2006) as 'boundary work' or 'bleed-through' (Boellstorff, 2008). An example of this includes residents of a virtual world meeting in 'real life', or 'real life' money showing up in the virtual world (Castronova, 2005). In particular, Boellstorff (2008, p.23) suggests that this crossing of boundaries 'can strengthen the distinctiveness of the two domains it demarcates'. For instance, virtual game worlds sometimes bring video gamers together into the 'real' world meetings. This suggests that game world can form or strengthen out of game social networks, or similarly, playing games online with people you know face-to-face, can add to and enhance the gaming experience.

Upholding the normative border of the strict division between play and non-play was also important to Caillois (1962) in his work, *Man, Play and Games*. Here he suggests that the characteristics that define the nature of play are that it is an activity that is (1) free, (2) separate, (3) uncertain, (4) unproductive, (5) regulated, and (6) fictive. In addition, Caillois (1962) identifies four different forms of play: agon (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (simulation), and illinx (vertigo and disorientation). These classifications of play enable the identification of the different motives that are essential for different types of play. Caillois (1962) argues that play has an important functional role in providing an outlet for emotions that are suppressed elsewhere in social life. However,

Caillois (1962) suggests that any corruption of the principles of play (competition, chance, simulation, vertigo) means abandonment of those precarious conventions – he uses examples that cheaters and professionals destroy play through their use and corruption of games. Caillois (1962) suggests that there should be a division between play and non-play; but not necessarily a strict division. As Caillois (1962, pp.6-7) writes:

In effect, play is essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally is engaged in with precise limits of time and place. There is a place for play, as needs dictate, the space for hopscotch, the board for checkers or chess, the stadium, the racetrack, the list, the ring, the stage, the arena, etc. Nothing that takes place outside this ideal frontier is relevant... In every case, the game's domain is therefore a recruited, closed, protected universe: a pure space.

The characteristics of play that takes place within 'isolated' spaces and 'special rules' suggests that it happens within certain limits of time and space – where play begins and ends at a certain moment. For instance, most people are frequently able to distinguish when they are playing (like play fighting) and when they are not (like fighting to inflict pain) (Crawford, 2012). Bateson (1976) suggests that players often signal to each other the essential message, 'this is play', through communication on two levels: text (describing the substance of play) and context (outlining the framework of play). These two levels, text and context construct the message of play that distinguishes play from 'real life'. These signals of play are important, as Bartle (2006) argues that the magic circle is needed to protect the game and keep it intact.

2.3. Challenging the Magic Circle

The conceptualisation of the magic circle has faced strong criticism, mostly because many scholars feel that the division between play and ordinary life is ultimately invalid. For instance, Crawford (2012) suggests that although the magic circle may be subject to specific rules, so are all areas of social life; hence, there is nothing that can be said that is distinct about the magic circle. Furthermore, advances in technologies such as mobile game devices make the distinction between times and places of play and ordinary life even more difficult to maintain, further blurring the boundary between 'game' and 'non game' spheres (Crawford, 2012). For instance, Herron and Sutton-Smith (1971, p.103) states '...this is the problem of the way we get into and out of the play or game... what are the codes which govern these entries and exits?' It is important to recognise that play can be fluid and is liable to change at any moment; play can be deferred or suspended at any time

(Crawford, 2012). The need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need (Bruner, 1983). Individuals engaged in play can frequently flip between play and non-play states, sometimes even in an instant (Arsenault and Perron, 2009). For example, video gamers are able to ‘pause’ the game when stuck, check online for walk-throughs or cheats and ‘un-pause’ the game to continue further (Consalvo, 2007):

Many gamers cheat in games when they get stuck. Having reached a point where they cannot process further without help. They turn to guides, codes, or friends to help them get pass the difficulty. This is the most common accepted form of cheating (some players don’t see it as cheating at all), suggesting that the reaching of an impasses and resulting request for help is not divorced from regular life (Consalvo, 2007, p.186)

Although Consalvo (2007) focuses on the aspect of cheating in video games, this example illustrates that video gamers often step in and out of the ‘magic circle’ without realising. This suggests that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what lies within and outside the magic circle; therefore it has been suggested that players often ‘live between the two worlds’ (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008).

While the game/not game argument may seem academic in the pejorative sense, it does suggest that boundaries of each are transgressed (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009). Thus, Caillois (1962, p.13) begins to address the game/not game dilemma by introducing the differentiation between games, which he characterises as ‘ludus’ and open-ended, creative play, which he characterises as ‘paidia’. As Dovey and Kennedy (2006, p.25) explains:

Ludus – rule based games. Chess is often cited as the clearest example. Often applied to games which have a clear win or lose conclusion, or zero sum games.

Paidia – open-ended play, spontaneous improvised play, often thought of as ‘true creative’ play – active, tumultuous, exuberant. Here we might apply the term to simulation games like Civilization, Age of Empires or The Sims, where there is no clear winning or losing state, just a dynamic ‘sandbox’ to play in endlessly.

In practice, applying ludus or paidia is more than likely to produce a spectrum with varying degrees of both categories present. For example, Dovey and Kennedy (2006, p.25) suggests that racing games can provide paidia-type activities, ‘by experimenting with different cars, different designs, different circuits and so on’. In addition, Seth Giddings’ film, *Circuits* (2003), offers a perfect illustration of the extension of ludic pleasure to more open paidia-like forms of play: ‘the film follows his two young sons as they re-form the world of Lego Racers in the house, using actual Lego, drawing and water play to inhabit the whole imaginative world of the game is physical play’ (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006, p.25).

Similarly, Salen and Zimmerman (2004, p.303) suggest that there are two possibilities between play and games: play is an element of games and games are a subset of play:

Play is an element of games: In addition to rules and culture, play is an essential component of games, a facet of the larger phenomenon of games, and a primary schema for understanding them.

Games are a subset of play: Games constitute a formalized part of everything we might consider to be play. Playing catch or playing doctor are play activities that fall outside our definition of games (a contest of powers with a quantifiable outcome etc.). However, although not all play fits the category of games, those things we define as games fit within a large category of play activities.

The first description is a conceptual distinction that frames play as an important facet of games – similar to Huizinga’s (1949) approach to play mentioned earlier, which applies to ‘special rules’ and steps outside of ‘normal life’. The second describes a distinction that places games within a larger set of real-world play activities – of which applies to Sutton-Smith’s (1997) approach to the ambiguity of play.

Sutton-Smith (1997) considers the absolute definition of play to be elusive, where it can only be defined insofar as the rhetoric of a particular field or discipline allows: ‘...any earnest definition of play has to be haunted by the possibility that playful enjoinders will render it invalid’ (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p.213). Sutton-Smith’s (1997) identifies seven rhetorics of play, which he classified as either ancient or modern. The ancient rhetorics included fate, power, identity and frivolity, with the modern forms being progress, the imaginary, and the self. For Sutton-Smith (2006), the emphasis on the flexibility of play suggests the potential of adaption and variability. As Sutton–Smith (2006, pp.298-299) writes:

The diversity of play is well illustrated by the varied kinds of play that are to be found within the larger menagerie of the “play” sphere. Almost anything can allow play to occur within its boundaries, as is illustrated, for example, by works on tourism as play (MacCannell, 1976), television as play (Stephenson, 1967), day-dreaming as play (Caughey, 1984), sexual intimacy as play (Betcher, 1987), and even gossip as play (Spack, 1986). Travel can be a playful competition to see who can go to the most places or have the most authentic encounters

The diversity of play suggests that it can come in many forms: from pretend, performance, creativity, games, sports, and much more. For instance, McMahon (1992) suggests three development forms of play: from sensory and physical play; exploratory and social play; and symbolic and pretend play. Sensory play is linked with physical play, using the body to experience the world. In relation to video games, this can involve the contact with a

video game controller, the physical movements and control during gameplay. Exploratory and social play develops from turn-taking games, which involves a reflective and developmental process during gameplay. This can involve strategy thinking, tactical conversations and experimenting or playing with ideas through gameplay. Symbolic and pretend play is considered to be the most important development in children's play, although, this can also apply to adult play needs. Symbolic play becomes crucial during gaming play to understand the rules and social norms during gameplay, while pretend play becomes daydreaming, thinking, and creative writing. Therefore, the ambiguity of play; '...should not be defined only in terms of restricted Western values that say it is non-productive, rational, voluntary, and fun' (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p.218), but defined in an equally varied variety of scholarly fields and context. Hence, Sutton Smith's (1997) concept of the ambiguous nature of play is important (and of particular relevance here), as it places video games within a wider social context. It allows us to recognise that besides the simple participation of video gamers in front of a video game screen, it is also important to consider play as also extending into other times and places.

The varying degrees of distance between games and the rest of the world is also considered by Eskelinen (2001). As he (2001, p.1) writes:

The category of static relations implies ready-made relations not to be tampered with. This means that the game is every way closed or separated from the rest of the world. There are alternatives to this: casual, spatial, temporal and functional connections could well exceed the confines of a game... The dynamic dimension could then be understood as containing various violations of this default separateness of games

Eskelinen (2012) suggests that the temporal and spatial connections with video games can extend beyond the confined boundaries of the magic circle and intermingle with the players' and non-players' everyday life. For instance, the emotional, physical, or monetary can be felt and suffered both long after the game itself, and events outside the game can influence the game and gameplay. Eskelinen (2012) concludes that the distance varies from game to game, context to context, and definition to definition. Therefore, it is important to recognise that video games cannot be totally isolated from the world outside. This suggests that video game practices can extend beyond the video game screen, which can influence the game and gameplay, and vice-versa (Eskelinen, 2012).

In addition, Eskelinen and Tronstad (2003) suggests that games may have intended and unintended consequences that do affect the player's 'ordinary life' too. For instance,

Sudnow's (1983) book *Pilgrim in the Microworld: Eye, Mind, and the Essence of Video Skills*, provides an analysis on early arcade and console play on the cognitive work video gamers undergo in becoming experts in their games. Sudnow (1983) recounts his work of play experience; from marking screens to practice timing and positioning, daydreaming strategies and practicing his imagination; ultimately how his interaction and skill with the game was embodied in hands, eyes and ears (Taylor 2012). Sudnow (1983) suggests that video gaming has the ability to develop 'digital skill', where these skills are transferable across video games and into our 'ordinary life'. These skills from video gaming suggests that it can be transferable to activities in everyday life; such as solving puzzles, observation skills, fast reactions, prioritising and competitive tactics (Sudnow, 1983).



Figure 2.1: The King of Kong – Drawing markings on screens to practice timing and precision - Gordon, S. (Director). (2007). *King of Kong*. [Film]. United States.

For example, the documentary film, *'The King of Kong'* (Gordon, 2007), focusing on the popular 1980s arcade game Donkey Kong, follows Steve Wiebe in his attempts to take the world high score for the arcade game from Billy Mitchell (see Figure 2.1). In particular, Steve Wiebe was described to being proficient at music (gifted drummer), sports (star baseball pitcher), art, and mathematics; where skills such as hand to eye coordination were considered to be transferable and utilised in practice to obtain the world high score in Donkey Kong. This suggests that video gamers can migrate between different magic circles, importing play patterns and identities with them. For instance, video gamers can mutate play patterns and then transport those mutations back into the original play context. This suggests that in boundaries of the magic circle are often quite 'porous' (Pearce and Artemesia, 2009). Therefore, the boundaries between gaming and the world outside of gameplay is messy, contested and constantly under negotiation (Taylor, 2006).

However, despite several challenges to the magic circle and its applicability to the study of video games, it can be argued that the magic circle still remains useful in understanding how video games create and maintain social norms and practices, which may not necessarily apply in the same way in wider social interactions. Rather than applying Huizinga's (1949) or Salen and Zimmerman's (2004) concept of the 'magic circle', a more useful way forward might therefore be to use Castronova's (2005) concept of an 'almost magic circle'.

2.4. The Almost Magic Circle

Edward Castronova (2005) refers to the 'almost magic circle', which describes the membrane that encloses the '...fantasy [game] world from the outside world'; also referred as the 'synthetic worlds' of video games. Similar to the 'magic circle', within the 'almost magic circle', video gamers often play out a fantasy world, with its own logic and rule systems, which can be different from the world outside of the game and gameplay environment. However, Castronova (2005) emphasises that the membrane of the 'almost magic circle' is a highly porous membrane, which does not completely separate the game from the outside world. This suggests that video gamers can frequently move back and forth and bring game attributes from the outside world, and vice-versa.

Increasingly, the video gamer's daily life involves shifting frequently back and forth between different activities, some of which might be identified as the 'game', whereas others are called 'life'. As Castronova (2005, p.159) writes:

...I am sitting at my computer at home, chatting to my friend Ethelbert, who happens to appear on my screen as an Elven Mage, we are just as likely to be talking about the weather as we are by voice over Internet, and she is inviting us into a game of first-person World War II shooter action. Meanwhile, I am in an instant-messaging conversation with my friend Rowena, who wants to get together for a card game Saturday night. Ethelbert is reading an email from the administrator of another synthetic world, informing him that he has won an in-world auction for 600 slats of wood for 50 gold pieces. A similar email from eBay informs him that he has won an auction for a nice Magritte print for \$50. With all of this going on, where exactly is the line between game and life?

Castronova (2005) suggests that the membrane between the synthetic worlds and daily life is porous, and this is by choice of the users. In particular, the porous membrane seems to have the objective to retain the fantasy atmosphere of the synthetic world, while giving

users the maximum amount of freedom to manipulate their involvement with it. For instance, most video game consoles and computers are multi-purpose tools. An example of this includes video gamers, which can do various tasks, including game playing, while toggling back and forth between web pages and applications (Pearce and Artemesia, 2009). In addition, Taylor (2012) suggests that gamers are capable of conducting other activities in tandem with their gameplay. For example, video gamers can engage in multiple activities at the same time, such as playing on multiple screens while interacting with others using other forms of media communication tools. Therefore, the line between what is within the game and what is outside becomes blurred. This suggests that games are becoming an integral part of daily life, and the distinction between the game and life may be fading (Castronova, 2005).

In relation to this research then, the ‘almost magic circle’ may be a useful concept to determine the common practice of playing with video games that can extend beyond the confined boundaries of the magic circle, such as locating video gamers’ play within video game events. In particular, Castronova (2005) suggests that this social aspect of gaming is growing; such as communities based on websites, email, instant messaging, and social gatherings - where they can come together to meet face-to-face in the synthetic world and in the ‘real’ world. However, Castronova (2005, p.159) carefully points out that not all ‘meet-ups’ is about physical togetherness; ‘...for some gamers, the Internet is just too slow. If everyone can bring their high-powered machine to one location here they can link to a local high-speed network, the gaming is better for everyone’. This suggests that the source for ‘good internet’ may be one of the many reasons for attendance to video game events, such as LAN events. Hence, the importance to understand newer debates of play that specifically lead towards player activity – in particular, critical play.

2.5. Critical Play

Mary Flanagan’s (2009) book on ‘Critical Play’ examines alternative games and use such as models to propose a theory of avant-garde game design. Flanagan (2009) suggests that the concept of play not only provides outlets for entertainment but also functions as a means for creative expression, as instruments for conceptual thinking, and as tools to work through social issues. For instance, games have existed for various reasons, whether it is for entertainment, for passing time, for fun, as well as the diversionary activity, meant for

relation or distraction - however, certain games have become something more. To Flanagan (2009, p.6), critical play ‘means to create or occupy play environments and activities that represent one or more questions about aspects of human life’ and ‘is characterized by a careful examination of social, cultural, political, or even personal themes that function as alternates to popular play spaces. [...] Thus the goal in theorizing a critical game-design paradigm is as much about the creative person’s interest in critiquing the status quo as it is about using play for such a phase change’. Hence, critical play focuses on the reworking of contemporary, popular game practices to propose an alternative or ‘radical’ game design, which suggest ways of understanding large cultural issues as well as the games themselves (Flanagan, 2009).

In comparison to the more binary works on play in this chapter, Flanagan (2009) presents a less strict definition of play, and suggests it may be more productive to think of them as ‘situations with guidelines and procedures’ (p. 7) and as ‘social technologies’ (p. 9). As Flanagan (2009, p. 262) writes;

Shifts in play have historically mirrored shifts in technology and these shifts in technology signal shifts in societal norms. With groups tired of isolation and longing for community, the rise of massively multiplayer online role-playing games and social networks have provided a few ways to relink communities. The continuing popularity of Come Out and Play events in major global cities demonstrates that the public wants to play, and play outside, because of what games are: creative, collective, and social reactions to the dominant practices and beliefs of any culture. From these simple examples, it is possible to see how games in and of themselves function as a *social technology*. Games distill or abstract the everyday actions of players. Games also imprint our culture with the motives and values of their designers. Above all, a game is an opportunity, an easy-to-understand instrument by which context is defamiliarized just enough to allow what Huizinga famously refers to as his ‘a magic circle’ to play to occur.

Flanagan (2009) argues that games designed by artists (those who are creating outside commercial establishments, and often, those who are ‘making’ for ‘making’s sake’) and activists (those that emphasise on social issues, education, and occasionally, intervention) are reshaping everyday game culture – in particular, alternative games – games that challenge the accepted norms embedded within the gaming industry.

In relation to this research, Flanagan’s (2009) notion of critical play is useful, as it considers player activity engaging in social issues and social change. For instance, Flanagan (2009) identifies three types of critical play: unplaying, re-dressing or re-skinning, and rewriting – from her works on domestic play from the 17th century doll

houses to *The Sims* (Electronic Arts, 2000). Unplaying describes a form of play counter to the game itself; such as subverting the original game mechanics by playing against the rules, or performing acts that are ‘forbidden’ in the game. In re-dressing or re-skinning, characteristics of the object of play are adjusted. While rewriting changes the narrative content, in order to make way for critical or subversive play (Tronstad, 2010) – this suggests that play becomes a practice within a safe space for experimentation. As Flanagan (2009, p. 254) writes; ‘what is distinctive about play is that one cannot always easily see that a clear boundary exists between it and social reality, or rather, see that play uses the tools of everyday reality in its construction’. This suggest a shift in technology, which reflects a social reaction to the dominant practices of play to consider the everyday actions of players and their social networks. Hence, the reworking of contemporary popular game practices suggests an importance to understand player activity.

However, Tronstad (2010, p. 1) argues that Flanagan does not address the apparent paradox in the concept ‘critical play’, or how the two terms ‘play’ and ‘games’ influence each other; ‘What happens to play when it becomes critical? And how might critical content be influenced by play?’ By not clarifying these issues, Flanagan (2009) risks the accusation of uncritically recycling art historical clichés. Although Flanagan’s (2009) notion of critical play is useful to consider player activity, it is important to highlight that the history of art represents a quite different context than contemporary play culture, this could be an apt opportunity to re-evaluate their alleged ‘playfulness’ (Tronstad, 2010).

Furthermore, the magic circle, almost magic circle and critical play are not the only theoretical frameworks commonly applied to the study of play. Erving Goffman’s (1974) concept of ‘frame analysis’ is one that has likewise been (though much less commonly) applied to video games analysis, and may expand the magic circle, as this more clearly locates patterns of play within a wider social context.

2.6. Frame Analysis

Erving Goffman (1974), a Chicago sociologist introduced the concept of ‘frame analysis’. Frame analysis is a theoretical and methodological tool for understanding patterns of interaction and behaviour within a specific frame. A frame is what allows the participants to understand any particular situations, its rules, normal, expectations, possible roles and so forth, which are available to the participant to make sense of any given situation.

Goffman (1974) suggests that social interaction works on the basis of shared expectations, accepted roles, patterns of behaviour, codes of interaction, and so forth. This suggests that gameplay is just one of many frames that govern social behaviour. Goffman (1974) emphasises on the interplay between frames, where play is merely one frame within a social order that is saturated with other, often multi-layered frames. For instance, this can be related to how Consalvo (2007, p.4) suggests that video games are located within a wider social setting and consequently can be experienced in multiply ways; where video game experiences may differ and applied differently over time:

Games aren't designed, marketed, or played in a cultural vacuum. I would argue that it is somewhat futile to talk about the player or a game in the abstract, as what we know about players can change over time, and be dependent on such elements as player skill and age. Likewise, even the most linear game can be experienced in multiple ways, depending on a player's knowledge of past game in that genre or series, including previewed information from magazines or website, and marketing attempts at drawing attention to certain elements of the game.

It is important to emphasise that video games are not played in a cultural vacuum - as mentioned earlier, playing with video games often extends beyond the confined boundaries in front of a video game screen. For instance, Goffman (1974) defines a frame as a situational definition constructed in accord with organising principles that govern both the events themselves and participants' experience of these events. This suggests a linkage among frames, how individuals pass from one frame to another, and how they become involved in frames, which are grounded in the social order (Fine, 1983). Goffman (1974) approaches the assertion that human beings reside in finite worlds of meaning, and that individuals are skilled in juggling these worlds (Fine, 1983). Therefore, using Goffman's (1974) constituted frames of experiences, it could be useful to capture the experiences of video gamers at video game events – in particular, how video gamers move between frames, such as in-game and out-of-game play, and how they attempt to make sense of these worlds.

However, Goffman's (1974) frame analysis does come with limitations. For instance, Crawford (2012) suggests that Goffman is not particularly interested in where the origins of frames come from. Goffman is interested in a more micro-level of social phenomenon such as social interaction; therefore, this does not see frames as created by specific social actors, but rather as pre-existing schema, which they simply employ. In addition, Fine (1983, p.183) suggests that the weakness in frame analysis is Goffman's insistent shifting between examples:

The reader never learns enough about any one social world to understand the dynamics of the frames embedded in that world and the dynamics of keying in that “universe of experience”

However, frame analysis is useful, as where the magic circle just focuses on the instances of play, frame analysis allows us to understand play as one set out circumstances, roles and norms, within a larger configuration of frames.

2.7. Conclusion

Using classical theories of play, this chapter considers the location of play within a wider social context. It examines definitions of play, the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘magic circle’, it also considers the reworking of contemporary popular game practices using critical play, and finally the concept of ‘frame analysis’.

This chapter highlights that studying video games, as something separate from the rest of the world has its limitations in exploring video game practices beyond the video game screen. For instance, Pargman and Jakobsson (2008) suggest that the magic circle represents a ‘strong boundary hypothesis’, while frame analysis is a ‘weak-boundary-hypothesis’. Rather than rejecting the magic circle completely, I would suggest that the magic circle still remains useful in understanding how video games create and maintain social norms and practices, which may not necessarily apply in the same way in wider social interactions. Here, Castronova’s (2005) concept of an ‘almost magic circle’ with a (more) porous membrane becomes a more useful concept to apply to an understanding of what happens within and between the magic circle and other aspects of social life. By retaining some aspects of the magic circle, the almost magic circle remains magical and yet un-magical at the same time. This suggests that it is a useful concept to determine the common practice of playing with video games that can also extend beyond the confined boundaries of the magic circle, and the interactions between play and wider society. Hence, here I highlight the importance to understand newer debates of play that specifically lead towards player activity – in particular, critical play. From Flanagan’s (2010) book on ‘Critical Play’, she focuses on the reworking of contemporary, popular game practices to propose an alternative or ‘radical’ game design, which suggest ways of understanding large cultural issues as well as the games themselves. In relation to this research, Flanagan’s (2009) notion of critical play is useful, as it considers player activity engaging in social issues and social change; such as the social reaction to the dominant

practices of play to consider the everyday actions of players and their social networks. This suggests that video gaming involves more than the elements of repetitive gameplay among one or two people in front of a gaming machine; rather, it also functions as a means for creative expression, as instruments for conceptual thinking, and as tools to work through social issues.

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, these are not the only theoretical frameworks commonly applied to the study of play – in particular, Goffman's (1974) 'frame analysis' may also prove to be a useful tool. Goffman (1974) asserts that human beings reside the finite worlds of meaning, and that individuals are skilled in juggling these worlds (Fine, 1983). Therefore, using Goffman's (1974) constituted frames of experiences, it could be useful to capture the experiences of video gamers at video game events and how video gamers move between worlds. Unlike the magic circle, with frame analysis, play is not seen as specifically separate from other aspects of social life. The magic circle does not tell us 'how' it is social and how it is located within wider social context; instead, frame analysis more fully locates patterns of play within a wider social context. In conclusion, the combinations of these concepts and perceptions provide a useful theoretical and methodological tool that can be used and applied to the study of play within a wider social context. It is to this wider social context that we now turn to, in considering the importance of video gaming as a culture and video gamers as part of a community.

Chapter 3

Studying Video Gamer Culture

Introduction

This chapter considers the study of video gamer culture, and has two primary aims, in that it considers, what a video gamer is and what video gamers do? Firstly, in considering what a video gamer is, this chapter considers the conceptualisation of video gamer culture through the lens of video gaming as a culture and video gamers as part of a community. Within the literature of video games, there have been a number of concepts used to describe video gamers and video gamer culture. As Crawford (2012, p.98) states:

The degree to which these terms are critically reflected upon differs greatly from paper to paper, author to author, but the main concepts that have been advocated as useful in understanding video game culture and communities include: subcultures, neo-tribes, fans, knowledge, community, players, Otaku, gamers, scenes and habitus.

Crawford (2012) considers a variety of conceptualisations that have been offered in understanding video gamer culture, in particular those of subcultures, neo-tribes, fans, knowledge communities, players, Otaku, gamers, scenes and habitus. However, and of particular relevance to this research, there has been limited research focusing on the culture of video game events and participation in various video game related practices that are located away from the video gaming screen. Therefore, this provides an opportunity to examine the ‘usefulness’ of various conceptualisations in understanding video gamer culture at specific events.

Secondly, this chapter considers video gamer productivity, or what gamers do? Newman (2008) suggests that we are only beginning to scratch the surface of what we call ‘video gamer culture’. As previously mentioned, Newman (2008) is interested in the meaning of video games to players and the myriad ways in which they make use of them besides just playing them. This includes:

...the vibrant productive practices of the vast numbers of videogame fans and players and the extensive ‘shadow economy’ of player-produced walk-throughs, FAQs, art, narratives and event games, not to mention the cultures of cheating, copying and piracy, that have emerged (Newman, 2008, p.vii)

Newman (2008) suggests that the inherently social, productive and creative nature of these cultures that surround and support video gaming, are all but invisible within academic writing on video games and gaming. This suggests the need to consider the cultural and creative production (productive play) that can go into play activities (play communities).

Newman (2008) notes that while some of these activities and communities are ‘reasonably widespread’, others – such as the production of in-depth walkthroughs, fan fiction stories, or fame-inspired costumes – are considered ‘less widespread’. In relation to this research, this chapter therefore focuses on the participatory practices of video gamers within various (and different sized) video game communities.

Finally, this chapter considers the under-explored ‘negative’ side of video game communities, which often include exclusion, oppression, and conflict within communities; an area often over-looked within video game community studies. For instance, it has been suggested that certain ‘minority’ or marginalised groups may find it harder to ‘fit in’ with video game cultures, and this may still be particularly the case for women. Therefore, this chapter also considers the participation and exclusion of women in video games cultures.

3.1. Conceptualising Video Gamer Culture

This section draws on Crawford’s (2012) consideration of the variety of conceptualisations that have been offered in understanding video gamer culture, and in particular those of subcultures, neo-tribes, fans, knowledge communities, players, Otaku, gamers, scenes and habitus. Therefore, this section will examine the ‘usefulness’ of these concepts in understanding the cultures at video game related events, and in doing so specifically will focus on the concepts of subcultures, neo-tribes, fans, knowledge communities, scenes and habitus, as these I will suggest have the most value and relevance to the case under consideration here.

3.1.1 Habitus

In the book, *Video Gamers*, amongst the variety of conceptualisations, Crawford (2012) considers Bourdieu’s (1977) work on ‘habitus’ to be a particularly profitable way of understanding video gamer culture. Habitus is a ‘...system of schemes generating

classifiable practices and works... [and a] system of schemes of perceptions and appreciation (“taste”)’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p.171). Bourdieu (1977) argues that social life can be understood as consisting of numerous, and interrelated, social spaces, or ‘fields’, where each of these has its own habitus. Crawford (2012) suggests that habitus is similar to what other authors have described as the ‘culture’ of a particular group or society. However, key to Bourdieu’s (1977) understanding of habitus is that this is embodied. This, Jenkins (1992, p.46) argues, is manifested in three ways:

First, in a trivial sense, the habitus only exists inasmuch as it is ‘inside the heads’ of actors (and the head is, after all, part of the body). Second, the habitus only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment: ways of talking, ways of moving, ways of making things, or whatever. In this respect, the habitus is emphatically *not* an abstract or idealist concept. It is not just *manifest* in behaviour, it is an integral *part* of it (and vice versa). Third, the ‘practical taxonomies’... are at the heart of the generative schemes of the habitus, are rooted in the body. Male/female, front/back, up/down, hot/cold, these are all primarily sensible – in terms of making sense and of being rooted in sensory experience – from the point of view of the embodied person.

Habitus is defined as ‘an acquired system of generative schemes’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.55) that we learn through early socialisation processes. Therefore, we learn habitus by coping cultural and physical behaviours; ‘it is acquired unconsciously and present in the way we are disposed within our own bodies’ (Kirkpatrick 2011, p.129). Bourdieu’s (1977) focus on embodied practices widens the perspective on the range of processes through which technology is taken up and used by individuals. This is therefore useful in understanding video gamer culture, because it locates video games within a wider social context.

Although, Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of habitus has been critiqued for being too deterministic (Jenkins, 1992), it is not a set and inflexible culture, which remains static throughout people’s lives. For instance, Crawford (2012) argues that the theory of habitus may be a useful way of considering video gamer culture, because of its emphasis on embodiment. As Crawford and Rutter’s (2006, pp.155-156) writes:

...part of being a successful player of a deathmatch in Quake is not just a matter of being an accurate shot, but having a feeling for the games’ development and different strategies that inform when to shoot and how to get into the right position to do this. The experienced player uses the know-how of their previous games to develop a sense of their own strengths and weaknesses and can improvise their play in order to manage risk and influence the game’s outcome depending on what is at stake.

Crawford (2012) suggests that playing any game is not just about knowing the rules and acting upon them, but rather video gaming is located within a wider social context. However, most of this is not consciously recognised, but rather expressed and experienced through our embodied encounter with the video game. In relation to this research, the theory of habitus may therefore prove a useful way to consider the embodied experience of video gamers attending video game events (as examined further in chapter 6).

Despite the usefulness of Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus, it is important to examine other conceptualisations in understanding the culture at video game events. However, there have been numerous debates around the relevance of various concepts that have been used to understand video gamer culture. For instance, Frans Mäyrä (2008) suggests that 'subcultures' provides a useful way of understanding video game culture, as this reflects how video gamers often organise themselves into groups and behave in ways that are based on particular games, or a particular genre, or the broader phenomenon of gaming. This also includes those with particular interests, values, norms, and sometimes even languages. This suggests that the emergence of video gamer culture is a cultural force that influences individuals in complex ways through cultural trends.

However, there has been limited research focusing on the rising popularity of video game events and the participation in various video game related practices within video gamer culture. Therefore, the culture at video game related events provides a useful way of considering the theoretical tools that have previously been applied to categorise gamers. For example, can subcultural theory be applied the same way to video gamers that attend video game events? Or to what extent can video gamers that attend video game events be conceptualised differently within video gamer culture and video game studies? This suggests the need to consider how video gamers create social environments and how they choose to interpret them? In particular, the social and cultural practices of play *with* video games.

It is to these terms, their meanings and usefulness in understanding video game culture and communities that I now turn.

3.1.2. Subcultures, Neo-Tribes and Scenes

This section will examine the applicability and limitations of subcultural theory, neo-tribes, and the concept of ‘scenes’, in relation to video game communities at gamer events.

Many authors, such as Yee (2006), Crawford and Rutter (2006), and Mäyrä (2008) have referred video games as a ‘subculture’. The term subculture often refers to any loosely identifiable group that appears to share some kind of common culture, which is in some way different from what would be deemed ‘mainstream’ culture (Cohen, 1972). However, subcultural theory, when it was first proposed, suggested more than just shared practices and common spaces. The origins of subcultural theory can be found in two sociological ‘schools’. The first is the ‘Chicago School’, which from the 1920s onwards, studied interactional and deviant patterns, among others. In particular, the work of Howard Becker (1963) on marijuana users and Albert Cohen’s *Delinquent Boys* (1955) provides an understanding of how these ‘deviant’ groups hold and express different norms and values from those of a wider society. This suggests that ‘subcultures’ from that have their own value system, in which members can find in-group status and rewards.

From the 1970s, the idea of subculture was developed further most notably at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. For scholars at ‘The Birmingham School’ subcultures were intimately connected to issues of power and struggle. This can be seen in how subcultures often seek to mark themselves out from the dominant culture while simultaneously also accommodate certain aspects of it.

Dick Hedbige (1979) suggests that subcultures emerge through the process of ‘bricolage’, where groups draw on existing consumer goods to develop a distinctive style that marks them from the general public and acts as both a means and identifier of social subversion and resistance. However, subcultures are as much (if not more so) created from outside, rather than within. For instance, Cohen’s (1972) study on Mods and Rockers highlights that the mass media constructed groups of young people as ‘folk devils’ creating a ‘moral panic’: from exaggeration and distortion, prediction and symbolisation. The media used ‘symbolic shorthand’s’ such as hairstyles, items of clothing and modes of transports as icons of troublemakers (Cohen, 1972). This suggests that a subculture does not ‘counter’ the norms and values of dominant culture, but instead transforms them through a negotiated reinterpretation.

In relation to video games, Mäyrä (2008) considers video gamers as a subculture that identifies themselves through common shared practices, values and interests:

Subcultures are groups of people who have some practices, values and interests in common and who form through their interaction a distinct group within a larger culture. Members of game subcultures rarely carry distinctive outward signs as punks or skinheads so, but one only has to participate in a meeting of hard-core strategy gamers, visit a role playing convention or take part in a *Quake* LAN party (a gathering of gamers with their networked-together PCs), when the features of the associated game cultures start becoming apparent (Mäyrä, 2008, p.25)

Mäyrä (2008) suggests that people often share the same language and also interest in artefacts (like original packaged games and gaming devices); where they play the same games and adapt terminologies that suit those purposes. This suggests that when video gamers play together, they frequently occupy a shared space, where they engage in shared rituals of play (Mäyrä, 2008). Therefore, this gives the impression that these constitute a tightly bounded and coherent culture.

However, Crawford (2012) criticises subcultural theory for the failure to consider the movement between subcultures and that this overlook levels of personal choice (agency). Subcultural theory often provides a sense that individuals are immovable within that subculture; such as punks, goths, teddy boys and so forth. And in particular, this fixed notion of subculture has often been considered to be problematic within contemporary society. For instance, Bauman (1997) suggests that we live in constantly shifting and fluid society, where set identities become useless. This suggests that our identities likewise become fluid, flexible, and based increasingly on consumer choices, which can be easily swapped or adopted to meet our changing needs and circumstances (Baldwin et al., 2004). Therefore, the concept of 'neo tribes' from Maffesoli (1996) may provide a more profitable way to theorise of the study of video gamers.

Maffesoli's (1996) concept of 'neo tribes' refers to the formation of these tribes being fluid, loosely organised and by no means fixed, yet still places an emphasis on community and belonging. This concept seems to propose a better argument for an increasingly diverse nature of video gamer culture of permeable and informal communities where individuals move in and out of regularly:

...such as playing a round of *Call of Duty* with friends online in-between doing homework or discussing tactics for *Football Manager* during a coffee break at

work, before moving on to other duties, identities and, possibly, neo-tribes (Crawford, 2012, p.101).

This suggests that neo-tribes are fluid within a changing nature and membership, which require only a small amount of conformity from their members (Maffesoli, 1996).

In relation to this research, the concept of ‘neo-tribes’ may therefore prove useful, where parallels can be drawn here to the contemporary nature of fandom. Henry Jenkins (2006) highlights that while some fans remain committed to a single show or star, many others use individual series as points of entry into (and then move around within) broader fan community. Fans may also drift from one series commitment to another through an extended period of involvement within ‘fandom’. As Jenkins (1992, p.40) writes:

Susan M. Garrett explains; “A majority of fans don’t simply burn out of one fandom and disappear... In fact, I’ve found that after the initial break into fandom through a single series, fans tend to follow other people into various fandoms, rather than stumble upon programs themselves”

This suggests that fans often incorporate more and more programs into their interests in order to facilitate greater communication with friends who share common interests or possess compatible tastes. This can also be applied to video games. For instance, video gamers are not necessarily content with playing video game alone, but may also participate in various video game related activities, possibly with neo-tribes – where they may participate in more than one video game community and various forms of video game practice.

However, Hodkinson (2002, p.29) argues that we should not be too quick to reject the concept of ‘subcultures’. He argues that rather than attempting to understand the changing nature of communities with yet another new term, he suggests we instead employ a ‘workable and up-to-date concept of subculture’. In particular, he suggests that we can understand the contemporary nature of subcultures through the ideas of *identity*, *commitment*, *consistent distinctiveness* and *autonomy*. And he suggests that goths provide one example of the continued relevance of the concept of ‘subcultures’. As Hodkinson (2002, p.29) writes:

...in spite of overlaps and complexities, the initial temptation to describe goths using a term such as neo-tribe or lifestyle was gradually tempered by the realization that such a move would have over-inflated the diversity of instability of their grouping. Crucially, fluidity and substance are not matters of binary oppositions, but of degree.

Hodkinson (2002) suggested that there are elements of movement, overlap and change within the goth subculture, but that this does not obfuscate the remarkable levels of commitment, identity, distinctiveness, and autonomy, which were also evident. Firstly, consistent distinctiveness refers to the set of shared tastes and values, which 'is distinctive from those of other groups and reasonably consistent, from one participant to the next, one place to the next and one year to the next' (Hodkinson 2002, p.30). This suggests that the goth scene was characterised by a relatively clear set of ideals and tastes. Secondly, Hodkinson (2002) refers identity to the strong sense of 'us' and 'them'. This refers to the perception that individuals are involved in a distinct cultural grouping and share feelings of identity with one another. Thirdly, Hodkinson (2002) highlights that although levels of commitment varied from one individual to another, subcultures are liable to influence extensively the everyday lives of participants in practices, where this concentrated involvement will last years, rather than months:

Depending upon the nature of the group in question, subcultures are liable to account for a considerable proportion of free time, friendship patterns, shopping routes, collections of commodities, going-out habits and even internet use (Hodkinson, 2002, p.31).

Hodkinson (2002) highlights that those who were reluctant to explicitly locate themselves as members, the subculture often dominated their lifestyle in practice. Those who 'flirted' around the goth scene's boundaries tended to receive fewer social rewards, in comparison to those who were consistent with the operation of social pressures relating to tastes and norms. Finally, Hodkinson (2002) refers to the autonomy of productive or organisational activities that are undertaken by and for enthusiasts, suggesting a connection to the society and politico-economic system. As Hodkinson (2002, p.32) writes:

Furthermore, in some cases, profit-making operations will run alongside extensive semi-commercial and voluntary activities, indicating particularly high levels of grass-roots insider participation in cultural production. Therefore, while the exchange of money for goods and services and the use of media technologies had always been integral to participation in the goth scene, we shall see that in Britain in the late 1990s, the record labels, bands, DJs, promoters and producers of fanzines and websites involved were often subcultural participants providing exclusive services for their fellow enthusiasts and, frequently, making little or no money from doing so.

While non-subcultural products and producers were heavily implicated, specialist subcultural events, consumables, and media were playing an unusually significant role in

the generation of the grouping. This then suggests that subcultures can be seen as distinguishable from more fluid elective collectiveness by their level of *substance*.

Although the concept of subculture may not apply to all video gamers, Hodkinson's (2002) 'workable and up-to-date conception of subculture', maybe applicable to video gamers that attend to video game events – where those who attend share may similar tastes and values, such as a shared language. Though video gamers may not necessarily share a distinctive taste in fashion or music, similar to goths, but those who attend video game events, do share a way of identify themselves to like-minded individuals, and this will be considered further, later in the thesis.

Another relevant concept that Hodkinson (2002) draws on, is the notion of a 'scene'. The term 'scene' is typically used by music fans to describe loose-knit categories based around particular music genres. Harris (2000), who focuses upon the plethora of semiautonomous local and translocal scenes surrounding the umbrella genre of extreme metal, defends the word 'scene' by emphasizing that it is infinitely malleable and universal:

The implications is that scenes include everything, from tight-knit local music communities to isolated musicians and occasional fans, since all contribute to and feed off a large space(s) of musical practice (Harris 2000, p.25).

Hence, it is suggested that scenes are fluid and hence shift toward and away from one another, and that individuals continually negotiate pathways within and between them (Hodkinson, 2002). For instance, the goth scene illustrates that goths are part of a wider society and culture, most have jobs, interests and friends outside of the goth scene, but they remain part of this scene in their ordinary lives primarily through a sense of identity and their music and fashion choices. However, this scene becomes 'extraordinary' and takes on increased significance at certain times and in certain places, such as at goth clubs or, most visibly in the UK, at the bi-annual goth weekends in Whitby in North Yorkshire (Hodkinson, 2002). Therefore, this suggests that it is possible to understand video game culture in a similar way, and in particular, those who attend video game events. For instance, from Crawford and Gosling's (2008) paper, '*Freak Scene? Narrative, Audience & Scene*', they utilise the concept of 'scene' to consider video gamers as a media 'audience'. Crawford and Gosling's (2008) research includes a convenience sample consisting of interviews (face-to-face, telephone and email), diaries, and extensive observations of gamers at play in their own homes, several LAN events (both small and very large), and games arcades, with eighty-two gamers (all based in the UK, sixty-six

males, sixteen females, ranging in age from eleven to fifty-six years old). Crawford and Gosling (2008) consider scene to be a useful as it highlights how ‘elective belongings’ are located within our identities and ordinary lives, but can take on extraordinary meaning in certain times and in specific locations. Hence, this concept places particular emphasis on the importance of ‘place’ – which can be applied to video game events. As Crawford (2012, p.108) writes:

Space and place, both in-game and out-of-game, help determine what is, and what is not, possible, and shape the very nature of play. For instance, playing a video game in a NAMCO arcade in a shopping mall is very different from playing in a bedroom or living room; each will shape the nature of gameplay in different ways. Location matters, and location is what helps making video gaming take on extraordinary significance for the video gamer.

The importance of space *within* video games has been highlighted by several authors, such as the work of Henry Jenkins (2004); however, less consideration has been given to the physical spaces games are played in. With the increasing popularity of video game events, the concept of ‘scene’ could be considered a useful tool for understanding and analysing games events.

As already highlighted, the concepts of both ‘subculture’ and ‘scene’ are often closely linked to that of ‘fans’ and ‘fandom’, and similarly these are terms that have often been employed in attempting to understand gamers and gamer communities. Hence, it is a consideration of these terms that I now wish to turn.

3.1.3. Fans and Fan Activities

This section will explore the possibilities and limitations of classifying video gamers as fans, and the nature of fan activities that often overlap with video gamer culture.

The simple definition of a ‘fan’ typically evokes the idea of someone with an interest or enthusiasm in a certain sport, type of music, television series, or even video games. However, within the fan studies literature, agreeing upon a definition can prove to be problematic, where many writers avoid defining precisely what they mean by the term. As Hills (2002, p.v) states:

Fandom is not simply a ‘thing’ that can be picked over analytically. It is also always performative; by which I mean that it is an identity which is (dis)claimed, and which performs cultural work. Claiming the status of a ‘fan’ may, in certain

contexts, provide a cultural space for types of knowledge and attachment. In specific institutional contexts, such as academic, 'fan' status may be devalued and taken as a sign of 'inappropriate' learning and uncritical engagement with the media.

Throughout its evolution, Fan Studies has tried to situate the fan in relation to popular culture and media; variously as representative, subversive, or cultural consumer. In the past, the fan has been positioned and repositioned as both antagonistic and conformist (MacCallum-Stewart, 2014). Early writings suggest fans as passive, pathological outsiders; collectively determining them either as a 'hysterical crowd' or an 'obsessed loner' (Jensen, 1992, p.11). In this early literature there has been little discussion on 'fandom as a normal, everyday cultural or social phenomenon. Instead the fan is characterised as (at least potentially) an obsessed loner, suffering from a disease of isolation, or a frenzied crowd member, suffering from a disease of contagion' (Jensen, 1992, p.13). For example, 'Trekkies' (a term for fans of Star Trek) became a popular stereotype, depicted as being brainless consumers, devoted to worthless knowledge, placing inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material, and unable to separate fantasy from reality (Jenkins, 1992). Therefore, to claim the identity of a 'fan' remains, in some sense, to claim an 'improper' identity; '...a cultural identity based on one's commitment to something as seemingly unimportant and 'trivial' as a film or TV series' (Hills, 2002, p.v). This suggests that fans often struggle to define their own culture and construct their own community within the context of what many observers have described as trivial and worthless.

However, in *The Adoring Audience*, Jensen (1992) argues that fans should be seen as representative of changes in the media, rather than ostracized outsiders. For instance, Jenkins (1992) saw fans as actively engaged with popular culture, and draws on the term 'Textual Poachers', to describe the ways that fans (re)appropriate the media texts for their own ends. Jenkins (1992) highlights that 'poaching' is a concept to describe the ways media fans take characters, scenarios or narratives from existing texts, such as television shows or film, and use them to produce their own meanings, creativity and pleasure; such as creating new cultural artefacts, such as art, poetry, stories, performances, and so on. Hence, the early work of Jenkins (1992) seeks to emphasize the potentially creative, and even subversive, nature of certain aspects of consumer culture – this suggests that fans are not passive consumers (Schickel, 1986).

In relation to video games, the growth of fans as producer is something that is discussed increasingly in Games Studies. For example, the chapter, ‘*When Fans Become Players: The Lord of the Rings Online in a Transmedia World Perspective*’ by Klastrup and Tosca (2011, p.46) suggests that ‘*Lord of the Rings Online*’ [LOTRO] provided an opportunity to ‘come home’ to that place their imaginations conjured when they first encounter this world; usually through books, but also through role-playing or, later, via Peter Jackson’s movies’. As Klastrup and Tosca (2011, p.57) continue:

...they repeatedly return to their favourite texts, collect information about them and they will even maybe produce paratexts (Commentary) or derived texts (like fan fiction) themselves, as Henry Jenkins has so eloquently demonstrated

This suggests that the relation of fans with the object of their fandom is not limited to the purely textual, and that performance and social interaction with other fans are key aspects of these experiences (Sandvoss, 2005). For instance, the motivations behind fan creativity are sometimes referred to as a form of ‘gift-giving’, which is largely driven by the ‘promotion of self-interest’ among community members (May, 2002). Therefore, fans often engage with media texts in a more active and creative way, such as ‘poaching’, to create fan fiction and art (Jenkins, 1992).

There are of course, certain similarities with the kinds of fan creativity outlined by Jenkins (1992), and that of certain video gamers, such as modders, hackers, walkthrough writers and so forth. For instance, Crawford (2012, p.103) writes:

Just as Jenkins’s Star Trek and Dr Who fans take storylines and characters and use them to create art and poetry, Doom or Quake modders may take game codes and use them to create game add-ons or adaptations, or EverQuest gamers take narratives and settings to write new fictions around them.

Crawford (2012) suggests that there have been struggles between fans and official producers of television shows and films over the use of intellectual property, such as characters and storylines, and similarly it can be seen that video gamers have frequently encountered legal challenges to their production of game modifications and so forth. For example, in December 2015, the ‘Super Smash Brothers’ mod (game modification), known as ‘Project M’ (Project M Development Team, 2011) finished with their final release, v3.6. However, as Klepek (2015, p.1) writes, ‘the website for Project M has been stripped bare, download links and all... Project M was ‘controversial’ because it was never sanctioned by Nintendo’. The Project M Development Team (PMDT) ‘abandoned’ further

development on Project M to work on other game-related ideas; though it ‘denies claims’ that this is due to legal tussles with Nintendo.

Most of the academic discussions of ‘modding’ (the act of making game mods) are structured around the level of adding game data. Aarseth (1997) and Raessen (2005), refers modding as ‘addition’ or ‘construction’ for new game elements – that also include fuzzy and incoherent practices such as taking advantage of bugs and glitches that have an effect on the game’s functions and mechanics in certain ways (Sihvonen 2011). Sihvonen’s (2011) study on ‘mods’ suggests that many player activities in *The Sims* tend to be fundamentally based on the practices of sharing gameplay tips, hints and experiences as well as distributing the actual mods. As Sihvonen (2011, p.106) writes:

Besides the general game discussions often revolving around materials such as tutorials, walkthroughs and cheating guidelines, there are thousands of websites where players reflect on their own gameplay experiences and produce it publicly by making it visible through the redirection of the game engine

For Sihvonen (2011), modding is one of many forms of fan productivity, which promotes fan creativity to be publically demonstrate a sense of community among community members:

Modding is an individualistic activity, in the sense that it is very much based on the personal preferences of players, but at the same time it is likely that only a fraction of The Sims mods are kept private and most of them are being distributed (freely on the internet, through various kinds of web pages... personal effect is greatly valued but the dissemination of the end products takes place within an (enclosed) community of like-minded individuals, often results in a kind of meritocratic social structure (Sihvonen 2011, pp.117-118).

Modding has been placed within the contexts of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), and the political-economic implications of dissolving of the boundaries between production and consumption. However, modding is regarded as post-industrial unwaged labour, or ‘playbour’, and the developer companies are seen to reap the benefits of the work done by the largely recreational modding community (Kücklick, 2005). This suggests that fan creativity may not necessarily be profit driven.

Similarly, Turkle’s (2005) study on *Hacker Culture*, suggests that hackers are often after the thrill of triumph, rather than material goods. As Turkle’s (2005, p.213) writes:

Many hackers are expert lock pickers and carry their ‘picks’ around with them on their key chains. Their pleasure is in ‘beating’ the lock. They break, they enter, and then they leave. They are not after material goods, but after the thrill of triumph

Turkle (2005) highlights that the term 'hacker' has been stretched and applied to so many different groups of people that it has become impossible to say precisely what a hacker is. In general, the term 'hacker' often refers to curiosity, and the desire to grasp how things work through the use of any tool, computer, or mechanism. Hackers illustrate a particular aspect of online culture that is more properly called a subculture, a culture that is both inherently tied to a large culture, but also resistant to it. Turkle (2005) argues that hackers can speak openly about hacking, tools and techniques and can boast proudly about systems they have entered. However, hackers will rarely trade passwords or specific bugs, 'what they cannot, and for the most part will not, do is betray the information that gave them access' (Turkle, 2005, p.188). For instance, Turkle (2005) portrays hackers engaging with computers to show mastery, enjoying science fiction, and practicing rites of passage to form communities. The self-representation of hackers-as-outsiders 'knowing things better' than the experts-on-the-inside resembles the attitude of members of a counterculture (Alberts and Oldenziel, 2014, p.2). Similar to aspects of fandom, this suggests a shift from the site of cultural resistance, to a representation of the self (Sandvoss, 2005). As Sandvoss (2005, p.48) writes:

Conceptualizing fans as performers, rather than recipients of mediated texts, thus offers an alternative explanation of the intense emotional pleasures and rewards of fandom. As the fabric of our lives is constituted through constant and staged performances (Goffman 1959/1990), the self becomes a performed, and hence symbolic, object. In this sense fandom is not an articulation of inner needs or drives, but is itself constitutive of the self. Being a fan in this sense reflects *and* constructs the self. The concept of self in the analysis of fandom as performances, as well as, incidentally, in Goffman's work, thus coincides with symbolic interactionism and its emphasis on the creation and continuous re-creation of the self in everyday life

Sandvoss's (2005) argument is useful, as it positions fans as performers who form an identity through the text. This implies a subtle manipulation by the fan, who becomes more self-aware and more engaged with reiterating core tenets of the text through their own practices (MacCallum-Stewart, 2014). In particular, MacCallum-Stewart (2014) suggests that gaming fans fit well into this construction since through play, they are already used to understanding the game as performed text, and have a keen appreciation of their self also existing as player/avatar. The gaming fan exists in a liminal space in which they are self-aware of this positioning and able to respond creatively to it (MacCallum-Stewart, 2011).

Furthermore, MacCallum-Stewart (2011) suggests that space within the game world itself, the development of semantic and aesthetic elements can encourage the players' to respond to the game through fan-based activities, such as role-playing events, fan fiction, and podcasting:

It is also important to note that, even within a role-playing community, players may take 'time out' from their usual play styles in order to enjoy role-playing, 'downtime' tasks such as socialising or waiting for other players (MacCallum-Stewart, 2011, p.71)

She continues:

Some players use this 'downtime' – points at which they are not engaged with the game directly – in order to expand on their experiences in more creative ways. This activity includes the construction of fan art, machinima, modding, forum postings and blogs – in short, all the extraneous output we expect to see from fans appropriating texts in a convergent manner (Jenkins, 2006). Fan production is undoubtedly, as Henry Jenkins argues, a way of reclaiming territory in which the reader has previously been marginalised. This fan-based production, then, supports the idea that space within MMORPGs is limited for role players; the need to reclaim and rewrite it outside the game shows that there must be a form of exclusion working within it (Jenkins, 1992). However, fan production is also a way of celebrating the text in its original form, proving this it is inspirational enough to deserve recreation elsewhere (Hills, 2002) (MacCallum-Stewart 2011, p.87-88).

MacCallum-Stewart (2014) suggests that fandom is not only becoming an active procedure, but that pod- and web-casting has enabled new forms of creative output. For instance, Hills' (2006) notion of the 'elite fan', or 'Big Name Fan's' (BNF) highlights that gaming fans are becoming celebrities within an environment that has not hitherto provided a platform for 'real' voices and personalities. This suggests that web- and pod-casters are becoming a visible element in gaming culture, where it has recently begun to create its own celebrities.

In relation to my research, using fan studies to explain the participation of various video game-related practices may be useful. For instance, there are parallels between the activities of media fan producers and also some video games, who make mods, hacks, and walkthroughs, and so on. It may also be useful in respects where it explores the reasons for attendance at various video game events among some video gamers. For instance, celebrities (elite fans or big name fans) and casters often receive invitations to participate in workshops, or compete in tournaments and competitions, or to commentate on professional eSports or live matches; this may then attract other fans to meet or see them.

However, Crawford (2012) considers the term ‘fan’ to be ill equipped to describe all video gamers and identifies two issues with this. Firstly, there is a tendency to see fans as necessarily as ‘active’, and the wider population as invariably passive; ‘but such over-generations rarely hold true for all fans or wider audiences, all of the time’ (Crawford, 2012, p.103). Secondly, assuming the all video gamers are fans must be also problematic; ‘while it might seem applicable to refer to an individual who produces and maintains a website dedicated to the Final Fantasy video games series (of which there are many), as a fan, can we say the same for every player of a video game, even the most uninterested and unimpressed?’ (Crawford, 2012, p.104). Crawford (2012) argues that although players usually take an active role in gaming, this is not necessarily the same as being an active participant in a gaming community. Furthermore, he argues it is a mistake to depict all players as unilaterally active because of the nature of games. And even Jenkins’ (2006) work on fandom has moved on somewhat, towards a wider consideration of the changing nature of media audiences and what he refers to as ‘knowledge communities’.

3.1.4. Knowledge Communities

In the development of Jenkins’ (2006) work, he proposes the term ‘knowledge community’ to describe contemporary media users, including video gamers. Jenkins (2006) argues, that rather than focusing on whether particular technology, such as video games or the internet are interactive; we should consider the interactions that occur among media consumers, between media consumers and media texts, and between consumers and media producers. In particular, Jenkins (2006) draws on Pierre Lévy’s (1997) work on ‘collective intelligence’, whose concept of collective intelligence is employed as a way of describing how and why online communities collectively act to pool resources and add individuals work to a greater whole? This suggests that self-organised groups are held together by shared patterns of production and mutual knowledge. Lévy (1997, p.257) suggests that intelligence and human knowledge have always played a central role in social life, and there are three aspects of newness within collective intelligence, from speed, mass and tools.

Speed: This refers to the rate of knowledge – in particular, to science and technology that has been rapidly evolving

Mass: This refers to the number of people who will be asked to learn and produce forms of knowledge.

Tools: This refers refer to the appearance of new tools (cyber spatial tools) capable of bringing forth, within the cloud of information around us.

Similarly, Jenkins (2006, pp.135-136) suggests that we should consider the rise of new participatory culture of media users in three trends:

New tools and technologies that enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content;

A range of subcultures promote Do-It-Yourself (DIY) media production, a discourse that shapes how consumers have deployed those technologies; and

Economic trends flavouring the horizontally integrated media conglomerates encourage the flow of images, ideas and narratives across multiple media channels and demand more active modes of spectatorship.

Jenkins (2006) argues that participatory engagement with contemporary consumer practices is part of an increasing ‘convergence culture’, which has become increasingly mainstream. Convergence is a term that has been used to describe the blurring of media boundaries, and usually in terms of media forms and technologies – such as mobile telephones that can play music, and televisions that can surf the internet. For Jenkins, convergence culture is also about a blurring between user and producer patterns and new forms of collaboration and participation:

No longer a couch potato, he determines what, when, and how he watches media. He is a media consumer, perhaps a media fan, but he is also a media producer, distributor, publicist, and critic. He’s the poster child of the new interactive audience’ (Jenkins 2006, p.135).

In relation to this research, knowledge communities may prove to be useful for considering the growing forms of participation. However, to date, it is primarily the online participatory nature of gamer communities that has been considered in the gaming literature, but this research suggest the need to also consider (in greater depth) offline participatory culture of gamers. Hence, I now turn to video considering in more detail the literature on video gamer productivity and gamer communities.

3.2. Video Gamer Productivity

This section considers video gamer productivity. It is important to consider that video games have now become a way for people to identify themselves, to find like-minded individuals, and participate in a world that merges with their ‘real life’ in new and exciting ways. In relation to this research, this section focuses on the participatory practices of

video gamers within video game communities – in particular, what video gamers talk about, and the things they make and do *with* video games, besides gaming itself (Newman, 2008). This includes video games as representative systems, configurative performances, as technology; from stories, fan art, music cosplay, game guides, walkthroughs and FAQs, superplay, sequence breaking and speed running, modding and game making. (Newman, 2008). Similarly, Crawford (2012) examines video gamer production including textual producers, mods and hacks, private sensor gaming, game guides, walkthroughs, FAQs, fan fiction and art.

This section will consider video gamer culture in two forms:

Game Communities (within the game): this refers to the relations between players as afforded by the game, as members of a team, for instance, who communicate to arrive at the best strategy and align their movement. Such relationships are not always sufficient in current video games, so players extend these communications with informal rules, extra tools, and places to relate beyond the game, such as websites

Metaculture (around and beyond the game): this refers to fan sites, discussions forums, game magazines, and other places where players discuss a variety of content related to the game. It also covers modding, poaching and the more formalised side of gaming, from competitions to professional players (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p.152)

This distinction is in reality, somewhat artificial, since many activities overlap both categories, but it is a way to stress how video gamer culture is born within the games and then expands beyond this:

...it is the players who form game communities, and it is video game communities that through their actions define the metaculture around a game (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p.152)

This suggests the need to consider the social nature of video games, such as those who spend considerable amounts of time outside the actual game, discussing and interacting in meaningful ways.

3.2.1. Game Communities

Defining the word ‘community’ is often quite difficult. In the article, ‘Definitions of Community, Areas of Agreement’, George Hillery (1955) identified ninety-four meanings for the word ‘community’, which all dealt with social relations, connections and people - however, there was no accord about the precise meaning of the word. Today, the concept

of 'community' has often been considered to be something that is impossible to escape from, which seems to have become incorporated into every social organisation (Blackshaw, 2010). When most people talk about 'community', it often refers to an image of a sense of belonging, warmth and companionship (Blackshaw, 2010). For instance, Bauman (2001, p.1) points out that, '...whatever the word... may mean, it feels good to have a community... and... to be in a community'. This suggests that a community can provide a place within the knowledge we think with, and it is endowed with an atmosphere of its own.

In relation to video game studies, Hand and Moore (2006) suggests that video gamers often consider themselves to be part of a video game community with extensive and complex patterns of social interaction, culture and norms. Though these communities are sometimes physically located in one place, such as at LAN parties, as with most 'fan' activities and elective belongings, where these 'communities' are primarily located is within the imaginations and identities of their 'members'. For instance, using an example from Crawford and Gosling's (2008, p.131) study from '*Freak Scene?*' *Narrative, Audience and Scene*, a typical statement from one gamer was:

You know it's [video gaming] important to me because it's another group of friends and I can sort of like you know meet up with people and know people and whatever else, but it is like important. It's a difficult thing [video gaming] to talk about the people who aren't sort of really aware of it. So although it's an important part of what I do... I know that non-gaming friends know about it, occasionally ask about it, but we talk about other [non-game related] stuff, you know

According to the interviewee in Crawford and Gosling's (2008) study, video gaming provided them with a sense of community and group of friends. It is evident that many gamers in Crawford and Gosling's (2008) research did indicate that they viewed themselves as part of (some form of) 'gamer' community, which they often articulated as separate from other groups or activities they participated in. This separation between the gamers and their other social groups, was primarily based around their shared culture and understanding of video games. This suggests that those who do not play video games may not fully understand certain aspects within video gamer culture, and hence, are not part of the gamer community.

However, most studies of video game communities have often focused on the virtual communities of video gamers, especially massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) and multi-user domains (MUDs). Although, most studies on virtual

communities often consider the interaction between individuals through online gaming practices, it is important to highlight that the interactions between video gamers does not merely happen solely over the internet. For instance, Crawford (2005) highlights that gaming does not take place in a vacuum and players' experiences of play frequently spill over into other contexts. In particular, video gaming can sometimes bring gamers together in the 'real' world as well. However, there are only a relatively small number of studies of gamer gatherings and video game related events. Hence, consideration of virtual communities, and its importance in other contexts, that I now wish to turn.

Virtual Communities

To date, most video game studies have often focused on the virtual world and the virtual connections among video gamers; known as virtual communities. Howard Rheingold (1993, p.5) defines 'virtual communities' to be;

...social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace

Rheingold (1993) suggests that virtual communities refer to the interaction between individuals that form webs of personal relationships; such as MMORPGs and MUDs, where forms of communication involving individuals who have never met (face-to-face), generate meaningful social ties through the practicing of online gaming. For example, MMORPGs such as *Star Wars Galaxies* (LucasArts, 2003) and *Ultima Online* (Electronic Arts, 1997) are important sites for research on the relationship between technical and design elements of gaming worlds, and the social and cultural elements of gamer participation such as the use of currencies in virtual economies (Dibbell, 2003), the regulation of player behaviour, language use (Wright, Boria & Bridenbuch, 2002), popular culture references (Kolo and Baur, 2004), and so on. In relation to video game studies, authors such as Crawford, Gosling and Light (2011), Bosellstorff, Nardi, Pearce and Taylor (2012) and Taylor (2006) have studied video gamers within the virtual world, where they consider the social, cultural and theoretical significance of virtual communities.

However, there are many limitations to conceptualising the social relations surrounding online video gaming in terms of community. Critics of the virtual community idea point

out that it is actually underpinned by problematic assumptions about what community is. For instance, Jones (1995) and Sardar (2000) argue that the term community is misused in this way – online virtual worlds do not constitute community just because their participants believe this to be the case; especially without the consideration of social bonds or ties, the webs of mutual obligation, the embeddedness within wider social frameworks:

Belonging and posting to a Usenet group, or logging on to a bulletin board community, conforms no more an identity than belonging to a stamp collecting club or a Morris dancing society (Sardar, 2000, p.742)

For critics of ‘virtual community’, community has been stripped of its ethical dimensions. The very fact that they are formed through bonds of transient mutual interest rather than mutual obligation or proximity, makes them something other than communities. For instance, Castells (2000) suggests that online ‘community’ members can easily withdraw themselves from situations of conflicts without concern for the response of others, as would be necessitated by face-to-face contact. This suggests that the ‘flexibility’ of virtual communities means that many question whether they can be considered as ‘communities’ at all. For instance, Blackshaw (2010, p.105) writes:

Virtual communities exist for cultural individuals and they are highly personalised meaning that their ‘users’ are able to search various ‘communities’ to fulfil their own particular individual needs. For example, virtual communities enable individual to connect with each other through discussion groups and e-mail listings through which they can search for consumer advice on the most suitable products; support for emotional, physical or relationship troubles; or to engage with like-minded individuals around our shared work and leisure interests.

Blackshaw (2010) suggests that virtual communities are best understood as social networks, where the lack of community makes these alternative cultures of belonging attractive.

In relation to this research, although virtual communities refer to the virtual world of video gamers, these virtual worlds sometimes bring video gamers together in the ‘real’ world. For instance, Pearce and Artemisia (2009) identified patterns among ‘*The Gathering of Uru*’ (TGU) and *There.com* players, where they migrate outside of the virtual and into the real world. During *There.com*’s real life gathering (RLG), most of the members would encounter each other’s ‘real-life avatars’ for the first time – while some have had encounters with each other prior to the RLG. As Pearce and Artemisia (2009, p.181) writes:

While most of the formal event was focused on panels, discussion groups, and showcasing player creativity, including machinima films made in-world, live musical performances, and real-life crafts made by players, the most revealing aspects from a research perspective took place the last evening, when the group met for dinner at San Francisco and then returned to the hotel to socialize.

Hence, the interactions between video gamers does not solely happen over the internet. Moreover, the rising popularity of video games goes far beyond children's bedrooms and living rooms. For instance, Crawford (2005) highlights that gaming does not take place in a vacuum and players' responds to their experiences of play frequently spill over into other contexts. The studies of video game communities often focus on virtual communities and interactions online, as opposed to offline communities. Although these online and offline distinctions are not clear-cut, it is important to consider both the online and offline forms of socialisation and video game related practices. This brings us to Taylor's (2003) concept of 'online and offline' socialisation.

Online Socialisation and Offline Socialisation

Taylor (2003) highlights that there are two main types of gaming socialisations, which are rich in variations of social life and community: in-game socialisation ('online') and out-game socialisation ('offline'). Therefore, using Taylor's (2003) notion of 'in-game' and 'out-game' socialisation, this section will highlight the social interaction among video gamers that carries on beyond the confined spaces of the game itself, which may spill over into our everyday lives.

In-game social interactions can take place in various ways, such as creation of guilds, having regular friends and hunting partners, marriage between characters, and participating in the general spontaneous community interactions as they occur day by day (Taylor, 2003). These types of social interactions attempt to demonstrate a form of 'membership' towards a 'gaming community' (Rutter and Bryce, 2006). For instance, Taylor (2003) highlights that communication within a virtual environment requires 'people skills' during gameplay; such as being known as a good player or being a reliable team player. Taylor (2003) suggests that knowledge of game play becomes crucial to being known as a 'good player'; where these skills can act as a real commodity and be transferrable to other aspects of 'ordinary' life.

Similarly, Ducheneaut and Moore (2005) suggest that there are three important types of social interaction that are characteristics of MMORPGs: players' self-organisation, instrumental coordination, and downtime sociability. These social skills are often important during gameplay; where it can become a useful source of social capital within a gaming community. Therefore, Taylor (2003) argues that these forms of social capital become essential to progress further for higher levels or near high-end games, such as, '...being invited onto teams, asked to join a prestigious 'raid' or guild, can all result from well-developed social networks' (Taylor, 2003, p.25). This suggests that video gamers interact with each other to form their own webs of personal relationships based on their set of shared values and common interests (Rutter and Bryce, 2006).

Meanwhile, out-of-game socialisation can involve communicating and spending time 'offline' with those who are tied to the game in some way; from talking about games and participating in a variety of out-of-game activities through bulletin boards, mailing lists and conventions (Taylor, 2003). These offline encounters can often serve a purpose for continuing gameplay outside the confined spaces of the game itself, and also become significantly tied to our identity formations. As Taylor (2003, pp.35-36) writes:

As with offline life, bodies come to serve as medication points between the individual and the world (both social and material). What they are and more importantly, what social meanings they are given, then matters

However, it is important to highlight that there is little research on this aspect of gaming. Although, what studies do exist, often refer most notably to gamer conversations, and things gamers make and do with video games. Hence, we now turn to communities of conversation (things to talk about), and then communities of play (things to make and do).

Communities of Conversation

This section considers the importance of conversation within video game communities; where various video game related practices can often be suffused in talk, discussion, sharing and collaboration through social interaction.

With the development of technology, there has been an immense change to the social contents of gameplay for opportunities to share the gaming experience with other gamers; from the development of game consoles, the portability of handheld devices, multi-player games, online networks and gaming events (Newman, 2008). For instance, previously,

most game consoles usually supported up to two controllers, where consoles such as those by *Atari 2600* (Atari, 1978) or the *Sega Genesis/Mega Drive* (Sega, 1990) offered at best two player modes. Today, most game consoles are able to support at least four game controllers, and some games allows as many as ten controllers, such as *Saturn Bomberman* (Hudson Soft, 1997), while online games, such as MMORPGs allow thousands to play together in virtual worlds.

Nowadays, video gaming often consists of regular forms of conversation within both in-game (online) and out-of-game (offline). For instance, studies on MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) highlight the importance of in-game and out-of-game talk in creating the meanings of the game and promoting a key motivation of play (Burn and Carr, 2006; Taylor, 2003). Multiplayer games often encourage co-operative or competitive collaboration. Therefore, the importance of talk in shaping the meaning of the game and the experience of gameplay should not be underestimated.

Most game consoles and PC-based games often support microphone and headset facilities, where the device facilitates in-game talk as well as communication outside of play (Newman, 2008). In-game talk is often used as a play mechanic to communicate and coordinate game tactics among players. However, Wright et al. (2002) highlights that in-game talk is not solely based on directing performance. Using an example from *Counter-Strike* (Sierra Studios, 2000), in-game talk can offer meanings throughout gameplay from virtual interactions between players. The meaning of playing *Counter-Strike* (Sierra Studios, 2000) is not merely embodied in the graphics or even the violent gameplay, but in the social mediations that go on between players through their talk with each other and by their performance within the game. Participants, then, actively create the meaning of the game through their virtual talk and behaviour (Wright et al., 2002).

Similarly, MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) also promote communication between gamers that have never physically met and generate meaningful social ties and provide a sense of community (Nardi, Ly, and Harris, 2007). Within gaming communities, whether if it is during in-game talk or out-of-game talk, conversations promote gamers to acquire the basic knowledge needed to play the game; from guidance on tactics and strategy, and initiation into the moral order or ethos of the game (Nardi et al., 2007).

In addition, Levy's (1997) concept of collective intelligence suggests that communication consist of sharing memories and the perception of imagination that promotes knowledge culture. This can be used to illustrate Crawford's (2005) study from five interviewees that indicated that sport management games, such as *Championship Manager* (Domark, 1992), had significantly increased their sport knowledge. The learning experience within gameplay is often driven by a diverse group of gamers asking questions or receiving advice during gameplay. Conversations among gamers can occasionally reflect on moral values and the attitudes towards certain game tactics can vary; such as power-levelling: when a lower level character advances quickly through the accompany of higher level characters, making the completion of quests and acquiring level cap much easier (Nardi et al., 2007):

Some find it silly because why the rush through the levels not really playing at all? Some believe it is ineffectual because lower level players do not learn to play on their own. Some take pride in accomplishing things on their own. Some find it acceptable practice because their goal is to arrive as quickly as possible at "endgame" activities available only to level 60 characters. Some guilds adopt powerleveling as a service they provide while other feel it is not in players' best interests (Nardi et al., 2007, pp.6-7).

Nardi et al. (2007) highlights that power-levelling is a key issue in which the moral order of the game is contested. This suggests that part of the learning process to play a game is working out the moral order of what is appropriate and not appropriate for guilds (in-game formal groups) and communities. The interaction in video games provides practice in identifying shared goals, negotiating conflict, and connecting with others who are not part of their daily lives (Kahne, Middaugh & Evnas, 2009). This suggests that these 'moral orders' are often under negotiation through interaction and communication. Therefore, the proximal development of gamers is often shaped through the voluntarily teachings of others in persistent conversations (Nardi et al., 2007).

In addition, most video gamers often enjoy the sociability of video gaming, and conversations will tend to continue away from the sight of a gaming screen (Taylor, 2003) – such as attending various video game events for their social activities and interaction with other video gamers. Statistics from Crawford's (2005) study shows that video gaming is a common and regular form of conversation, where 83.5% of respondents indicated that video gaming was something that would be discussed with friends and 57.5% suggested that it would be something discussed between family members. Therefore, it is important

not to underestimate the non-playing experience in gaming cultures - sometimes a video gamer culture can consist largely around social interactions, talk and community with little emphasis on gameplay (Newman, 2008). Crawford (2009, p.9) writes:

Moreover, media audiences; engagement with texts will often live on beyond the screen or page – just as video games do – such as in conversations with friends and relatives, in attendance at conventions and fairs, in creating their own related media or simply in their imagination and day-dreams – none of which is in anyway passive.

Many video games can provide a sense of community, where chatting, connecting with other people and forming relationships becomes a part of drawing in a ‘competent’ online and offline life (Taylor, 2003). This suggests that video gamer culture can consist of video gamers who are active creators rather than passive consumers. However, it is important to highlight that community participation does not simply involve chatting; it requires a range of skills to become actively involved (Taylor, 2003). We now turn to the creativity of these video gamers; and in particular, communities of play.

Communities of Play

In the previous section (communities of conversation), we considered game-related talk, and now in this section, we will consider things to make and do with video games, and ‘communities of play’.

As Newman (2008) highlights that playing *with* video games can involve talking about video games, video games and/as stories, things to make and do (such as fan art, music and cosplay), game guides, walkthroughs and FAQs (frequently asked questions), superplay, sequence breaking and speedrunning, codemining, modding and gamemaking. However, most writers on these have continued to examine the results of production, rather than the producers themselves (MacCallum-Stewart, 2014). For example, although speed running has been related to the instances of play (to complete it as fast as possible), there has been a rising interest in speed running events. Events such as Games Done Quick (GDQ) have promoted a sense of community amongst thousands of spectators that attend to watch and tune in on their twitch channel – and this is an area that has been under-explored. For example, Edge (2013) suggests an evolution of spectatorship amongst video gamers from the emergence of a new web community; from spectating at video game tournaments and competitions to eSports streaming and Twitch streaming. Although, to some degree, there

are overlaps with the online and offline encounters of video gaming, it is important to consider that there is more to video game events than playing video games. In relation to this research, I suggest that the study of video games is changing, especially with the rising popularity of video game events, and it is no longer enough to analyse one type of video game community. As MacCallum-Stewart (2014, p.1) states:

The study of online gaming is changing. It is no longer enough to analyse one type of online community in order to understand the plethora of players who take part in online worlds and the behaviour they exhibit.

Hence, this research considers a variety of video game events, therefore the analysis will consist of more than one type of video game community. For example, fan conversions can consist of practices that embraces a range of role-playing traditions, including cosplay, the practice of dressing up in costume, and other fan practices. There are also casters and streamers (live streams, elite fans, big name fans, celebrities), tournaments and competition, spectatorship and many more – of which very little research of this nature exists. Therefore, we now turn to communities of play.

Pearce and Artemisia (2009) adapts the term ‘communities of play’ from DeKoven’s description of ‘play community’, as a group that ‘embraces the players more than it directs use toward any particular game’ (Pearce and Artemisia, 2009, p.128). They took the idea from ‘communities of practice’, that originates in anthropology and widely adopted in Internet studies and computer mediated communications. A community of practice is defined as a group of individuals who engage in a process of collective learning and maintain a common identity defined by a shared domain of interest or activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This suggests the need to consider the social perspective of video games, and the emergence of ‘productive play’ that is, creativity around play. For instance, Pearce and Artemisia (2009, p.128) considers the shift from playing for the game to playing for the people, and the emergent pattern of play communities, regardless of the game or world.

Initially, players logged on to Uru to experience more of the game, but over a period of the time, and often much to their surprise, the focus began to shift to the social; this transition began to occur even before the migration into the nongame social world of There.com...

Pearce and Artemisia (2009) suggests that the studies of communities of play often focus on the organisational and sociological aspects of group play and ways in which communities use digital and networked media to support play activities. However, Pearce

and Artemisia (2009) argue that most studies have focused on text-based chats, and little attention has been paid to the design of the mediated space and its impact on social interaction.

When I asked players what they did in Uru in the final weeks, most said they spend the majority of the time simply talking, often for hours, including telling each other stories, sometimes in a campfire tale-type setting, or discussing personal issues. They also explored, played in each other's Ages, and invented new games to play in the Uru world, such as hide and seek. Even though they inhabited an imaginary world, the friendships that formed there were very real (Pearce and Artemisia 2009, p.129).

Previous studies on video game communities have often considered video gamers either in small groups, isolated in front of the video game screen, or in particular, 'virtual communities'. Therefore, it is important to consider the different forms of social interaction that occurs among video games within these video gaming communities in comparison with communities that meet face-to-face on a physical locality, that are often transient.

In addition, communities of practice and communities of play both share common features, but Pearce and Artemisia (2009) suggests that play practices warrant their own understanding of how communities form and are maintained; a subject that becomes particularly pertinent in the context of technologically mediated play. As Pearce and Artemisia (2009, p.129) writes:

While the game is often the starting point, over time the group may tire of that particular game but still wish to play together. Members of such a community are ready and willing to adapt game rules and to change or even invent new games to create a supportive environment with their playmates. DeKoven also identifies the point of transition, at which the play community shifts from a game focus to a social one

The shift between games and the social suggest that play communities often embraces the players more than it directs use toward any particular game. While the game is often the starting point, over time the group may tire of that particular game but still wish to play together. This suggests a blurring between virtual worlds and the physical world; which Taylor (2006) terms 'boundary work' or the 'bleed-through' from the virtual world into 'real life'. Much research suggests that this blurring breaks the notion of the 'magic circle'; however, (as discussed in chapter 2) Boellstorff (2008, p.23) suggests that 'crossing a boundary can strengthen the distinctiveness of the two domains it demarcates'.

That is to say, offline and out-of-game interactions can strengthen the online and in-game, as well as vice-versa. For instance, as previously mentioned (earlier in this chapter), Pearce and Artemisia (2009) identified patterns among ‘*The Gathering of Uru*’ (TGU) and *There.com* players, where they migrate outside of the virtual and into real world gatherings. Here, Pearce and Artemisia (2009) suggest that the link between the virtual and physical world for the gamers, is their voices. As Pearce and Artemisia (2009, p.181) writes:

One could easily recognize others because of the familiarity of their voice, which served as a bridge between the real-life and virtual –world avatars. Additionally, many players bore a physical resemblance to their Uru and/or *There.com* avies, and some arrived dressed in their avatars’ typical garb.

This then suggests a need to explore offline/out-of-game, but still game-related, social interactions and practices. Hence, this research considers game-related communities of practice that exist in physical settings; where there is more to video game events than playing video games. This suggests that video gamers often attempt to bring a game beyond the screen; and this interaction, between the game and wider practices, is sometimes referred to as ‘meta-culture’.

3.2.2. Considering Metaculture

‘Metaculture’ refers to the relationship between the game and outside elements, including everything from player attitudes and play styles, to social reputations and social contexts in which the game is played (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). The Latin root ‘meta’ means *between, with, after, behind, over, or about*. Salen and Zimmerman (2004, p.481) defines ‘meta-gaming’ as ‘the game beyond the game... or the aspects of gameplay that derive not from the rules of the game, but from interplay with the surrounding context’.

The term ‘metagame’ refers to the wide variety of play activities perceived by gamers as being ‘outside’ or ‘peripheral’ to the game, while still being important to the overall game experience (Carter, Gibbs & Harrop, 2012). Therefore, the metagame refers to the way a game engages with factors permeating to the space beyond the edges of the magic circle (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). In relation to my research, this may prove to be a useful concept, as it considers factors beyond the playing of a video game screen.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008, p.157) highlight that video gamers do not content themselves with just the game, but often attempt to bring a game beyond the screen; this they term ‘metaculture’ or ‘meta-communication’. Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) suggest that although games are designed and produced industrially, it is often used and transformed by gamers, who are themselves producers of culture. For instance, this can involve gamers coming together in out-of-game meeting places, discussing and sharing strategies, creating ranking systems based on their performance, modding, and poaching (fans reusing the content from other media to create stories, manga strips and walk-throughs) (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). These video game related practices then often produce particular values, normal, and sometimes even new languages, among video gamers:

Players have a sense of belonging and develop slang or references to each other than can only be understood as it is centred around a specific game... (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2008, p.157)

This then suggests consideration towards various video game related practices that are suffused within the notion of sharing, discussion, and interaction among video gamers.

In an essay titled ‘Metagames’, written in *Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Essays on roleplaying*, Garfield (2000) presents a useful model for thinking about metagames. He identifies ‘metagame’ as a broad definition of how a game interfaces with life; where ‘a game interfaces outside of itself’ (Garfield, 2000, p.16). Using examples from *Magic: The Gathering* (a trading card game) Garfield (2000) states that the metagame has four categories:

1. What a player brings to a game
2. What a player takes away from a game
3. What happens between games
4. What happens during a game other than the game itself

Hence, the following sections will consider Garfield’s (2000) four categories of meta-game in more detail.

To: What a Player Brings to a Game

Garfield (2000) argues that players usually bring something to a game. A player usually has some level of choice in what to bring to a game, where the choice of resources can be considered to be an enjoyable process through the player (Garfield, 2000). For example, in a trading card game of *Magic: The Gathering*, each player brings their own cards for the game, and choosing the game resources to bring is a large part of the appeal to many players. Garfield (2000) suggests four components that players often bring to a game; from game resources, strategic preparations, peripheral game resources, and reputation. Game resources refer to game components of what players bring to the game, such as a deck of cards, a gamepad or fighting stick or even physical reflexes. Strategic preparation refers to the analysis of opponents; from play styles or memorising levels. Peripheral game resources refer to optional elements; such as game guides, cheats, knowledge of play patterns. These resources are often created and shared among a game community, either through ‘official’ or ‘unofficial’ channels; from game forums and fan sites. Player reputation is the final category of what player brings to a game, and is often not voluntary. This involves the reputation of the player itself: are they a good player? Or do they cheat?

From: What a Player Takes Away from a Game

Most of the time players take something away from a game, such as the experience of the game itself or knowledge about how the game works (Garfield, 2000). Also, in competitive play, players will often take away other things as well. Playing and winning a ‘stakes’ game might mean taking away prize money, or standings in a competition, or something less tangible, like gloating rights, or social status among a group of players. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) suggest that this aspect of the metagame can have strong positive or negative influences on player attitudes and performances.

Between: What Happens Between Games

Garfield (2000) suggests that the space between games is filled with a rich palette of metagame activities that can add value to the core experience. For some players, what happens between games can be as important as what happens during a game. Players

commonly reflect on strategy, training, or planning for the next game. Meta-gaming can include players communicating with each other about what happened in their last game or players spreading stories and building reputations. In addition, not all between-game meta-gaming is strategic. For instance, Garfield (2000) uses an example of decorating a skateboard with stickers between game competitions, or reading historical accounts of a battle about to be enacted in a miniature war-game. Both of these activities occur between games and add to the meaning of the play experience, but neither is usually done primarily

During: What Happens During a Game Other than the Game Itself

This category of the metagame is quite diverse, and refers to the influence of ‘real life’ on a game in play (Garfield, 2000). For instance, there are many factors beyond the magic circle that enter into the experience of play. Hence, metagaming also occurs during play, such as the influence of the physical environment of play, such as good lighting or a noisy atmosphere.

3.2.3. Considering the Meta-Game and Everyday Life

The term ‘meta-game’ is useful, in that it can be used to explore various video game related practices away from the video game screen. The boundaries of what constitutes a game and ‘meta-gaming’, similar to the magic circle, can be messy, contested and constantly under negotiation (Taylor, 2006). Therefore, what constitutes the ‘game’ and the ‘meta-gaming’ can often be blurred. However, meta-gaming provides a useful tool for highlighting wider influences that impact on the game, and consequences that are taken away from the game, but are not in themselves, necessarily part of the game.

Crawford (2012) suggests that exploring video games in everyday life provides an understanding of video games as part of the fabric of everyday life. That is to say, for example, the way gaming is experienced in ‘mundane’ ways, such as in conversations at work or school, or how posters advertising video games become part of the urban environment. Although this research does seek to consider video game-related practices away from the video game screen, its focus is not on the ‘everyday’. For instance, Crawford (2012) suggests that everyday life typically refers to the ordinary, and at times

mundane, patterns of social life. However, it is important to recognise that there are still moments of the ‘spectacular’ in the midst of the ‘everyday’ and ‘mundane’; such as attending video game events. Therefore, I find ‘meta-gaming’ a more useful concept than the ‘everyday’, as it provides a much more focused analysis. That is to say, the focus of meta-gaming remains specifically on things that impact on, and interact with, the gaming event, the spectacular, rather than ‘the everyday’, in which gaming seems to be lost in a myriad of mundane practices.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) considers forms of meta-game practices, from professionalization of play, poaching, mods and ‘flash movies’. This suggests that video games have now become a way for people to identify themselves, to find like-minded individuals, and participate in a world that merges with their ‘real life’ in new and existing ways. For instance, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) suggest that although games are designed and produced industrially, they are often used and transformed by gamers, who are themselves producers of culture. For example, home computers in the 1980s were sold as ‘respectable’ information technologies within the public and private sector. The purpose of a computer was to perform calculations, store information, and retrieve data and process information, but instead these machines were often primarily consumed as game devices (Rutter and Bryce, 2006). Video games can be understood not only as texts but also cultural artefacts, which are given value, meaning and position through their production and use.

In relation to my research, it intends to explore the creativity of video gamers beyond their simple participation with video games, and how gamers take part in various video game related activities away from the game screen. Therefore, using a similar approach to Hodkinson (2002) in his ethnography of goth culture at Whitby, this research will focus on specific locations and times where these cultures take on greater significance.

3.3. Communities, Exclusion, Oppression, and Conflict

This section focuses on an often under-explored ‘negative’ side of video game communities, which can include exclusion, oppression, and conflict within communities. For instance, MacCallum-Stewart (2014) suggests that players do not simply socialise in

order to make friends, they also use these networks to grief, steal, offend, and manipulate each other. As MacCallum-Stewart (2014, pp.13-14) writes;

Much of the advertising for the game on the main splash pages promotes e-sport battles and highlights specific teams, suggesting that the game is played more effectively with group members who know each other. Live events and webcasts are hosted by chatty, informal presenters who not only give news and current events from the game but also emphasize human interest stories or spotlight individual players. Overall, a game which appears to comprise ephemeral meetings from match to match encourages its players to form strong networks in order to strengthen meaning within the group activities it comprises. And yet, as Bogost and Dyer-Witheford foresaw, the community is well known amongst gamers for its aggressive, unforgiving player based and dislike of new players

In the world of MMOs, ‘grief’ players sometimes cause distress to other players, such as killing other players on purpose or stealing their property (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). Melucci (1989, p.46) argues that human conflicts are often conflicts of identity where individuals and groups ‘struggle to affirm what others deny’. This suggests conflict also occurs within video game communities. As Blackshaw (2010) writes:

What is often overlooked in the community studies literature is that community is always a double. In other words, all its warmth, charm and geniality, notwithstanding, there is much about community, that is distinctly unsettling: if one side of its coin is inclusion and harmony, its companion side is always exclusion and oppression (Blackshaw, 2010, p.151)

It is important to highlight that exclusion and oppression can occur within video game communities. For instance, Bauman (1995) suggests that oppression can be carried out through two strategies, from *anthropophagic* or *anthropogenic* strategies of oppression. Communities employing *anthropophagic* strategies are often referred to ‘devour’ the ‘outsiders’, who they perceive to carry ‘powerful mysterious forces’ (Bauman 1995, p.180). While, those employing *anthropogenic* strategies (from Greek, meaning ‘to vomit’ towards ‘outsiders’) metaphorically throw them up, ‘away from where the orderly life is conducted... either in exile or in guarded enclaves where they can be safely incarcerated without hope of escaping’ (Bauman, 1995, p.180). This suggests that communities are capable of valuing loyalty as well as punishing any betrayal to it, but also work coextensively to exclude ‘outsiders’ (Blackshaw, 2010).

In relation to video games, Erickson (1997) suggests that communities often contain the following elements: membership, relationships, commitment and generalised reciprocity, shared values and practices, collective goods and duration. The dynamics and natures of a

game community differs depending on the game(s) they are based around; such as, where some communities have a persistent universe, in comparison to others with only websites and discussion forums (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). Gaming communities often involve various forms of social interaction, where groups negotiate norms and learn rules of social comportment that reproduce codes of behaviour and established standards of conduct (Wright et al., 2002). Video gamers often have to undergo a process of living up to community norms through acknowledgement and acceptance to develop a certain level of social capital; which includes trust, social networks and social norms. Similar to aspects of 'ordinary' life, people often find places where they can 'fit in'. Crawford (2004, p.55) writes:

Once inside these communities, an individual's ability to progress is often dependent on their ability to 'fit in' the existing social norms of the group. Those who do not fit may find themselves marginalised or even excluded altogether

This suggests that it is often important to be considered a 'good player' amongst other gamers; as it proves self-worth, by living up to community norms and developing a certain amount of social capital (Taylor, 2003). For instance, from Chee's (2006) study among Korean gamers, the ability to do something 'extremely well', in the areas of school or games, is very much taken seriously and admired. However, when community members struggle to 'fit in', they often find themselves marginalised. For example, from Chee's (2006) interviews, gamers often isolate and bully the worst game player in one's peer group – also known as 'Wang-tta'.

However, not all conflict is negative, as it can constitute being part of a community. For instance, Neilburger (2007) suggests that running a tournament event can challenge ones organisation skills; from running the event and taking steps outside the event to help the community to grow and continue to grow – including the negative aspects. This can increase the draw and value of the services to the gamers attending video game events, and it can strengthen the intensity of the event.

While there's plenty of benefit to having this community just coalesce once a month you can keep the involvement going, add more value, and strengthen and mould the community intensity if you're able to offer your players a place online here they can congregate to talk trash, complain and hurl insults at each other (Neilburger 2007, p.153).

Neilburger (2007) suggests that it is important to build a community online from tools such as a traditional forum, blog or chat-room in order to provide space for the organisers to talk to the audience, and for the audience to talk back.

And talk back they will. There will be disagreements, there will be name-calling, and there will be inappropriate language. However, I've gotten to the point where I consider those things to be assets to the online community because they give me an opportunity to demonstrate to the players where the boundaries of acceptable behaviour are without having to spell it out in another dreaded set of rules. This is your blog and your service don't hesitate to tell a player publicly when they've stepped over the line, but be friendly and don't hold a grudge about it. I tend to expect players to be respectful and stay on topic, but I'm a lot more rigid about the former than the latter. However, you should expect and tolerate some trash talking. It's all part of the game... (Neilburger, 2007, p.154)

He continues:

The whole point is that the community that your event created is able to persist online, giving the players an opportunity to gab and strut as they may and giving you a chance to be part of it. It's an Internet truth that no matter what you're into, people are talking about it online, Don't let your tournament series be an exception! (Neilburger, 2007, p.155)

For Neilburger (2007), both online and offline communities can be considered to be useful spaces to promote a sense of community amongst members. These community spaces, such as video game events, can also be considered to be a safe way to experience video games within a public setting. Therefore, it is important to highlight that not all conflict is negative, as it can constitute and monitor appropriate behaviour within communities. For instance, Crawford (1982, p.12) writes:

Therefore, a game is an artifice for providing the psychological experiences of conflict and danger while excluding their physical realizations. In short, a game is a safe way to experience reality. More accurately, the results of a game are always less harsh than the situations the game models

For Crawford (1982), he observes that games allow the exploration of conflict in a safe environment. However, it has been suggested that certain 'minority' or 'marginalised' groups may find it harder to 'fit in' than others; which may suffer greater forms of oppression and exclusion, involving gender, sexuality and race diversity.

For the purpose of this literature review, I recognise that diversity needs to move beyond the scope of this thesis, however, the findings suggest that gender plays an important role within the study of video games - in particular, the patterns of attendance among men and women, as well as their participating in certain video game related practices and player

identification - this will be examined further later. Hence, we will now turn to the issues relating to the gendered nature of video games and gaming.

3.3.1. Considering Gender

This section will explore the relationship between gender and video games. In the early-2000s the marginalisation of women in video games was a major area of discussion, when a number of important papers and studies were published on the subject. Although this subject has received less attention over the last decade; this does not necessarily mean that the situation has improved. The marginalisation of women in video games continues to be an important social issue. Gender inequalities have been argued to exist in marketing, game themes, gender representations in gaming characters, gaming spaces and participation in video gaming (Mou and Peng, 2009).

From a feminist perspective, Haywood, Kew and Bramham (1989) highlights that leisure reflects a 'man made' view of the world, where women's leisure experiences have often been ignored. The lack of female participation in video gaming has been recognised as a social problem, where modern technology has often been argued to be male dominated (Cassel and Jenkins, 2000). For instance, female gamers have often been routinely marginalised with a lack of acceptance in video game spaces (Cassel and Jenkins, 2000). This form of behaviour in society reflects patriarchy, which is '...a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (Walby, 1990, p.20). Feminists have aimed to challenge the marginalisation of women, their experiences and interests, as well as seeking to understand and theorise gender inequalities (Richardson and Robinson, 2008).

Feminism starts from the idea that women live in a patriarchal society, where the subordination of women is considered to be the cause and consequences of male dominance. Cassell and Jenkins (2000) suggest that the lack of female engagement in video games is deeply rooted in the construction of gender and the understandings of gender differences in cultural norms:

Gender construction operates with an internal and external system of constraints. Internally, the identity formation of women in relation to leisure privileges importance of physical appearance and presupposes a sense of a lack of equal

entitlement to leisure with males. Externally, women's participation in leisure is constrained by a lack of time and money compared with men in the same class formation (Rojek, 2005, p.74)

In relation to video games, video games often represent dominant patriarchal roles in society through gendered themes, the design of the game, and the way that characters are portrayed (Valentines, 2004). Valentine (2004) argues that video gamers are often presented and engaged with stereotypical gender roles that are shaped by culture without often realising. For example, forms of hegemonic masculinity have traditionally reinforced video games to be primarily marketed towards male interests, involving male lead characters, and commonly featuring 'male themes'. Such as, 'masculine game' themes in games like *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (Activision, 2013), *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar Games, 2013) and *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011* (THQ, 2010), which are characterised by high levels of game aggression and violence (Kinder, 1991).

Krotoski (2004) suggests that the video game market is primarily aimed at men, where most games reflect 'male-stream' game designs from male creators, reinforcing the social construction of patriarchy. For instance, female characters are often represented in either heavily sexualised or stereotypical ways. For example, female game characters in *Dragon's Crown* (Atlus, 2013), *Playboy: The Mansion* (ARUSH entertainment, 2005) or *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* (Tecmo, 2003) are often represented in highly sexualised ways, which represented patriarchal stereotypes and treat women as objects.

In addition, Anita Sarkeesian's 'Tropes vs. Women in Video Games' (Feminist Frequency, 2012) project highlights that games such as *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, 1981), *Super Mario Land* (Nintendo, 1989) and *Final Fantasy X* (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2002) portray female characters either as damsel in distress or supporting characters, which represents females as the weaker sex, too weak to engage in combat or helpless and in need of rescuing. While, games such as *Cooking Mama 3: Shop and Chop* (505 Games, 2009), *Nintendogs* (Nintendo, 2005) and *My Pet Dolphin* (505 Games, 2007) are often shaped around traditional stereotypical gender roles of cooking, nurturing and caring. These games often lack the use of strategies, goal orientation and not considered by many to be a 'game' (Cassell and Jenkins, 2000). Therefore, these representations of gender often make video games unattractive to many female gamers.

The marginalisation and stereotyping of women in video games continues to be an important social issue. For instance, the developer for *Remember Me* (Capcom, 2013) reported that a number of publishers passed on the game due to its female protagonist (Philip, 2013). Creative director, Jean-Maxime Mori stated; ‘Well, we don’t want to publish it because that’s not going to succeed. You can’t have a female character in games. It has to be a male character, simple as that’ (Philip, 2013, p.1). The number of female protagonist is a significantly low number compared to male protagonists; data from video game research and consulting firm EEDAR (Electronic Entertainment Design and Research) suggested that, from a sample of 669 current-generation games which had protagonists of a specific gender, only 24 of these were exclusively fronted by women (Philip, 2013).

However, it is important to highlight that female and male gaming preferences are not always opposites, as many games and gamers fit into or between these polar opposites (Bertozzi, 2007). For example, ‘Grrl gamers’ and female *Quake* (GT Interactive, 1996) or *Counter-Strike* (Sierra Studios, 2000) clans demonstrate that women can be interested in competition and ‘masculine’ game themes of war and aggression (Bertozzi, 2007). In addition, Rutter and Bryce (2006) highlight that game developers have recently developed more gender-neutral games that negotiate gender in video gaming. For example, there has been an increase in gender-neutral games on the *Nintendo Wii* (Nintendo, 2006), *Nintendo DS* (Nintendo, 2004) and *PlayStation 3* (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2007), such as *Pokémon X* and *Pokémon Y* (The Pokémon Company, 2013), *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* (Nintendo, 2013) and *Fez* (Trapdoor, 2012). Likewise, the first female heroine, ‘Samus Aran’ from *Metroid* (Nintendo, 1986) does not apply aspects of the male gaze (Rutter and Bryce, 2006). The female heroine, *Samus Aran* was portrayed and presented as a man throughout the game from addressing *Samus Aran* as ‘he’ (Grimes, 2003). It was not until the end of the game that *Samus Aran* was revealed as a female heroine, which caused a major shock among video gamers from proving that women can be strong heroes too (Grimes, 2003).

Taylor (2003) suggests that massively multi player online role playing games (MMORPG) such as *Ultima Online* (Electronic Arts, 1997), *Everquest* (Sony Online Entertainment, 1999) and *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2005) and provide women freedom to explore online worlds and ‘public’ spaces and opportunities to compete men on an equal level, which is often denied to most women ‘on real life’ (Crawford and Gosling 2005,

p.11). The increase of freedom to play with gender within video games reflects post-structuralist arguments that there is no one way of being masculine or feminine, as gendered existence is formed from dominant and hegemonic ideology (Butler, 1990). It has been suggested that cultural messages differ over time and place, therefore masculinity and femininity becomes diverse (Barnard, 2002). Similar to language, discourses can create other ways to express masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1990). Butler (1990) highlights that gender is 'performative' and refusal to conform to hegemonic or traditional performances can create 'gender trouble' (Butler, 1990):

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively consisted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results... (Butler, 1990, p.25)

In certain video games, players are sometimes able to choose their own characters' gender and behaviour or play more than one avatar at the same time (Bertozzi, 2007). This provides players with opportunities to alternate and play male or female characters, with flexibility to gender their own game characters through the creation and the development by the gamers themselves (Taylor, 2003).

However, female gamers have routinely been marginalised with lack of social acceptance not only within private gaming spaces, but also public gaming spaces too. For instance, online harassment of women in video games culture is hardly new, as much of the coverage of and responses to the '*Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*' (Feminist Frequency, 2012) controversies detail (Chambers, 2012). Video game spaces have often been gendered within the public and private domain, where women have been denied access to participate and marginalised. It has been argued that boys and men take up space, which often leaves no room for girls and women (Walkerdine, 2007).

Jenkins (1998) highlights that access to spaces are often structured around gender differences. Jenkins (1998) suggests that girls are often more restricted in their travel distance compared to boys, where girls experience far less mobility and range compared to boys. Consequently, their participation towards video gaming have significantly been centred in or near the home:

Children's access to spaces are structured around gender differences. Observing the use of space within 1970s suburban America, Hart (1979) found that boys enjoyed far greater mobility and range than girls of the same age and class background. In the course of an afternoon's play, a typical 10-12-year-old boy might travel a

distance of 2,452 yards, while the average 10-12-year-old girl might only travel 959 yards. For the most part, girls expanded their geographic range only to take on responsibilities and perform chores for the family, while parents often turned a blind eye to a boy's movements into prohibited spaces (Rutter and Bryce, 2006, p.192)

With leisure restrictions due to constraints and social expectations, most females have often resorted to playing games within the home, where it is considered safe and an appropriate place to play (Hart, 1979).

However, even in the home, female gamers are often marginalised or restricted in their gaming practices. Video games appears to be primarily a male domain, which continues to be viewed (both men and women) as culturally not 'belonging' to women (Crawford and Gosling, 2005). For example, Green (2001) argues that many leisure technologies (such as computers and game consoles) within the household are primarily located in 'male' spaces (such as male sibling's bedrooms and studies), where female members are (sometimes) allowed access to through the 'permission' of other (male) family members. Even when game consoles are located in shared family spaces such as the family television, it is still assumed that it is owned and controlled by male family members (Gray, 1992; Morley, 1986). This is usually caused from stereotypical assumptions as video gaming within families demonstrate that males often assume the role of an 'expert' and undermine female skills and knowledge within domestic gaming spaces (Schott and Horrell, 2000; Rutter and Bryce, 2006).

In addition, Crawford and Gosling's (2005) study indicate that when females leave their childhood home, the level and frequency of female gaming decreases. It has been suggested that as women take on additional roles and responsibilities, their gaming involvement changes over time. For instance, Crawford and Gosling's (2005) study suggests that female undergraduate students were half as likely as their male colleagues to have played any video games in the previous three months, and approximately a third less likely to play more than once a week.

Evidence suggests that women still spend more time on domestic labour than men; therefore, many women usually have less time to enjoy leisure activities (Krotoski, 2004). Rutter and Bryce (2006) suggest that many females experience limited leisure time because their private spaces have been traditionally conceptualized through their relationship with domestic and family labour.

Many studies tend to focus on the marginalisation and exclusion of female gamers within private spaces (such as in their own home), rather than their participation in public spaces (such as gaming events). For instance, Hey (1984) argues that public spaces, such as traditional pub culture, have excluded women from full participation and have created limited roles for women's involvement. Likewise, places such as gaming arcades have restricted female entry; due to the environment being highly gendered and male dominated. For example, female gamers are presented either as 'exotic' or 'strange' and sexualised in a manner in which male gamers are not (Rutter and Bryce, 2006). In addition, Bryce and Rutter (2003) highlight that when women appear in these environments, women are usually expected to fit into a non-gamers role offering support and encouragement, rather than being active gamers or written off as 'tom boys' (Valentine, 2004, p.20). Also, girls in general are less likely to 'brag' or make themselves heard – especially in a male centred environment. However, if a female is good, she may be told she 'plays like a man' (Valentine, 2004, p.40). Therefore, when women participate and compete in such spaces, many are still framed in a number of ways by male gamers and appear contrary to expectations of feminine behaviour and interest (Rutter and Bryce, 2006).

The lack of female participation in public gaming spaces is also supported by Jansz and Martens (2005) study on LAN parties. Their study showed that from a sample of 1200 people, all participants were almost exclusively male; about 30 were female, with a mean age of 19.5 years old (Jansz and Martens, 2005). Faulkner (2000) suggests that we live in a society where men and masculinity are the norm and often go unchallenged, where domestic spaces often constrain female participation in video gaming based on traditional patriarchal roles and gendered patterns of access and control reproduced within the family, while public leisure spaces have traditionally been claimed to be highly gendered as masculine, placing restrictions to female access (Adam, 2005). However, Taylor and Witkowski's (2010, p.6) study at DreamHack suggests that there may be a growing presence of female gamers; 'we counted 1 for every 20 seated participants and DreamHack puts the total number of women visitors generally at 10-15%'. As Taylor and Witkowski (2010, p.6) writes;

Walking throughout the halls we experience a growing presence not only in women at the event, but are struck by the roles these women have taken. Not simply 'stuck' as girlfriends on the sidelines, women in this space regularly jump in and take on active roles – joining others on stage for the rock-paper-scissors and stare-

down competition, competing in first person shooter matches; downloading new games and trying them out. As we saw over and over again they are playing a variety of games in every aisle in the BYOC section.... They play on the two elite *World of Warcraft* raiding guilds performing for their fans. They watch the e-sports finals and play in the pro-am tournaments.

Traditionally, women in public gaming scenes have often been documented as the marginalised girlfriend, or more recently as the hyper-sexualised or ride-show professional player/all female team. The space of DreamHack is far removed from these shallow opportunities for participation. In particular, Taylor and Witkowski (2010) argue that women are taking on the role of gatekeepers for other women, taking on the role of the practiced player(s), and providing an alternative access point to gaming. This example prompts some worthwhile considerations on access to gaming and game spaces where entrée involves a more complex structural arrangement in which networks, meets gaming know-how, meets access to technology/games.

Despite the growing numbers of female gamers, the gaming industry as a whole is not meeting women's needs and not taken their interests and preferences into account. Many women remain largely dissatisfied with the games available to them (Martins, Williams, Ratan & Harrison, 2009). Although it may seem that video games are made by men, for men, it is important to recognise that there is more than playing *with* video games (Newman, 2008). Hence, rather than solely focusing on the gender representation of playing with video games, it may be useful to consider gender representations of various video game-related practices too – such as cosplay, which is primarily dominated by women (Banesh-Liu, 2007; Cooper-Chen, 2010; Okabe, 2012). As mentioned earlier, Horton and Wohl (1956) highlights that fan creative content is often interpreted as a consequence of mass culture needing to compensate for a lack of intimacy, community and identity. For example, Penley's (1997) study on 'slash art', which is an activity dominated by women, refers to the production of images and stories based on popular media characters, which often feature male/male romances or sexual images – also known as 'Yaoi'. Hence, these women can 'participate' in other ways. This suggests that the study of video games needs to similarly widen its focus, such as considering the participation and marginalisation of women at game events, where gender patterns may differ when compared with various other video game-related practices.

3.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter considers the importance of video gamer culture through the consideration of video gaming as a ‘culture’ and video gamers as part of a ‘community’.

Firstly, to examine video gaming as a culture, I considered the conceptualisation of video gamer culture. As mentioned earlier, there is limited research focusing on the rising popularity of video game events. Therefore, for comparative purposes, I examined the ‘usefulness’ in understanding video game event culture from the perspective of subcultures, neo-tribes, fans, knowledge communities, scenes and habitus. For instance, although subcultural theory identifies video games through common shared practices, values and interests, it gives the impression that these constitute a tightly bounded and coherent culture. Therefore, subcultural theory fails to consider movement between subcultures and overlooks level of personal choice (Crawford, 2012). In comparison, neo-tribes refer to the foundation of a fluid and loosely organised community, yet still places an emphasis on community and belonging. This suggests that neo-tribes may provide a more profitable way to theorise the study of video gamers. However, Hodkinson’s (2002) ‘workable and up-to-date conception of subculture’, also considers a more fluid elective collectiveness and suggests the need to consider specialist subcultural events, consumables, and media, which play a significant role in the generation of groupings. Using a similar approach to Hodkinson (2002), this research focuses on specific locations and times where these cultures take on greater significance, in order to understand how technologies are consumed, experienced, and located within these exceptional moments away from the video game screen.

Also, using fan studies to explain the participation of various video game-related practices may be useful. For instance, there are parallels between the activities of some video games, such as those who make mods, hacks, and walkthroughs, and fans. However, Crawford (2012) considers the term ‘fan’ to be ill-equipped to describe all video gamers. To an extent, I too agree that not all video gamers can be described as fans, but it may still prove a useful literature for understanding some gamer activities and production. Similarly, the concept of ‘knowledge communities’ may be useful to consider growing forms of participation. However, it is important to recognise that these forms of participatory culture often refer to online interactions, rather than the offline; hence this is an area in need of greater research.

Crawford (2012) considers Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) work on 'habitus' to be a profitable way of understanding video gamer culture - in particular through the embodied encounter with video games - little consideration has been given to the physical spaces games are played in. In relation to this research, the theory of habitus may be useful to consider the embodied experience of video gamers attending video game events (as examined further in chapter 6). This suggests that Bourdieu's (1977) theory on habitus could provide important insights into the embodied nature of video gamer culture. However, Crawford and Gosling's (2008) concept of 'scene' could also be considered a useful tool for understanding and analysing games, and moreover, contributes to debates on the usefulness of 'narrative' analyses in games studies — as here narratives become located outside of games, in gamers' identities, social performances, networks and within physical spaces. For instance, it may be useful to consider the 'scene' surrounding certain video games or genres of games. This may include examples such as the 'Final Fantasy scene', or the 'Hearthstone scene', and so on, which consists of communities, gamers, fans that contribute to and feed off a large space(s) of video game practice.

Secondly, this chapter explores video gamer productivity, in the form of the social and cultural production (productive play) that can go into play activities (play communities). Most studies have often focused on video gamer culture within the 'virtual world', rather than playing *with* video games away from the video game screen, such as at video game events (Newman, 2008); such as communities of practice that exist in physical settings, where there is more to video game events than playing video games. This suggests that video gamers do not content themselves with just the game, but often attempt to bring a game beyond the screen. For instance, here, exploring video game events with 'meta-culture' may be useful, as this locates video games within a wider social context. However, it is important to recognise that this approach can be too closely knitted with player performance. Hence, the importance to consider exclusion, oppression and conflict within communities, and in particular differences in the nature of participation and exclusion of men and women in various video game-related practices.

Today, video games have now become a way for people to identify themselves, to find like-minded individuals, and participate in a world that merges with their 'real life' in new and exciting ways. However, most research to date has focused on video games either in the isolation or small groups or the textual analysis of video games themselves. There has been significantly less research on the importance of video gamer culture away from the

gaming screen and how video gaming can reach into our everyday lives (Crawford, 2012). For instance, Taylor (2003) highlights that both male and female gamers enjoy the sociability of gaming, where gamers often continue conversations about games away from the sight of a gaming screen. In addition, there are many opportunities for gamers to meet face-to-face and play against each other, such as at temporary local area network parties (LAN parties), gaming conventions, gaming tournaments and competitions, where gamers can form common associations or friendships with other gamers. This suggests that gamers do not content themselves with just the game, but often attempt to bring a game beyond the screen into everyday settings where people interact, shop, and work (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2008). This can involve gamers coming together in out-of-game meeting places, discussing and sharing strategies, creating ranking systems based on their performance, modding, and poaching (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., 2008). This suggests that the influence of video games can extend into many diverse areas of social and cultural life. Hence, the aim of my research is therefore to explore the sociological significance of video gamers that attend various video game events across the United Kingdom, and it is now to the methods and methodology of this research that I now wish to turn.

Chapter 4:

Research Methods

Introduction

This chapter will outline the methods and methodology for this thesis. The first section will consider the use of ethnographic research [4.1.]. In particular, it focuses on the ontological and epistemological standpoint for this study. It also considers the strengths and weaknesses of using ethnographic research. The second section [4.2.] will explore the process and rationale for the research design, sampling procedures, data collection and data analysis. Also, the ethical issues and limitations of the thesis will be discussed here. Finally, the conclusion to the chapter [4.3.] provides a summary and overview of the research methods and the underpinning methodology.

Using an ethnographic approach, consisting of questionnaires, interviews, group interviews, and extensive observational research, this thesis considers the cultures and patterns of video gamers that participate in various video game practices at a number of video game events across the UK; from video game conventions and exhibitions, LAN parties, video game tournaments and competitions, and video game-related musical events.

4.1. Doing Ethnography

This section will explore the debate on the appropriateness of the chosen methodology. In particular, this section will focus on the importance of choosing an ‘ethnographic’ research approach and how it can be applied in social science?

The term ‘ethnography’ often refers to both a method and the written product of research based on that method (Agar, 1996). This suggests that ethnography can be seen as a philosophical paradigm to which one makes a total commitment, while for others it designates a method that one uses as and when appropriate - and of course, there are positions between the two extremes. In practical terms, ethnography usually refers to forms of social research having a substantial number of the following features: a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomenon, tendency to work primarily with ‘unstructured’ data, investigation of a small number (but in detail), and

analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation (Bell, 1993). Hence, ethnography is the study of a way of life and a way of doing social research:

The study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally (Brewer, 2000, p.6)

Ethnography, at its core, is about using a variety of methods, most commonly observations, document, and speech (such as interviews), to provide a deep and detailed understanding of a culture and its people. However, clearly defining ethnography has often been quite difficult and is subject to controversy. For instance, Bell (1993, p.10) defines ethnography as: 'an approach, which depends heavily upon observation and, in some cases, complete or partial integration into the society being studied'. While, other definitions have focused on the use of a variety of methods, such as the use of non-observation methods such as interviews, focus groups, and documents (Bryman, 2004). This suggests that ethnography is often loosely defined within an almost limitless variety of methods (Werner, Schoepfle & Mark 1987). Hence, this research uses questionnaires, interviews, group interviews, and observational research to get directly involved with the various video game communities at the events under consideration.

However, it is important to highlight that the research methods chosen for this research are not simply neutral tools; these research methods also come with strengths and weaknesses, where it is important to consider the relationship between theory and research. For instance, Whitehead (2002, p.3) stated that: '...ethnography is more than simply methods, but has ontological and epistemological properties'. Marsh and Furlong (2002) argues that all researchers should recognise and acknowledge their own ontological and epistemological positions and be able to defend their position against critiques from other positions: '...they are like a skin not a sweater: they cannot be put on and taken off whenever the research sees fit' (Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p.17). To put it crudely, one's ontological position affects, but far from determines, one's epistemological position (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). This suggests that ontological and epistemological positions are related, but need to be separated.

Firstly, 'ontology' refers to the theory of 'being' – the world derives from the Greek for 'existence' (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). It concerns the nature of what is being studied, as

well as the question of how the world is built; 'is there a 'real' world 'out there' that is independent of our knowledge of it?' (Marsh and Furlong, 2002, p.18). This research adapts a constructionist ontological position, where it implies that there is no one 'real' world, which exists independently of the meaning, and which actors attach to their action. This suggests that no observer can be completely 'objective', because they live in the social world and are affected by the social constructions of 'reality'. This is sometimes called the double hermeneutic; the world is interpreted by the actors (one hermeneutic level) and their interpretation is interpreted by the observer (a second hermeneutic level) (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). This implies that there are no essential differences of 'being' that provide the foundations upon which social life is built; also known as anti-foundationalist. Instead, the ontological position emphasises the social construction of social phenomena, which is in constant state of revision – hence the world is socially constructed and dependent from a particular time or culture. Therefore, this research is underpinned by a subjectivist ontology, which examines the world through subjective knowledge to understand people; in particular, it attempts to provide an understanding to how and why various video game-related practices away from the video game screen happen through elucidating meaning.

Secondly, 'epistemology' refers to the theory of knowledge - how to best understand the object of study? There are different ways of classifying epistemological positions and there is no agreement as to the best way. The most common classifications distinguish between scientific (sometimes positivist) and hermeneutic (or interpretivist) positions. This research considers an interpretivist epistemological position. An interpretivist approach is a critical response to the scientific model (positivist). Interpretivism aims to grasp a subjective meaning and respect the differences between people. One of the advantages of interpretivism is that it promotes a good understanding of social processes and allows complexity and contextual factors, which enable the researcher to adapt to changes when it occurs (Bryman, 2004). For instance, Max Weber's (1947, p.88) notion of a 'Verstehen' approach refers to '...the interpretive understanding of social science action in order to arrive at a casual explanation of its course and effects'. Therefore, an interpretivist methodology implies that there is no objective truth, that the world is socially constructed, and that the role of the social scientists is to study those social constructions.

Nevertheless, a major criticism of the interpretivist tradition comes from positivists. To positivists, the interpretivist tradition merely offers opinions or subjective judgements of

the world, where there is no basis on which to judge the validity of their knowledge claims (Bryman, 2004). However, most researchers do believe that it is possible to generalise from ethnographic research (Bevir and Rhodes, 1999). For instance, Bevir and Rhodes (2010) states that ethnographers generalise through the use of ethnographic techniques to produce what Geertz (1973) calls 'thick description'. As Geertz (1973, p.9) writes: '...what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to'. Doing ethnography involves techniques, such as selecting informants, transcribing texts, and keeping field notes. Using these techniques, ethnographers develop narratives about the past based upon the meanings of social actors; 'seeing things from the others point of view' (Bevir and Rhodes, 2002, p.10). Then, on the basis of this 'thick description', they offer an interpretation of what this tells us about society. The point is that these interpretations are always partial, in both senses of the world, and provisional: they are 'not' true (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010). As Bevir and Rhodes (2002, p.10) writes;

Ethnographic description has four main characteristics: it is interpretive; it interprets the flow of social discourse; it inscribes that discourse by writing it own; and it is microscopic. It is a soft science. It guesses at meanings, assesses the guesses and draws explanatory conclusions from the better guesses. However, it is still possible to generalise... If experimental sciences are about description and explanation, then ethnography is about inscription (or 'thick descriptions') and specification (or clinical diagnosis). So, the task is to set down the meanings that particular actions have for social actors and then say what these thick descriptions tells us about the society in which they are found. And this analysis is always incomplete.

They continue:

The ethnographer will never get to the bottom of anything. So ethnography is a science 'marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debates. What gets better is the precision with which we vex each other' (Bevir and Rhodes, 2002, p.10)

Ethnography means a description of people (Angrosino, 2007). Therefore, the role of an ethnographic researcher involves becoming a participant observer who balances the objective collection of data with the subjective insights that results from an ongoing association with the people, whose lives they seek to understand. For the purpose of this research, I will follow Wolcott's (1995) definition of ethnography, which defines this as a form of inquiry that requires a researcher to be immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of some individual or group carrying out the research. The aim of this research is

to explore video gamers that attend various video game events and their various video game related practices. Therefore, the role of the ethnographic researcher is to become immersed into the on-going social activities that take place at these video game events through those various video game related practices.

4.2. The Research

This section will explore the sampling and research rationale, approach, and process. Primarily this research is interested in exploring the cultures of video gamers and their patterns of participation at various video game events. The sampling focused on collecting participants at various video game events across the UK and the purpose of this research method is to draw out comparisons between video gamers that attended these video game events. This research consists of an ethnographic mixed methods approach, using questionnaires, interviews, group interviews and observation research.

4.2.1. The Video Game Events

This section considers the process of video game selecting and sampling game events. For this research, the video game events included video game conventions [such as MCM Comic Con – London, Birmingham, Manchester and Telford], video game exhibitions [such as Eurogamer Expo and Play Expo], LAN parties [such as Insomnia Gaming Festivals i50/i51/i52/i53/i54/i55/i56], tournaments and competition [such as Super Smash Brothers Events: Manchester Monthly Regionals 1, Manchester Monthly Regionals 2, Edmas, Edintines, Cabin Fever 1, Cabin Fever 2, Warrior Returns 2, Warrior Returns 3], and game-related musical events [such as Video Games Live, Final Fantasy orchestral concerts and Legend of Zelda orchestral concerts]. The rationale and justification for selecting these particular events, and types of events, is discussed below. A summary of the events attended, the dates of the events, locations, cost and the approximate number of attendees is outlined in Table 4.1. This is then followed by a more detailed explanation of the events.

Table 4.1: List of Video Game Events				
Event	Date	Location	Weekend+ Ticket Price	Tickets Sold
Eurogamer Expo	26 th -29 th September 2013	Earls Court, London	£60	70,000+
Play Expo Manchester	12 th -13 th October 2013	Event City, Manchester	£23	15,000+
MCM Comic Con (London)	24 th -26 th October 2013	ExCel London	£35	88,000+
Doki Doki – The Manchester Japanese Festival	9 th November 2013	Sugden Sports Centre, Manchester	£12	2,700+
Insomnia50 (i50)	29 th Nov-2 nd Dec 2013	Telford International Centre	BYOC: £80 £30 - £55	5,000+
Edmas 2	7 th December 2013	The Old House, Birmingham	£2 (venue) Game: £2-£5	28+
MCM Comic Con (Midland)	15 th February 2014	Telford International Centre	£10	6,000+
A New World: Intimate Music from Final Fantasy	15 th February 2014	Jerwood Hall, London	VIP: £100 £50	412 (x2) [Hall Capacity]
Edentines Day	28 th Feb-1 st Mar 2014	Earlswood Log Cabin, Birmingham	£6.50 (venue) Game: £3	81+
MCM Comic Con & Memorabeillia (Birmingham)	22 nd -23 rd March 2014	NEC International, Birmingham	£30	20,000+
EGX Rezzed	28 th -30 th March 2014	NEC International, Birmingham	£27	70,000+
Manchester Monthly Regions 1	5 th April 2014	Student Housing, Manchester	No fee	16+

Insomnia51 (i51)	18 th -21 st April 2014	Ricoh Arena, Coventry	BYOC: £97 £40-£65	5,000+
Cabin Fever 1	25 th -27 th April 2014	Earlwood Log Cabin, Birmingham	£6 (venue) Game: £3	34+
Play Expo Blackpool	3 rd -4 th May 2014	Norbreak Castle Exhibition Centre, Blackpool	£22	10,000+
Manchester Monthly Regions 2	10 th May 2014	Brunswick Parish Church, Manchester	£5 (venue) Game: £2-£3	32+
MCM Comic Con (London)	23 rd May – 25 th May 2014	Excel, London	£35	101,000+
Final Symphony: A New World	30 th May 2014	Barbican Hall, London	VIP: £65 £30-£50	1943 [Hall Capacity]
Cabin Fever 2	30 th May-1 st June 2014	Ackers Residential Centre, Birmingham	£12 (venue) Game: £2	39+
Manchester Monthly Regions 3	22 nd June 2014	Ape and Apple, Manchester	£5 (venue) Game: £2-£3	32+
Warriors Return 3	5 th July 2014	Bangkok Bar/Restaurant, Manchester	£7 (venue) Game: £5	115+
Symphonic Legends - Zelda Concert	13 th July 2014	Barbican Hall, London	£30-£85	1943 [Hall Capacity]
MCM Comic Con (Manchester)	19 th -20 th July 2014	Manchester Central, Manchester	£20	11,000+
Insomnia52 (i52)	22-24 th August 2014	Ricoh Arena, Coventry	BYOC: £97 £40-£50	5000+
Heir to the Throne	28 th -31 st August 2014	Bilberry Hill Centre, Birmingham	£24 (venue) Game: £3	100+

Eurogamer Expo	25 th -28 th September 2014	Earls Court London	£60	70,000+
Play Expo Manchester	11 th -12 th October 2014	Event City, Manchester	£23	15,000+
MCM London Comic Con	24 th -26 th October 2014	Excel, London	£35	101,000+
A New World: London Encore Performance	31 st October 2014	St John's Smith Square	VIP: £80 £25-£50	760 [Hall Capacity]
Distant Worlds	1 st November 2014	Royal Albert Hall, London	VIP: £145 £25-£65	5,272 [Hall Capacity]
Video Games Live	2 nd November 2014	Eventim Apollo, London	VIP: £130 £26-£51	3,487 [Hall Capacity]
Insomnia53 (i53)	21 st -24 th November 2014	Ricoh Arena, Coventry	BYOC: £97 £40-£50	5,000+
Insomnia54 (i54)	3 rd -5 th April 2015	Ricoh Arena, Coventry	BYOC: £97 £40-£50	5,000+
Insomnia55 (i55)	28 th -31 st August 2015	Ricoh Arena, Coventry	BYOC: £97 £40-£50	5,000+
Insomnia56 (i56)	11 th -14 th December 2015	The NEC, Birmingham	BYOC: £99 £55-57	5,000+

All information presented above was obtained from official event websites.

The column 'Weekend+ Ticket Price' shows the prices to attend the video game events listed for the day, weekend, or three to four days when the show was open to the public.

BYOC: Short for 'bring your own computer'

VIP: Short of 'very important person'. For instance, the Video Games Live VIP package includes the following:

- Platinum seating (Best Seats in the House)
- Video Games Live backstage laminated tour pass
- Pre-show production tour
- Q&A and special personal meet & greet with VGL creator and game music superstar Tommy Tallarico
- Free download card for the special extended Video Games Live: Level 2 album
- Official vintage Video Games Live poster

- Video Games Live Temporary Tattoos
- Special FRONT OF LINE access to the Video Games Live post-show meet & greet
- Signed 1st page conductor sheet music from the performance

Venue and Game: Some events required a payment of venue fee (venue) and game fee (game), which usually goes towards the venue hire and the cash prize. For example, Cabin Fever 2 required a payment of £12 towards venue fee (including spectators). A separate charge of £2 was required for each game entered – for example, if there were 50 entries (£2 per game) with a total of £100, then the cash prize would be £60 (1st place), £30 (2nd place) and £10 (3rd place) – however; the cash prize ratios depended on the organisers of the event.

In addition, the ‘Ticket Sold’ column is illustrated using the following symbols:

+ The representation of tickets sold online. This does not include the following:

- Number of tickets sold on the door
- Spectatorship - some were free of charge to spectate
- Also, the number of tickets sold also represents every ticket, which includes weekend tickets, day tickets and family tickets. For example, a family ticket consists of two adults and two children – this ticket was counted as 1 ticket, which has been included in the representation of tickets sold.

(x2) The show ran twice on the same day. For example, A New World: Intimate Music from Final Fantasy [2014] had two showings (2pm and 7pm).

Hall Capacity: The maximum number of tickets available depending on the capacity of the hall. All the concerts attended to/or will attend to are currently all sold out. For example, Distant Worlds tickets were sold out in less than fifteen minutes once released.

Video Game Conventions and Video Game Exhibitions

Eurogamer: A video game event

EGX Rezzed: A video game event

Play Expo: A retro video game event

MCM Comic Con: A anime, manga, comic book and video game event

Doki Doki: A Japanese festival based on Japanese culture (including anime, manga and video games)

Local Area Network (LAN) Events

Insomnia Gaming Festivals: A local area network (LAN) event

Insomnia50 (i50)

Insomnia51 (i51)

Insomnia52 (i52)

Insomnia53 (i53)

Insomnia54 (i54)

Insomnia55 (i55)

Insomnia56 (i56)

Musical Events

Video Games Live: A video game music festival

Distant Worlds: Final Fantasy Concert

Final Symphony: Final Fantasy Orchestral Concert

Symphonic Legends: Zelda Orchestral Concert

Local Video Game Community Events

Manchester Battle Arena: Warriors Returns 3

Super Smash Brothers: Manchester Monthly Regionals 1 - Regionals

Manchester Monthly Regionals 2 - Regionals

Manchester Monthly Regionals 3 - Regionals

Edmas 2 - Midland Regionals

Edintines - Midlands Nationals

Cabin Fever 1 - Midland Regionals

Cabin Fever 2 - Midlands Nationals

Heir to the Throne -UK Championship

4.2.2. Choosing the Video Game Events

The process used to select the video game sample was as follows:

1. Defining video game and video game events – What constitutes a video game event?
2. Exploring the literature of video game events – What has already been looked at?
3. Determining the list of existing video game events – Which events should be considered?
4. Pilot study – Which events have participants been to?
5. Refining the list of video game events – And why should these be considered?

Firstly, defining what video game is? This is important because it determines what constitutes a video game event for this research. Using the definition of video games we discussed earlier, this research considers a video game event to be an organised activity arranged on a specific day to attract people with interests relating directly to, various types of electronic gaming played on game consoles, arcade machines, computers, mobile phones and other gaming hardware. It is important to consider that a video game event does not necessarily mean it must involve the playing of video games; but rather it is a place where people that are usually separated come together and share their interest in video games and collaborate in meaning ways, around various video game-related practices.

Secondly, it was important to explore the existing literature on video game events in order to consider what types of events have previously been studied. However, this is a rather under-researched area; in particular, there were only a few studies on video game events, and these were most commonly focused on LAN parties, therefore there seems a significant gap within the literature here. For that reason, this research sought to address this by having a particular focus on video game conventions, exhibitions and other kinds of events.

Thirdly, determining the video game event list was important. As the literature on video game events was limited, I relied on my own previous experience with video game events and selected the video game events that were popular (in terms of attendance figures). This included Eurogamer, MCM Comic Con, and the Play Expo, from which I conducted a pilot study to refine the list of video game events.

Hence, fourthly, a pilot study was conducted primarily using questionnaires at three events, to obtain some basic demographics of video game event-goers, to help finalise the list of video game events based on participant responses, and to refine research questions for online questionnaires, interviews and group interviews. The pilot study was conducted at the first three video game events between September and October 2013. This included Eurogamer Expo, Play Expo Manchester, and MCM London Comic Con. Before carrying out the pilot study, the organisers (gate-keepers) of these video game events were contacted via email, and provided with information about the research in order to obtain access to carry out research at their events. Typically, permission to carry out research at these video game events was granted on the basis that I did not disturb ‘paying customers’ during gaming sessions and to conduct research at appropriate times; such as while participants were queuing to fill in ‘dead-time’. Therefore, most participants were collected while queuing; to either get into the venue or while waiting to play a game.

The pilot study aimed to collect between 20-40 questionnaire responses from each video game event – the number of questionnaire responses was determined based on the time to collect the data in-person at these video game events, which took place over a few days (between two to four days). In addition, it also provided the researcher experience in conducting questionnaires and in getting to know the cultures of these events, as well as securing potential participants for further more detailed interviews.

To conduct the questionnaires for the pilot study, participants were provided with information about the research and asked to fill out a consent form to confirm their age as over 18 years old, for ethical reasons (discussed below). The consent form also had the option to participate in a follow-up interview or group interview. The time to conduct each questionnaire varied between ten to thirty minutes to complete; this depended on the length of conversation with participants before, during and after the questionnaire – these conversations were also jotted down using hand-written notes afterwards, as part of the observational field-notes made throughout the entire research process.

Finally, after the pilot study, the video game event list was refined. In total, the pilot study collected 60 completed questionnaires – 20 questionnaires at each event. However, during the pilot study, the participants from the questionnaires recommended several video game events that were coming up soon; in particular *Insomnia50 (i50)*, and a *Super Smash Brothers* event (Edmas 2). Due to these video game events being on a smaller scale, in

comparison to the others (Eurogamer, MCM Comic Con and Play Expo), additional pilot questionnaires were carried out at these video game events [Insomnia50 and Edmas 2] to determine whether these events were appropriate for this research. For that reason, a further 40 (20 at each) questionnaires were obtained from these additional two events.

After the pilot studies, the list of potential events were considered in more detail, as I considered if these video game events were appropriate choices for the research? For instance, it was important to consider whether to attend to the same (or similar) events several times, or if to engage myself in wide variety of video game communities. For example, the ‘Smash’ (Super Smash Brothers) events, such as Manchester Monthly Regionals, occurred on a monthly basis. Therefore I decided to strike a balance, and become a regular attendee at some events, such as ‘Smash events’, while also sampling and attending some of the larger, less frequent, game related events, such as conventions and expos.

In conclusion, a variety of video game events were selected to compare and contrast the video game related practices that video gamers participated in, who attended these events. The video game events sampled, often provided a range of activities; from exhibitions showcasing products and selling goods, workshops, video game tournaments, cosplay competitions, and much more. The interest of video game event-goers often varies from what they do, why they do it and what their actions mean to themselves and others. For that reason, this research consists of various video game events from gaming tournaments and competitions, LAN parties, gaming conventions, and game-related musical events.

4.2.3. Sampling Process

Overall, the sample of participants for this research were primarily recruited using convenience and snowball sampling, as well as utilising the idea of theoretical sampling.

Firstly, according to Bryman (2004) it is common to use both convenience sampling and snowball sampling in ethnographic research. A convenience sampling is common in social research, where it is the make-up of the participants’ availability to researchers by the virtue of their accessibility. A snowball sampling refers to the approach where the research makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others (Bryman, 2004).

Secondly, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that research based on a theoretical sampling technique refers to the collection of data until an emergence of similar categories that is well established and validated. For instances, Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.121) writes:

This mean, until (a) no new or relevant data seem to be emerging regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships among categories are well established and validated

Therefore, the idea is to sample until a category has been saturated with data – this suggests that the researcher carries out research until no new data or relevant data emerges from the research.

4.2.4. Triangulation

This research consists of using a mix method approach, allowing for triangulation. Triangulation is defined to be a technique commonly designed to compare and contrast data gathered from different types of methods to help provide more comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under study. This technique is important as what people say about their behaviour can contrast with their actual actions. For instance, an early reference to triangulation was in relation to the idea of ‘unobtrusive method’ proposed by Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest (1966, p.3), who suggested; ‘Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced. The most persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of measurement processes’. Therefore, this form of ‘mixing of methods’ is often thought to help validate claims that might arise from the research.

4.2.5. Data Collection

The following section will examine the selected methods of this research, including the use of the pilot study, questionnaires, interviews, group interviews, and observational research. However, it is important to highlight that the pilot study is not part of the data analysed within the research, but rather it is used to pre-determine and test the research questions and to provide a direction for the wider sample.

The Pilot Study

For this research, questionnaires were used as a pilot study. The pilot study used questionnaires based on three objectives; to obtain the general demographics of video game event-goers; to develop a list of video game events based on participant responses; and to refine research questions for online questionnaires, interviews, and group interviews. The pilot study consists of 100 questionnaires, where 20 questionnaires were collected from five video game events the researcher attended; Eurogamer, MCM London Comic Con, Play Expo, Insomnia50 (i50) and Edmas 2. Questionnaires were conducted in-person with the researcher (walking with questionnaires on a clipboard and a pen) inside the venue at these video game events – mostly while participants were queueing; either to get into the venue or queues that developed inside the venue. Before conducting the questionnaire, participants were asked to complete a consent form, with an option to take part in a follow-up interview or group interview.

After the pilot study, the questions for the online questionnaire, interview, and group interviews were revised and finalised. Bryman (2004) suggests that piloting and pre-testing questions is always desirable in conducting research. For instance, the pilot questionnaire consist a mixture of closed and open-ended questions to generate fixed-choice answers for the online questionnaires. This was particularly useful, as it allowed the researcher to determine the adequacy of instructions to interviewees for completing a self-completion online questionnaire. In addition, the researcher was also able to identify questions that may have made the respondents feel uncomfortable, such as when asking about yearly income. To overcome this, the researcher decided to group yearly income into pre-determined groups, rather than have the participant write down a specific figure.

Pilot Study Results

Using the results from the pilot study, this section will explore the demographics of the sample of video gamers, as well as the motives for participating in various video game practices at video game events. However, it is important to highlight that the pilot study is not a representative sample; rather it is used to pre-determine the research questions and to provide a direction towards the rest of the research.

From the pilot study, the 100 questionnaires consisted of 70% males and 30% females, and an average age of 23 years old. The 100 questionnaires originated from five different video game events, from Eurogamer, MCM London Comic Con, Play Expo, Insomnia50 (i50) and Edmas 2, where twenty pilot questionnaires were collected from each event.

The tables below (Table 4.2 – Table 4.6) show the results generated individually for each video game event from the pilot questionnaire.

Table 4.2: Pilot Questionnaire - What is your gender?		
	Male	Female
EuroGamer Expo	15	5
MCM Comic Con	8	12
Play Expo	12	8
Insomnia50 (i50)	15	5
Edmas 2	20	0
TOTAL	70	30
Total Percentage	70%	30%

Table 4.2 shows the sample of males and females that attended the video game events sampled in the pilot study. This small sample, though not representative, does generally reflect the male dominated nature of most video game events. Similarly this can be seen in the research of Jansz and Martens (2005) on LAN gamers, which consisted of 170 men and six women in their sample. This suggests that video game events may be more male dominated, and appear more appealing to men more than women. However, there may be some exceptions to this pattern, for example MCM Comic Con consisted of 60% (12) females and 40% (8) males. MCM Comic Con is an event that targets audiences interested in anime (a style of Japanese animation), manga (a style of Japanese comics book) and video games, and hence, the wider target range may have resulted in a higher proportion of women attending. For example, Eventbrite’s (2014) online survey reported, that amongst the 2,600 people who purchased tickets to one of the hundreds of fandom events on their platform in the last two years in North America, 55% were male (1217) and 45% were female (986) (Altier, 2014). This suggests a more ‘balanced’ division of male and female

attendees, than a more male dominated attendance from video gamers that attended EuroGamer Expo, Play Expo, Insomnia50 (i50) and Edmas 2.

Table 4.3: Pilot Questionnaire - What is your age?			
	Minimum Age	Maximum Age	Average Age
EuroGamer Expo	18	55	25
MCM Comic Con	18	47	24
Play Expo	18	42	26
Insomnia50 (i50)	18	35	21
Edmas 2	19	27	21
Total Average	18	41	23

Table 4.3 shows the minimum, maximum, and average age of participants from the pilot questionnaire. The overall average age was 23 years old.

The report 1000Games (2011) suggested that the UK's average gamer is around 23 years old, with 10 years gaming experience and approximately spends around 12.6 hours playing video games every week. However, it is important to consider that most statistics on video games often gather research participants via online self-completion surveys, rather than at specific video game events. However, there are some exceptions, such as Jansz and Matens' (2005) study on LAN gamers, which reported to have an age range from 11 to 35 with a mean age of 20 years old. However, it is important to consider that the minimum age from the pilot study only consist of participants above the age of 18, due to ethical considerations.

Table 4.4: Pilot Questionnaire - What is your current occupation? (Total: 100)					
	Full Time Employment (only)	Part-Time Employment (only)	Full-Time Student (with employment)	Full-Time Student (without employment)	Unemployed
EuroGamer Expo	16	0	2	2	0
MCM Comic Con	13	1	4	2	0

Play Expo	12	1	3	2	2
Insomnia50 (i50)	15	1	1	2	1
Edmas 2	3	2	9	2	4
TOTAL	59	5	19	10	7
Total Percentage	59%	5%	19%	10%	7%

Table 4.4 shows the current occupation of participants from the pilot questionnaire. Overall, the Table 4.4 shows that 59% of respondents were in 'Full Time Employment', 19% of respondents are in 'Full-Time Education (with employment)' and 10% of respondents are in 'Full-time Education (without employment)'.

However, when examined separately, it is important to highlight that Edmas 2 is the only event that consists of the most students (full time education, without employment), in comparison to those in full time employment.

Table 4.5: Pilot Questionnaire - Have you considered doing any of the following when attending gaming events? (tick multiple)						
	Play video games	Meet new people	Attend workshops	Purchase merchandise	Cosplay	Other
EuroGamer Expo	20	12	8	11	4	3
MCM Comic Con	20	15	10	17	6	2
Play Expo	20	11	6	15	5	4
Insomnia50 (i50)	16	15	8	10	4	7
Edmas 2	20	20	0	5	3	1

TOTAL	96	73	32	58	22	17
Total Percentage	32%	24%	11%	20%	7%	6%

Finally, Table 4.5 shows the interest of various activities at video game events from the pilot questionnaire. Among the activities that were available to select, ‘play video games’, ‘meet new people’, and ‘purchase merchandise’ appeared to be the most popular.

Overall, the pilot studies were useful, as they provided some basic demographics of video gamers that attended various video game events (EuroGamer, MCM London Comic Con, Play Expo, Insomnia50, and Edmas 2). However, it is important to consider that the findings from the pilot study are not generalizable, due to a small and convenience sample used.

Questionnaires

The online questionnaires were conducted after the questions were revised from the pilot study. The online questionnaire was created using an application called *Typeform* - an application that helps produce and manage online questionnaires. Online questionnaires were created for each video game event from January 2014 to July 2014. The online questionnaires were collected through convenient sampling, where they were posted on various video game event forums and Facebook pages, between the period of a month before and after the dates of the video game event. For example, MCM Midland Comic Con was scheduled on the 15th February 2014, so the online questionnaire was made available on the MCM Midland Comic Con forum from 15th January 2014 to 15th March 2014 – the application *Typeform* had a feature which allowed the researcher to make the online questionnaire open or closed for public access at any time. The purpose of the online questionnaire was to continue obtaining demographic information on those who attended the list of video game events, as well as to obtain participants to take part in follow-up interviews or group interviews, with the majority of the participants stated that they would be willing to do an interview or group interviews at a later date.

A total of 80 online questionnaire responses were obtained from 15 different video game events from January 2014 to July 2014. The initial goal of the online questionnaires was to obtain between 20 - 40 online questionnaires from each video game event – similar to the pilot questionnaires. However, online questionnaire responses ranged from obtaining no responses and between six to twenty-one online questionnaire responses from the list of video game events. Hence, given the low response rates and differing figures obtained from the online questionnaires, the online questionnaires responses were disregarded, and hence only used as a mechanism for obtaining interviewees for the next stage of the research.

Interviews and Group Interviews

The participants for follow-up interviews and group interviews were obtained from the online questionnaires that were collected using convenient sampling. In some cases, snowballing was also from these original participants, to obtain adequate number participants with similar interests to take part in a group interview. Snowball sampling was considered to be useful, as the participant appeared to feel more comfortable taking part in a group interview with other participants that they already knew, rather than total strangers.

For the follow-up and group interviews, participants were contacted via email to arrange a day to conduct an interview. Individual interviews and group interviews took place at a suitable location that was convenient for the participant, where neither the researcher nor participant would be at significant risk. Most interviews took place in a quiet area at the video game event. In some cases, local participants were asked to conduct an interview at a public location (such as local cafes), or at the University of Salford, where it is appropriate and convenient. Individual interviews and group interviews were conducted following a semi-structured interview schedule. These interview schedule contained questions on main topics to ask participants: from their motives for attending various video game events, video game activities engaged in, reasons for engagement, and so on. The interviews were recorded using an audio recording device. The group interviews were recorded using both an audio recording and a video recording device to observe body language, interaction between participants, structure of the conversation, and also aid to

the transcription process. The recordings were then all fully transcribed by the researcher for analysis.

Interview Participants

The Table 4.6 shows the demographics of all the participants that were interviewed; including the event the participant were collected at, the name of the participant (anonymised using game character names), their age, gender, and their location (town they live in).

Table 4.6: Interview Participants				
Event	Name	Age	Gender	Location
EuroGamer	Chell	26	Female	London
	Sonic	27	Male	London
	Scott Pilgrim	28	Male	London
MCM Comic Con	Pikachu	23	Male	London
	Levi Acherman	24	Female	Leeds
	Master Chief	25	Male	Liverpool
Insomnia Gaming Festival	Rexxar	18	Male	Manchester
	Teemo the Swift Scout	22	Male	Liverpool
	Annie the Dark Child	22	Female	London
Play Expo	Princess Leia Organa	22	Female	Manchester
	Daenerys Targaryen	27	Female	Manchester
	Pac-Man	29	Male	Liverpool
Final Fantasy Orchestral	Rinoa Heartilly	24	Female	London
	Squall Leonhart	25	Male	Liverpool
	Sephiroth	30	Male	London
Smash UK	Ness	22	Male	Manchester
	Mr. Game and Watch	22	Male	Bristol
	Captain Falcon	26	Male	London
Manchester Battle Arena	Mokujin	27	Male	Manchester
	Jin Kazama	28	Male	Manchester

Group Interview Participants

The Table 4.7 shows the demographics of all the participants from group interviews; again, including the event the participant was collected at, the name of the participant (anonymised using game character names), their age, gender, and home town.

Event	Participants	Age	Gender	Location
EuroGamer (London)	Kirby	26	Male	London
	Meta Knight	25	Male	London
	King Dedede	22	Female	London
	Adeleine	23	Female	London
	Bandana Waddle Dee	24	Female	London
MCM Comic Con	Batman	27	Male	London
	Robin	23	Male	London
	Blinky	21	Female	Manchester
	Pinky	21	Female	Manchester
	Inky	22	Male	Manchester
Insomnia Gaming Festival	Clyde	22	Male	Manchester
	Bulbasaur	24	Male	Manchester
	Charmander	24	Male	Manchester
	Squirtle	20	Male	Manchester
	Rengar the Pridestalker	28	Male	Manchester
Play Expo	Kah'Zix the Voidreaver	27	Female	Manchester
	Mario	28	Male	Manchester
Final Fantasy Orchestral	Luigi	22	Male	Manchester
	Tidus	25	Male	London
Smash UK	Yuna	24	Female	London
	Parappa the Rapper	26	Male	Birmingham
	Sunny Funny	25	Male	Birmingham
	Katy Kat	27	Male	Birmingham
	PJ Berri	22	Male	Birmingham
	Bowser	23	Male	Manchester
	Boom Boom	22	Male	Birmingham
	Pom Pom	24	Male	Birmingham
	Fox	25	Male	London
	Sheik	24	Female	London
Princess Peach	24	Female	London	

A group interview is a method of interviewing that involves more than one person, usually at least four interviewees. In comparison to a focus group that typically consists between 6 - 10 members (Morgan, 1998), the group interviews consist between 2 - 5 participants. It is important to highlight that this research's initial intention was to conduct focus groups, however, I have deliberately used the term 'group interviews', due to the problem of participants not turning up on the day; which led to smaller groups than typically seen in focus groups. Therefore, the group interviews consists of aspects from a focus group, but at the same time, cannot be considered as a focus group. In particular, Bryman (2004, p.346) highlights three reasons that draws a distinction between the focus group and the group interview techniques;

- Focus groups typically emphasize a specific theme or topic that is explored in depth, whereas group interviews often span very widely.
- Sometimes group interviews are carried out so that the researcher is able to save time and money by carrying out interviews with a number of individuals simultaneously. However, focus groups are not carried out for this reason.
- The focus group practitioner is invariably interested in the ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue as *members of a group*, rather than simply as individuals. In other words, with a focus group the researcher will be interested in such things as how people respond to each other's views and build up a view out of the interaction that takes place within the group.

Firstly, the group interviews mainly consist of a specific theme or topic that was explored in depth. As mentioned earlier, the group interviews were conducted following a semi-structured interview schedule, which consist of guided questions with prompts, which were asked to all groups. Therefore, similar to a focus group, it does typically emphasise a specific theme or topic. Secondly, when gathering data within a video game event environment, it was often the case where there was a limited time and space for the researcher to 'work with' and to conduct interviews and group interviews. Thus, several group interviews were conducted with the intention to save time and money by carrying out interviews with a number of individuals at certain video game events – especially those that were only accessible for one or two days.

Finally, it is clear that the focus group practitioner will be interested in which individuals to discuss a certain topic as 'members of the group'. However, due to the size of the group interview, it becomes difficult to analyse certain issues as 'members of the group', especially between two people. Hence the use of the term 'group interviews'.

Participant Observation

Finally, observational research was undertaken throughout the process of this research. This research was ethnographic in nature. The term 'ethnography' is often taken to refer simply to 'participant observation', which often seems to imply just observation. However, Bryman (2004) suggests that participant observers do more than simply observe. As a participant observer, I became an active member of various video game communities from video game events. For example, one particular video game event, Play Expo asked me to volunteer; so I helped with the setting up and taking down at Play Expo (2013) and Play Expo Blackpool (2014), which helped me to gain interesting insights as a volunteer. Another example involved voluntarily setting up equipment and being a driver to move

CRTs (televisions) for Manchester Monthly Regionals (one of the Super Smash Brothers events). Therefore, my role as a participant observer was more than to observe the behaviour of participants, but also involved active participation in these communities, and for an extended period of time. Hence, besides observing people who attended various video game events, I became an active member of the communities: from entering competitions and tournaments, attending various workshops, cosplaying, and volunteering. A further example includes an attempt to do 50 push-ups on stage after being nominated from the group of participants I was observing, and where I also got ‘stuffed’ into a box at Insomnia50 (i50) when the same group participants won the traditional ritual of obtaining ‘The Box’ (an empty box that carried the freebies, also known as ‘free swag’, to distribute to the crowd) (see Figure 4.1).

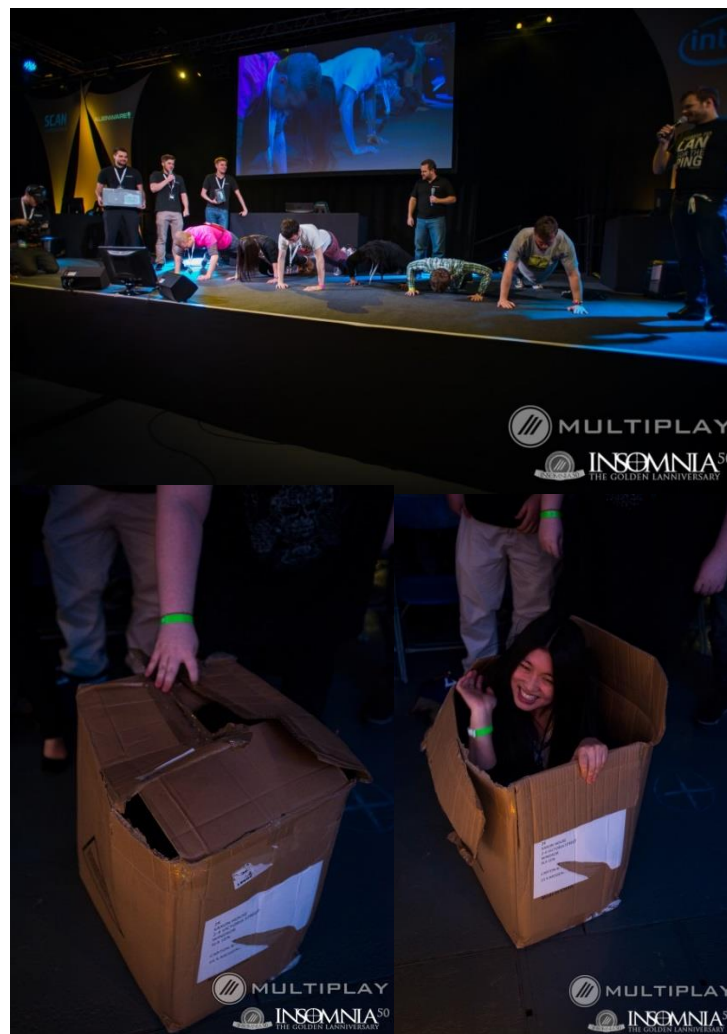


Figure 4.1: Photographs of the researcher doing push-ups and getting stuffed into ‘The Box’ (Taken by Multiplay Photographers)

Gold (1958) provided a classification of participant observer roles, which can be seen as a continuum of degrees of involvement with members of the social setting (see Figure 4.2). The four roles are:

- 1) Complete Participant:
The complete participant is a fully functioning member of the social setting, which consist of covert observation – where members do not know his or her true identity as a researcher.
- 2) Participant-as-observer:
A participant-as-observer consists of the same role as a complete participant, but members of the social setting are aware of the researcher’s status as a researcher. The ethnographer is engaged in regular interaction with people and participants in their daily lives.
- 3) Observer-as-participant:
In this role the researcher is mainly an interviewer. There is some observation but very little of it involves any participation.
- 4) Complete Observer:
A complete observer does not interact with people. According to Gold (1958), people do not have to take the researcher into account.

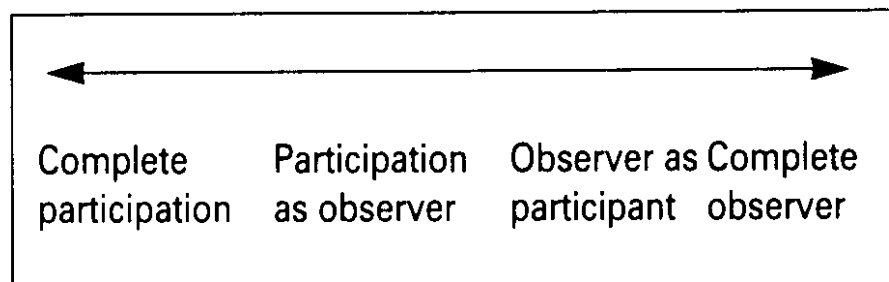


Figure 4.2: Gold’s (1958) classification scheme of participant observer roles

In relation to this research, my role as an ethnographic researcher could be considered somewhere between a participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant; where the role switched interchangeably throughout the day from participating actively to simply observing. However, at all times the researcher considered herself to be an ‘active’ ethnographer. For instance, Bryman (2004) suggests that even when the ethnographer is in an observer-as-participant role, there may be contexts in which either participation is unavoidable. For example, Fine’s (1996) research on the work of chefs in restaurants was carried out largely by semi-structured interview. In spite of his limited participation, he found himself involved in washing up in the kitchens to help out during busy periods. In many instances, the researcher has no choice – for example, as mentioned earlier, as I was

considered one of the ‘designated drivers’ to move CRTs (televisions) for the Smash community, I also found myself lifting and moving CRTs up and down stairs, from people’s houses to venues and back. Bryman (2004) suggests that sometimes, ethnographers may feel they have no choice but to get involved; because a failure to participate actively might indicate a lack of commitment and lead to a loss of credibility. Bryman (2004) suggests that this can often lead to dilemmas on the part of ethnographer, especially when the activities in which they actively take part (or might do so) are illegal or dangerous. Although I did not encounter any illegal or dangerous activities, I have heard of incidents of drug-use during video game events – however, due to my physical appearance, I have been told I appeared ‘too innocent looking’ to be involved or even invited. At most, from my field-notes at Insomnia54 (i54), the most dangerous activity I encountered was receiving a ‘playful slap’ from a ‘fellow LAN gamer’ for going to bed early (1am) on the first night on LAN; as traditionally, LAN gamers attempt to stay up all night on the first night of LAN (Thursday), because tournaments and competitions do not start until the weekend (Saturday and Sunday).

Despite going to bed early, Whitehead (2005) suggests that classical ethnographers, who primarily studied local communities, are meant to immerse themselves into the field 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, over different seasons of the year for an extended period of time. In addition, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) highlights that ethnographic research sampling is not just about people, but also other things – such as time and contexts that need to be considered in the context of sampling. Due to the purpose of these scheduled events, where they only occurred at specific times, observing participants 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and in different seasons of the year, for an extended period of time was not possible. However, during the several game events I attended, I did undertake extensive and almost continuous observations. For example, I attempted to ‘hang around’ as much as possible at the events; from attending pre-meet ups before the event, arriving early at the venue before opening time to observe the queuing process, carrying out research during the whole time the event was open, walking around both indoors and outdoors to observe what people were doing (from cosplay, photo-shoots, workshops and so on), then walking around the venue after the closing time of the events to observe how certain groups continued to ‘hang out’, such as going to after-parties or designated spaces where people decide to meet together after the event.

A similar example can be illustrated with William Whyte's (1981) study on street corner society of Italian American slum, he called 'Cornville' – an ethnography on street gangs and 'corner boys' from 'hanging around' the streets and observing. From his book, Whyte commented on how he wondered if 'hanging' on the street corner was an active enough process to be dignified by the term 'research' – he wondered if he should be asking more questions? However, he soon learned the importance of 'hanging-out' when he was given advice from 'Doc' his gate-keeper;

Go easy on that "who," "what," "why," "when", "where" stuff, Bill. You ask those questions and people will clam up on you. If people accept you, you can just hang around, and you'll learn the answers in the long run without even having to ask the questions. (Whyte, 1981, p.303)

It is important to consider that William Whyte (1981) conducted a covert ethnography, therefore had to be careful of risks. However, 'hanging out' provides a chance to overhear exchanges that are not specifically addressed to the researcher. For example, De Garis (2000) study on male identity, aggression, and intimacy in a boxing gym, describes revelations and intimate exchanges in the showers, which provided useful insights.

In relation to this research, using Whyte's (1981) method of 'hanging around' to observe participants was useful. For instance, the method of 'hanging around' provided the flexibility to arrange an interview and group interviews at different times of the day; either before the event, during the event, directly after the event in a quiet space in a public setting, or even some time after the event. For example, there were several occasions where I stayed in London a few extra nights in order to conduct interviews or group interviews on the day after the event (such as after MCM London Comic Con, Distant Worlds, and Symphonic Legends).

In addition, this involvement over an extended amount of time at video game events was also advantageous, as it allowed me to build rapport with participants, which eventually enables me to 'hang-out' with them, and let me observe them as a group while they did various activities at the event. Agar (1996, p.158) suggests that one of the richest data which ethnography can capture comes from informal talk between research and informants; of which Agar (1996, p.158) calls 'hanging out' and places at the centre of ethnographic fields. This suggests that the objective of ethnographic research is to get as 'experience-near' as possible (Geertz, 1973); such as allowing the informant to control the discussion, rather than a repertoire of question asking:

Everything is negotiable. The informant can criticise a question, correct it, point out that it is sensitive, or answer in any way they want to (Agar, 1996, p.140).

Similarly, 'deep hanging out' was coined by Rosaldo (1989) to capture the sense of being profoundly immersed in a culture. The duration of video game events was often spread over between one to four days; therefore the period of time to conduct research (at the venue) was often quite 'short-lived'. Therefore, possibly a better way to understand my ethnographic research is to consider it a 'micro-ethnography' (Walcott, 1995). For instance, while I was 'hanging around', I also attempted to conduct 'walking interview' with the participants; where researchers 'walk alongside' with the participants in order to observe, experience, and make sense of the everyday practices (Clark and Emmel, 2010). Clark and Emmel (2010, p.1) suggest that 'walking interviews' could provide the following:

- 1) Understanding of how individuals conceptualise their neighbourhood
- 2) Understand of how individuals think about and articulate their neighbourhoods as well as create them through socio-spatial practices
- 3) Understand of how individuals locate their social networks and express their sense of community in relation to (local) places.

In relation to this research, walking interview were used to understand how the selected participants experience various video game events, how they differed in relation to various video game related practices, how they located their social networks, and express their sense of community. However, due to the noise levels at the video game events, these 'walking interviews' were unable to be recorded, and only field notes were taken down.

Field-Notes and Photographs

Throughout the extensive research observations, data was collected from taking field-notes and photographs at various video game events to capture the setting of the environment. Field-notes were taken based on the researcher's observations. The field-notes consist of a combination of mental notes recorded after the event (when it was inappropriate to be seen taking notes)' and jotted notes (very brief notes written down on a piece of paper or notepad at the time). All notes were later finalised with more detail at the end of the day or sooner if possible. On the other hand, photographs were taken carefully to comply with

intellectual property issues and adhere to the basic code of avoiding inappropriate content of images.

In relation to photographs, there has been a growth of interest in the use of visual ethnography in qualitative research. For instance, there are a number of ways in which photographs have been employed by qualitative researchers:

1. As *aides mémoires* in the course of fieldwork, in which context they essentially become components of the ethnographers fieldnotes.
2. As sources of data in their own right and not simply as adjuncts to the ethnographer's fieldnotes.
3. As prompts for discussion by research participants. Sometimes the photographs may be extant... In other contexts, the discussions may be based on photographs taken by the ethnographer or by research participants more or less exclusively for the purposes of the investigation (Bryman, 2004, p.312)

For this research, photographs will be used as an '*aides mémoires*' in the course of fieldwork, where they essentially become components of the ethnographers field-notes. Rather than capturing an event or setting and state them as fact for the ethnographer to interpret, it seems more useful to consider Pink's (2001) notion to be 'reflexive';

...which entails of and sensitivity to the ways in which the researcher as a person has an impact on what a photograph reveals. The sensitivity requires a grasp of the way that one's age, gender, background, and academic proclivities influence what is photographed, how it is composed, and the role that informants and others may have played in influencing the resulting image (Bryman, 2004, p.312)

This suggests an importance to recognise the fluidity in the interpretation of images, implying that they never can be fixed and will always be viewed by different people in different ways. Hence, this use of photographs in this findings section (in chapter 5 and chapter 6) will be used for illustration purposes only.

4.2.6. Data Analysis

The data gathered was coded and analysed thematically. The purpose of using thematic analysis was to limit research bias. It is important to highlight that research bias can rise from applying subjective meanings to the research, asking questions from a particular point of view, and using the findings to fit certain pre-determined conclusions (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, the use of thematic analysis with no pre-determined themes, lets the themes emerge from the data. This approach comes from the 'Grounded Theory Analysis' of Glaser and Strauss (1967), where the researcher would begin to study an area of interest

with an open mind and explore the issues for certain features to emerge. Grounded theory has been defined as:

...theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventually theory stand in close relationship to one another (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.12)

By linking and categorising the frequent features of the particular social interaction, the researcher can then build up a theoretical framework that directly emerges from the research and is not imposed upon it (Bryman, 2004).

The data was analysed using SPSS (a software package for quantitative data) and NVivo (a software package for qualitative data).

The process of the thematic analysis, as set out by Glaser and Strauss's (1967), consists of four stages. The first stage is to compare incidents applicable to each category. In order to do this, familiarisation of the text enables an understanding and a feel of the dialogue to build up ideas. The second stage is integrating categories and their properties by adding in-depth annotation and making notes on the transcripts, which can make spotting themes and dominant thematic areas easier. The third step is to delimit the theory, by summing up themes and building a 'theme tree.' Rearranging themes and adding sub-themes can make the data look clearer to compare and contrast. Finally, the last stage is to write the theory; by joining the themes together, this creates critical commentary in the form of prose.

In undertaking this thematic analysis two computer packages were used to assist this process. Firstly, SPSS was used to code the questionnaire answers (both pilot questionnaires and online questionnaires on separate data files) to generate diagrams and tables to showing percentages for comparative purposes. Secondly, and most importantly, NVivo was used to assist in the analysis of the transcriptions from the follow-up interviews and group interviews, as well as the researchers' observational notes. Recorded interviews and group interviews were transcribed to enable a thematic analysis, and to draw out and compare the main themes of the data (Bryman, 2004).

4.2.7. Ethical Issues

Ethical approval for this research was granted via University of Salford's ethics committee. I have conducted this research using the ethical guidelines of the British

Sociological Association (2002) and the Social Research Association (Roberts, 2003). Ethical considerations are grouped into four main areas: avoidance of harm, avoidance of deception, confidentiality and consent (Homan, 1991). The researcher has conducted the work responsibly within the moral and legal orders of society and will protect the participants from harm by adhering to ethical practices.

Before conducting the interviews and group interviews, participants needed to meet the criteria of being over the age of 18 years old and sign a consent form, and were made fully aware of the aims and nature of the research. It is important to be open and honest to the participants about the research, so a full disclosure of information was provided (Bell, 1993). Therefore, participants were informed that they were free to choose whether they would like to take part in research activities and be provided with the fullest information concerning the nature and purpose of the research (Nigel, 2001). I also took this into consideration in the online questionnaires, where the first page explained the purpose of the research to participants before continuing, and participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also able to volunteer to do a follow-up interview or group interview, which were arranged via email and for which a separate consent form was provided.

In relation to confidentiality, the data has omitted respondents' names and addresses, and their geographical location, so that they cannot be identified (Nigel, 2001). The participants' names and addresses have been provided voluntarily on questionnaires only by those participants who were willing to provide it and say that they were willing to participate in follow-up interviews or group interviews. Names and addresses will not be revealed to anyone other than the researcher, and questionnaire and interview responses will remain anonymous. To protect participants from harm and identification, all data have been stored on one computer and locked with a password to respect to individuals' right to privacy. All additional paperwork and backup files is stored in one location and locked up, and participants are able to request the destruction of audio recordings and transcripts at any point.

4.2.8. Problems and Limitations

A major limitation of most qualitative research is the relatively small sample size. Because of its largely qualitative nature the research is not necessarily reliable and it may

be difficult to repeat and obtain similar results. However, Hall and Hall (2004) highlights that these 'restrictions' can also be strengths of qualitative research. A small-scale project of this nature is easier to handle and allows for greater control and for changes or improvements to be made, and costs involved will not be as great as a large-scale research study (Hall and Hall, 2004). In addition, Siegel (1956) argues the sample size is determined by the amount of information needed, rather than designing research on quantitative presuppositions; 'Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know' (Siegel, 1956, p.43). Therefore, although this research may be low in reliability, it is high in validity because it provides in-depth accounts of individual experiences.

In addition, attending video game events was quite costly; besides the venue fee, it was also involved travel expenses, accommodation, and food; all of which I had to provide for myself. For this reason, the number of events that could be attended was limited.

Furthermore, there are other factors that needed to be taken into consideration when conducting the research. Crawford (2012) highlights that studying video gamers that attend game conventions, LAN parties, or similar events and activities, will not necessarily represent the whole culture, as the majority of participants at these events may represent more 'hardcore' members of this community. Therefore, rather than comparing different 'types' of gamers, this research acknowledges that it focuses on the various video game practices and cultures only at a limited number of events, in one country, over a specific period of time.

Issues in fieldwork

Within fieldwork approaches, there are seen to be three issues traditionally considered in methodological discussions of the field approach that are affected by the nature of the researchers experiences in gathering data; validity, and reliability, ethics and the study of the unfamiliar. All research is subject to the problem of validity and reliability. Validity and Reliability – for instance, in field research can often fall into the following categories of problems:

- 1) reactive effects of the observer's presence or activities of the phenomena being observed;

- 2) distorting effects of selective perception and interpretation on the observer's part; and
- 3) limitations on the observer's ability to witness all relevant aspects of the phenomena in question (McCall and Simmons, 1969, p.78).

Firstly, reactive effects refer to the special behavioural responses subjects make because of the observers presence within the setting. Secondly, Shaffir and Stebbins (1991, p.13) states that observers are human too; '...at times they get angry, become sympathetic, grow despondent, and are unable to hide these sentiments'. This suggests that special reaction effects may take place when a researcher's rational appearances fail. Thirdly, reactive effects could blemish the quality of the data from the disintegration of trust between the observer and one or more subjects (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991). In relation to this research, there may have been some degree of reaction effects from the observer's presence, selective perception and interpretation on the observer's part, and limitations on the observer's ability to witness all relevant aspects of the phenomena in question. For instance, Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) suggests that the status of the researcher may engender an observational limitation – in particular, the exclusiveness of sex.

As a female, slightly older (though look young) and ethnically Chinese, researching in a male dominated environment, to some extent, I am considered an 'outsider'. For instance, Taylor (2012, p.29) considered herself as an outsider, for she described herself as a 'non-competitive, a women, and a bit older than most attendees'. In comparison, I would describe myself as 'competitive', a women, appears to be of the same age, of which it may have helped me be accepted within certain video game communities and provide a presence that bears the 'stamp of familiarity' from attending various video game events, and also the same series of events multiple times, as Taylor and Witkowski (2010, p.6) writes;

What women establish at this event is that their presence bears the stamp of familiarity, not only with games and their playing of a rich variety, but also in having a computer of one's own to play on.

As a sponsored/competitive gamer in Hearthstone (as examined further in chapter 5), I consider myself as one of the women in Taylor and Witkowski's (2010) study from DreamHack, where I mark a space of one's own, having personal gaming knowledge and entering with an active stance to activity engage in the public gaming spaces.

4.2.9. Timetable

To ensure that the research was manageable and doable, I produced a timetable that planned the duration of each of the components and stages (Blaikie, 2000). Each stage of the research may overlap in time, occur at more than one time, or was carried out throughout the process of the whole project (Blaikie, 2000). Firstly, I prepared a research design before applying for ethics. Once granted ethical approval, I contacted specific gatekeepers for video game events that I wanted to carry out research. The preparation for my data collection included designing the research questions, selecting the sample size, developing research techniques to carry out the data collection, and the analysis of data. However, the data collection took a little longer than expected, because I wanted to obtain a variety of interviews and group interviews with people that attended different video game events. After gathering data from a variety of video game events, near the end of the data collection process, I continued gathering data from Insomnia Gaming Festivals, because I wanted to obtain more in-depth data on competitive gaming. Nevertheless, analysis of data was carried out immediately after data collection to ensure I could undertake the working on ‘writing up’ of the thesis as scheduled.

Table 4.8: Timetable										
Stages	Sept 2012	Dec 2012	Mar 2013	Jun 2013	Sep 2013	Dec 2013	Mar 2014	Jun 2014	Sep 2014	End 2016
Preparation of the research design										
Review of the literature										
Selection of data sources (including sampling)										
Development of the research instruments										

Collection of the data										
Analysis of the data										
Writing the thesis										

4.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has used a variety of research methods to explore the cultural and patterns of participation of video gamers at various video game events across the UK.

This research has employed an ethnographic research approach, which follows Wolcott's (1995) definition of ethnographer, who defines this as a form of inquiry that requires a researcher to be immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of some individual or group carrying out the research. Therefore, the role of the ethnographic researcher is to become immersed in the on-going social activities that take place at these video game events. For instance, Johnson (2006, p.25) describes there is 'an experiential gap between people who have immersed themselves in games, and people who have only heard second hand reports, because the gap makes it difficult to discuss the meaning of games in a coherent way'. Not only is ethnographic research rich in data, it also creates a binary separation of self and research which is difficult to maintain. Ethnography needs to account for emotions whilst maintain academic rigor through a process known as reflexivity. Reflexivity means both having the capability and language necessary to justify the methodological, theoretical and practical/pragmatic steps undertaken during data collection and analysis (Mason, 2002), and also the awareness of the researcher's relationship to the field.

In relation to this research, this type of reflexivity requires acknowledgement of when the researcher is, and is not, an embedded member of the community being researched. For example, Taylor (2012) is reflective on the uses of ethnographic research, in that she *did*

not consider the research she conducted within the e-sports community to be ethnographic. Taylor (2012, p.29) writes that she ‘was always fairly outside’ what she was studying by virtue of her status as ‘non-competition, a woman, and a bit older’ than her research participants. Taylor (2012) acknowledges her status as an outsider, even when her research was designed to be an ethnographic account of e-sports, Taylor’s own reflexivity on her methodological choices and relationship to the field and participants required her to recognise that it was not ethnographic. Therefore, Taylor’s experience illustrates that researchers studying communities of players face power imbalances, such as those related to gender or age, and often these experiences are integral to the experience of playing within a given community.

In comparison, as a young, ethnically Chinese female, I did not feel *so much* of an outsider when attending various video game events. Although, I may have been more active within certain community than others, I am an active gamer, and I have spent a significant amount of time dedicating myself to getting accepted into (at least parts of) the communities under research; from attending regular meet-ups, participating in various community activities, attempting to acquire the appropriate level of game knowledge to understand their ‘language’, and so on. Therefore, on that reflexive note, it can be concluded that this research still stands as a piece of ethnography.

Chapter 5

Characteristics of Video Gamers and Video Game Communities

Introduction

To date, there has been limited research focusing on video gamers attending video game events. Therefore, it becomes important to consider two principal research questions, who are the visitors and what motivated them to participate in video game events?

Most studies often explore the question ‘who plays video games’, rather than those who attend video game events. Amongst the researchers who have examined video gamer demographics, Crawford (2012) suggests that the stereotype of video gamers as predominantly white male adolescences is commonly assessed in surveys, amongst both academic and industry-based research, that have sought to count, record and measure those who play video games. For instance, in the video game industry, the main source of video gamer demographic information is the annual *Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry* (ESA, 2015), which invariably uses data to present their business and customers in the best possible light – such as countering the stereotype of video gamers as exclusively anti-social adolescent boys. The report for 2015 declares that the average American male gamer age is 35 years old, and the average American female gamer age is 43 years old; the American video game players consists of 56% male and 44% female; and 56% of American gamers frequently play with others, including friends (41%), family members (21%), parents (16%) and spouse/partner (15%) (ESA, 2015). These statistics suggest several positive aspects of video gaming; such as video games being suitable for all age groups, a ‘more equal’ representation of male and female gamers, and that it should be considered a social activity. Hence, these findings often focus on headline-grabbing statistics to convey a very particular image of video gaming as a normal, social and healthy pursuit. It is not to say that these kinds of findings should be simply mistrusted; they have their value (Crawford, 2012).

Similarly, the UK equivalent of the ESA, the UK Interactive Entertainment Association (UKIE), presents its own statistical evidence, as well as selectively drawing on other academic research to present a partially positive picture of video gaming. For instance, GameTrack reports 20 million people of the 6-64 year population playing games in the UK; with 57% male and 43% female (Ukie, 2014). However, very little information is

usually provided on how the data sets are collected and analysed – in particular, the original sources of secondary data are often poorly referenced, making following up this research difficult (Crawford, 2012). Therefore, it is important to explore more specific and most often academic studies – of which little has focused on video gamer demographics using quantitative research and in particular, to those who attend video game events.

In relation to video game events; there has been limited research offering a description of video gamers that attend video game events. As previously examined in the pilot study (as discussed in chapter 4), statistics on video gamer demographics attending video game events include; Jansz and Martens's (2005) study on LAN gamers (Campzone 2 – Netherlands); Taylor and Witkowski's (2010) study on LAN gamers at Dreamhack (LAN event) in Sweden and Eventbrite's (2014) online survey of more than 2,600 people who purchased tickets to one of the hundreds of fandom events on their platform in the last two years in North America (Altier, 2014). For instance, Jansz and Martens (2005) study on 'Gaming at a LAN event' (Campzone 2 - Netherlands) reported LAN gamers were almost exclusively male, with a mean age of 19.5 years; they devoted about 2.6 hours each day to gaming, and were motivated by social contact and a need to know more about games. Taylor and Witkowski (2010) reported an increasing number of female gamers attending Dreamhack Winter 2005 and 2009. Also, Eventbrite (2014) online survey reported; that amongst the 2,600 people, 55% were male (1217) and 45% were female (986); and 38% were between the age of 30-49; and 47% make less than £35k. However, these statistics were obtained from 'hundreds of fandom events in the last two years', of which, when examined separately, may indicate similarities and differences across all fan events (Altier, 2014). For instance, even though the pilot study consists an overall gender representation of 70% male and 30% female, average age of 23 years old, and mostly in 'full-time employment'; when the five video game events were examined separately, it indicated that MCM Comic Con and Play Expo consists of a more 'balanced' division of male and female attendees, than a more male dominated attendance from video gamers that attended EuroGamer, Insomnia (i-Series) and 'Smash' (Super Smash Bros. Series) events; and there were more video gamers in 'full-time education' from Smash events, than those in 'full-time employment' from video gamers that attended Eurogamer, MCM Comic Con, Insomnia (i-Series) and Play Expo. This suggests that a specific pattern of representation may not be consistent across all video game events.

Although the stereotype of an average gamer as 35, lower middle class, white and of either gender still exists, MacCallum-Stewart (2014) states that these are simply not an accurate portrayal of the player. As MacCallum-Stewart (2014, p.4) writes:

The 'average online gamer' is a title that cannot be applied to a generation, because players include students, young professionals, mothers, retired silver surfers and children just learning to use the computer. It cannot be pinned to a specific subculture, because criminals, farmers, swimmers, agoraphobics, schoolchildren, dog lovers and hunter, from all ages, social classes, religions and races, play together. Most importantly, it cannot be applied to gamers, because the revenue generated from the games industry has been regularly surpassing cinema releases since 2009 (Chatfield, 2009; Martin, 2013). This suggest that a vast social demographic are consuming games, and were the metrics to be reversed, it seems laughable that anyone would ever try to categorise an 'average' moviegoer. In short, the online community is as diverse as anyone who can access a computer.

MacCallum-Stewart (2014) suggests that the social demographic of consuming games has shifted to the extent where we can no longer identify an 'average gamer' amongst people who can access a computer – correspondingly the social demographic of visitors that attend video game events can also be as diverse as someone who can access the venue. Similar to the limitations to identify the 'average gamer' (MacCallum-Stewart, 2014), the findings suggest that those who attend video game events include students, young professionals, mothers, fathers, uncles and children attending either for their first time, or multiple times, and for various reasons. Therefore, rather than focusing on the demographics of those who attend, it becomes more worthwhile to examine the motives for attending video game events.

By focusing on the motive of video gamers attending video game events, it may provide a shift from examining video games with narrow understandings of (direct) play, to consider the wider social aspect of video gaming away from the video game screen; of which writers such as Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008), Newman (2008), Crawford (2012) and Taylor (2012) are considering in detail what video games mean in a wider social setting and what a video gamer culture entails. Video game studies have often focused on video gamers within a private domain, such as their own living rooms, bedrooms or over the internet. However, what are the motives for video gamers coming out into the public domain, and why video game events?

Today, video game events have become a rising phenomenon, attracting increasing numbers of visitors' year after year, with its range of activities across the spectrum of video games; from exhibitions showcasing products and selling goods, video game

tournaments, cosplay competitions, signing sessions, workshops, and much more. For instance, MacCallum-Stewart (2014) highlights that the game *Free Realms* (Sony Online Entertainment, 2009) is specifically a ‘family friendly’ game (Hindman, 2011) and aims to create a new pool of players familiar with gaming conventions who will hopefully integrate games into their leisure activities throughout their lives. In particular, the gaming convention, Sony Online Entertainment [SOE] Fan Faire, that began in Las Vegas in 2000, was renamed to SOE LIVE to reflect its evolution and chart a course for the future, including games from *EverQuest/EQ* (Sony Online Entertainment, 1999), *DC Universe Online/DCUO* (Daybreak Game Company, 2011), *Free Realms* (Sony Online Entertainment, 2009) and *PlanetSide* (Sony Online Entertainment, 2003) (Haas, 2012). The rising popularity of video games suggests various motives for attending video game events, and participating in video game related practices.

The argument presented within this chapter, is that video game events are not just about playing video games, with the assumption that video gamers queue mindlessly to play game demonstrations, or compete in tournaments and competitions. Video game events consist of various social and cultural practices, besides gaming itself, where communities come together and interact in meaningful ways. Crawford (2012) argues that video gaming needs to be understood not as a solitary leisure activity that occurs only at certain isolated times and locations, but rather as a culture which extends far beyond the sight of a video game machine or screen. Although video game events occur within a certain period of time and location, it is something that happens beyond the video game screen, and there are aspects where other things happen before, during and after, attending a video game event. Many of those who attend video game events often engage themselves through various forms of socialisation, tuition, and social progression, that are often taken for granted. Hence, the findings suggest that despite the stereotypical anti-social representation of video games within the media, playing *with* video games (Newman, 2008) can be considered to be a very sociable activity that extends beyond the video game screen – in particular, to the social, participative, and competitive elements of video gaming.

5.1. Video Games and Motives

To date, there has been limited research focusing on the motives of video gamers attending video game events. Previous studies on video games have often focused on the immediate forms of play, where academics have continued to link the motives for playing video games to the assumption that it takes place in front of a video game screen. Motives to play video games has often been linked to enjoyment and entertainment (Griffiths and Hunt, 1998), to escape away from their ‘routine’ everyday life [escapism] (Philips et al., 1995), to pass time and ‘avoid boredom’ (Barnett et al., 1997), to win or surpass others through competition (Barnett et al., 1997) and to provide control over their game character and its context (Grodal, 2000). However, it is important to highlight that these motives for playing video games are not concerned with gaming as a social activity and ignore the social context of playing *with* video games (Newman, 2008). Therefore, by focusing on the motive of video gamers attending video game events, it may provide a shift from examining video games with narrow understandings of (direct) play, and consider the wider social aspect of video gaming away from the video game screen.

In relation to video game events, Jansz and Martens (2005) study on Campzone 2 (LAN event in the Netherlands - July 2002), where about 1200 people gathered (about 30/1200 women), they conducted a questionnaire (170 male and 6 female) that was in two parts; 1st set of 17 forced choice questions about demographics; 2nd part on 28 Likert-scaled statements intended to tap motives. From their questionnaire, 25/28 Likert items about motives were interpreted into four motives; competition (go to a LAN event to win), sociality (go to join like-minded gamers and friend), interest (go to gather information about games and gaming) and relaxation (go to escape from ordinary life) (Jansz and Martens, 2005). For comparative purposes, there were some similarities to this research, where several participants mentioned the same four motives interpreted by Jansz and Martens (2005). For instance, from the findings, other reasons for attendance also included competing in gaming tournaments (competition purposes), networking (sociality purposes), taking time off work (relaxation) and simply to ‘check it out’ (interest purposes). However, Jansz and Martens (2005) study only focused on one particular event (Campzone 2 - a LAN event) – in comparison to exploring various video game events. Also, Jansz and Martens (2005) study is almost a decade old, of which over time, video game events have changed and evolved in various ways. For instance, throughout the data collection (between September 2013 to December 2015), there has been a significant

increase of video game events across the United Kingdom. For example, MCM Comic Con have expanded their number of shows from London, Midlands, Telford, Birmingham and Manchester to include Scotland (from 2013), Ireland (from 2014), Belfast (from 2014), Stockholm (Sweden: from 2014), Malmo (Sweden: from 2015) and Liverpool (from 2016). From the research observations, video game events have noticeably gotten bigger with increasing numbers of attendance through their surplus appeal to attract the general public: from comic books, manga, anime, video games and much more. For instance, Batman and Robin (Group Interview: MCM Comic Con) described their weekend at MCM London Comic Con (2014) with various activities:

Batman: This event has gotten so big over the years (MCM Comic Con)... We've been around the expo already, bought a couple of things, and got a few freebies too... I'll be going to a few workshops and joining him (Robin) for the Namco signing session... people here do all sorts... this is why I like events like this, a lot of stuff going on... and you can choose what to do...

Robin: Yeah, like yesterday I just hung around with my cosplay friends and we took loads of pictures by the steps (outside the venue)... some people might see that as a waste of a day, but it doesn't really matter because it's a three-day event (Friday-Sunday)... it's what you make out of it... as long as you've enjoyed yourself...

From the group interview, Batman and Robin (Group Interview: MCM Comic Con) mentioned visiting the exhibition hall, purchasing merchandise, obtaining freebies, attending workshops and signing sessions, cosplay, taking photographs and 'hanging out'. This suggests that video game events consist of various activities taking place at the same time, and it is common for video gamers to constantly move from one thing to the next. For instance, Taylor and Witkowski's (2010, pp.2-3) study suggests that during LAN parties, besides gaming itself, the participants were constantly moving between a variety of activities:

...reading the IRB channel or Twitter feed for the event to see what others were up to and talking about and posting back to it, joining in the clapping when the dominant viral song (a catchy net-pop song titled 'Get on my horse') is played, searching for that song then downloading it (and a thousand others), finding a new screensaver or desktop image, watching films or favourite TV shows, reading game forums or speciality websites, admiring other peoples hardware and set-ups, wandering over to watch official matches and discuss scores and tactics at the e-sports arena, glancing up at the main stage from your seat to watch a dance or beatbox contest, looking around at your neighbours screens, eating at your computer (sometimes with one hand on the keyboard), wandering through the expo/demonstration area taking a look at new products on the market or other

games, getting information from political or social organisations, sleeping (head on the table, sometimes with a jacket pulled over you), and having conversations – and planning – about next year’s event

Amongst these various activities happening at the same time, it is important to consider the extent of video gaming and its culture that extends into everyday life, which can often refer to the ordinary, and at times mundane, patterns of social life (Crawford, 2012) – such as using a mobile device to play games, in quite mundane ways, while commuting. These moments can take on considerable significance, where there can also be moments of the spectacular in the midst of the everyday and the mundane (Crawford, 2012). For example, video game events can consist of video game related practices that consists of moments of the spectacular and the mundane; from hyped moments watching live matches, to simply queuing to play the latest game demonstrations. This suggests a shifting nature of consumption and development of video games, where video games can be consumed in various ways, besides gaming itself – hence, it is important to consider video games in a wider social context. Many of those who attend video game events often engage themselves through various forms of socialisation, tuition and social progression, that are often taken for granted. This suggests that there is more to video game events than just playing video games. Therefore, using the motives gathered from this research, I conducted a diagram to illustrate the three characteristics of video game attenders.

5.2. The Three Characteristics of Video Game Event Attenders

Previously, it has been suggested that video games are an anti-social activity divorced from the routine and ‘normal’ contexts of everyday life (Crawford, 2012). However, recent ethnographic research suggests that, on the contrary, gaming is performed in the context of existing social and cultural networks, friendships, and relationships while at the same time predicting novel forms of cultural activity. This involves looking at the various video game practices implicated in video gaming and how they contribute to the construction of gaming communities and identities.

From the data gathered, the majority of the participants mentioned that their purpose to attend video game events was to ‘play games’ and to ‘have fun’. Amongst these reasons for attendance, several participants suggest common factors that consist of companionship, social-practice, availability, and access:

Researcher: Which events will you be attending in the near future?

Bulbasaur: Dunno, it depends what's happening. I might go to Summer LAN (Insomnia55), but it depends when and where cos (because) the next one will be in Coventry... and it also depends who else is going... and what the prize money will be...

In simple terms, it mainly depended on 'who was going' (such as certain members of a community or celebrities), 'what was happening' (such as tournaments, signing sessions, workshops and many more) and 'if I can make it' (this included aspects of availability, access and finance). Therefore, the diagram (see Figure 5.1) illustrates the three main types of video game event attendees that have been categorised according to the reasons for attendance from the participants in the interviews and group interviews; the socialiser, the participator, and the competitors - what the diagram does not illustrate are the cleaners, the venue staff, the security staff – in particular those who attend with no means to socialise, participate or compete (such as) with others at video game events - these I will refer as the 'leakers'.

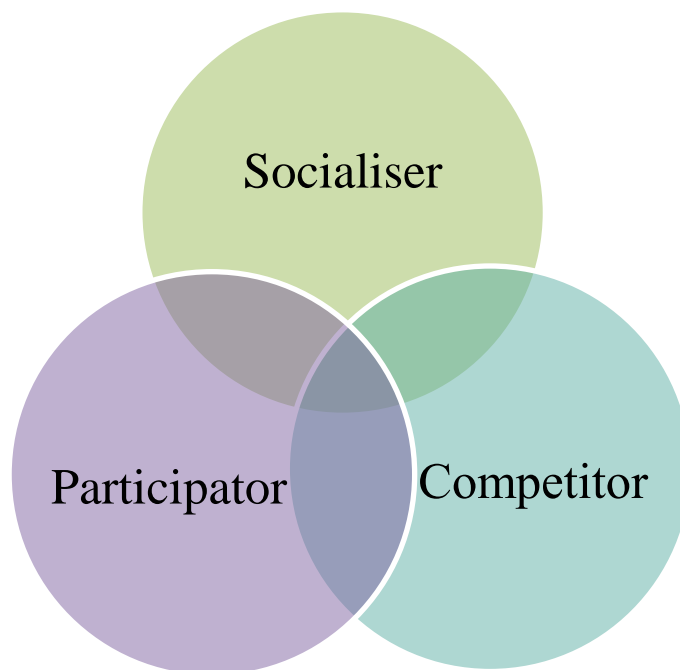


Figure 5.1. A diagram showing three types of video game attendees

Briefly, the 'socialiser' refers to individuals that attend video game events for social purposes. The 'participator' refers to individuals that attend video game events for participation purposes. Finally, the 'competitor' refers to individuals that attend video game events for competing in tournaments and/or competition purposes. However, it is important to highlight that the three types of video game attendees (illustrated above) are

not exclusive to one another (this is for simplicity purposes), as more than half the participants had some attributes from two or three categories – hence the choice of a Venn diagram (in Figure 5.1).

In addition, the three characteristics (socialiser, participator, and competitor) also consist of a continuum of socialness (very social – not social), activeness (very active – not active), and competitiveness (very competitive - not competitive). One of the most influential conceptions of leisure is found in the work of Stebbins (1982, 1997) who made a distinction between ‘serious leisure’ and ‘casual leisure’. According to Stebbins (1997), serious leisure allows individuals to develop a feeling of ‘career’ within their free time. This means that serious leisure is concerned with participants who pursue the leisure activities with an unusual passion and commitment. This is important amongst those who attended video game events, as there were those who attended for leisure and those who attended for serious leisure, and these reasons for attendance can consist of varying levels of social, participative, and competitive purposes. Therefore, it is important to consider the continuum or varying intervals of socialness (socialiser), activeness (participator) and competitiveness (competitor) – for example, a participant can be very social, moderately active, but not competitive, and vice versa.

Also, it is important to highlight that certain roles amongst video gamers can change throughout the duration of the day. Video gamers often choose from the various activities that take place at video game events, where they decide how to schedule their day and nip in and out from one activity to the next. As Kirby, Meta Knight, King Dedede, Adeleine and Bandana Waddle Dee (Group Interview: EuroGamer) states:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Kirby: | We’ve been queuing for hours... and as you can see, we’re not even close yet... |
| Researcher: | And what have you guys been doing in the queue while you wait? |
| Kirby: | Mainly hanging out... and looking for things to pass time... |
| Meta Knight: | Like trying to win an Xbox 360?
<i>*Group laughs*</i> |
| Researcher: | Oh, the one from the announcement? (The Xbox 360 challenge – from the Xbox One promotion) |
| King Dedede: | Yeah, a few of us have been slipping in and out of the queue to go check it out... there are several to be |

given out throughout the day, and so far, each challenge has been different...

- Adeleine: Shame you didn't get picked to beat that kid in the last one...
- Meta Knight Arghhh... I'm still bummed I didn't get picked... I could have so beaten that kid in that racing game... he was rubbish...
- Adeleine: Yeah, but there was no guarantee you'd get picked... they pick people randomly from the audience... maybe I should have gone...
- Banadana Waddle Dee: It's worth going and sticking around anyway... because they throw out **free swag** afterwards... like this T-Shirt I got!
- Meta Knight That's a size large! I thought you were giving that to me!

Despite queuing for hours for the latest game demonstrations, Kirby, Meta Knight, King Dedede, Adeleine and Bandana Waddle Dee (Group Interview: EuroGamer) assigned themselves switching roles, where a few of them would stay in the queue for the latest demonstration releases, while the others attempted to win an Xbox 360 and obtain free swag. Similar to Gold's (1958) classification scheme of participant observer roles (as discussed in chapter 4), moments of the spectacular and the mundane can be considered on a classification scheme of video gamer roles – where the role amongst video gamers within an event environment can change in an instant, from moments of the spectacular and the mundane (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: The Typology of Video Gamer Roles – Mundane and Spectacular Moments	
Gold's (1958) Typology of the Participant Observer Roles	The Typology of Video Gamer Roles – Mundane and Spectacular Moments
The complete observer	The complete mundane moments
The observer as participant	The more mundane to spectacular moments
The participant as observer	The more spectacular to mundane moments
The complete participant	The complete spectacular moments

During the data collection process with the Smash community, the organiser arranged a table on the balcony of the venue for the researcher to conduct research. However, several

Smash players began gathering around the table because they had ‘nothing better to do’ after being knocked out in the early stages of the tournament – although these Smash players were considered to be ‘**salty**’ (the feeling of bitterness from losing), they began talking about their match experiences. Consequently, this led to confusion that the researcher was offering counselling, ‘is this the losers table, where everyone is receiving counselling?’ (Smash Player: Edmas 2). I want to highlight this situation, because it illustrates an important factor, that during a video game event, there are moments considered as ‘mundane moments’ or ‘**dead time**’– this refers to moments where individuals are not doing anything in a particular situation. Video gamers that experience moments of ‘dead time’ often attempt to fill it with an alternative activity – sometimes to avoid boredom or simply to fill the limited time to make more worthwhile. For example, when I asked for permission to conduct research at Play Expo (2013), I was instructed by the director to conduct research with individuals while queues, because it was considered ‘dead time’ to the ‘paid customers’ that came to enjoy the show. Also, during the data collection at EuroGamer (2014), I observed several people bringing portable gaming devices to play while queuing for the latest game demonstrations. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this suggests that there are moments of the mundane when attending video game events, which can often refer to the ordinary, and at times mundane, patterns of social life (Crawford, 2012). However, besides these examples of moments of the mundane, there were also moments of the spectacular, such as the ‘hyped moments’ that consist of screaming and shouting during live matches from spectators, meeting celebrities, ‘elite fans’ or ‘Big Names Fans’ (Hills, 2006) and much more. Hence, there can also be moments of the spectacular in the midst of the everyday and the mundane (Crawford, 2012).

The purpose of identifying the three types of video game attendees is to categorise the various reasons for attendance within their different forms of social encounters within video game communities, which at the same time differs from one another when compared to their ‘normal’ video game experiences in everyday life – this will be examined later.

5.2.1. The Socialiser

The ‘socialiser’ usually consists of individuals that come together for social purposes, besides playing video games themselves. This can include the opportunity to meet people,

communicate through social networking, or simply to ‘hang out’ with others. The sense of belonging amongst ‘socialisers’ is often sustained by individuals with similar interests that come together. For instance, almost all the participants that attend video game events did not attend on their own. The majority of the participants either attended with a friend or a group of friends. Also, it was common for ‘socialisers’ to attend a video game event and meet others throughout the day, and ‘hang out’ together. This suggests that being social could be considered an important trait to promote a friendly environment and interaction with others of similar interests.

‘It means something to be there’

Amongst the reasons for attendance, Pikachu (Interviewee: MCM Conic Con) states that ‘*it means something to be there*’. This suggests a strong sense of community amongst those who attend and share the same moments together. As Pikachu (Interviewee: MCM Conic Con) states:

Pikachu: ...we all played the game and share common interests... it means something to be there...

Researcher: What does it mean for you to be there?

Pikachu: My life... I’m willing to ditch work if I can’t get it off to be there... I’m very committed.

Pikachu’s (Interviewee: MCM Conic Con) notion that ‘it means something to be there’, suggests that ‘being there’ and ‘together’ provides a welcoming atmosphere with considerations to a worthwhile leisure lifestyle shared amongst gamers (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011). For instance, Jackson’s (2004) ‘Inside Clubbing: Sensual Experiences in the Art of Being Human’, suggests that sensual experiences take shape through music, dance, dress, drugs, sex and the over-arching “vibe” that characterises alternative club spaces – alternatively, this can also be applied to video game events.

In addition, Pikachu (Interviewee: MCM Conic Con) attempts to capture the meaning and significance through the prioritisation of attendance to a certain video game event and to be with others of similar interests over work - in this instance, to attend Distant Worlds (Final Fantasy Orchestral). From a sociological perspective, individualistic set priorities often reflect on education, love, and career goals. For instance, Sue Sharpe’s (1994) study on set priorities, suggests that girls that were unlikely to attach a higher importance education, consist of love, marriage, husbands, children, jobs and career (more or less in

this order). In Sharpe's (1994) later studies, she suggests that women no longer want to get married as they see men and marriage as a liability to their career. However, Sharpe's (1994) study is over a decade old, of which set priorities may have changed over time, and her study does not consider the set priorities amongst men and leisure opportunities. In this particular instance, to be willing to 'ditch work' to attend certain video game events suggests its importance to consider the cultural shift to prioritise leisure over work, and a form of escape from 'normal' everyday life through leisure activities.

Amongst the set priorities mentioned, almost all the participants had made prior plans and taken certain days off work to attend video game events. Planning to attend video game events often involves some degree of socialisation to organise together, where these efforts are often overlooked. Similar to the diversity of domestic labour, it is the 'invisible housework' that tends to be disregarded – such as meal planning and coordinating tasks (Kaminer, Izquierdo and Bradbury, 2013). A common feature of planning to attend video game events sometimes involves 'getting to know others' and 'booking hotel, travel, and tickets'. These forms of organisation processes require a certain level of socialisation, commitment and finance, which have often been taken for granted. For example, Mr. Game and Watch (Interviewee: Smash UK) stated that he travelled from Bristol to Birmingham to attend Cabin Fever 1 (2014), which consist of a several hour journey via public transport. After attending several Smash events, Mr. Game and Watch (Interviewee: Smash UK) opted to travel with other 'Smash players' (Super Smash Bro. Series players) to 'Smash events' (Super Smash Bro. Series events), and considered it to be a 'fun and cheaper option', in comparison to organising travel by yourself.

Mr. Game and Watch: Yeah... it's quite a commitment because I'm from Bristol, so I have to travel for it and look for accommodation... I met like a lot of people at these events while playing Smash, so it's quite nice meeting people and arranging travel together.

This suggests that it may be an important trait to be social within these public gaming spaces as it was also uncommon for individuals to attend video game events alone and solely play video games, without some form of social interaction with others.

'It's about being with like-minded people'

From the data gathered, almost all the participants mentioned the motive to attend video game events to socialise with others. As Bulbasaur, Charmander and Squirtle (Group Interview: Insomnia) states:

Charmander: ...people are so busy these days... so it's rare I get to see everyone, especially those who live far away... but when something (a video game event) comes up, most of us make an effort to go... and it's great to see everyone again...

Squirtle: Yeah, with us it's ok, because we're all from Manchester, so we see each other quite often, but it's other people like Mr. Mime and Jynx... they've moved to London now, so we only get to see them at i-Series (Insomnia Gaming Festivals)...

Bulbasaur: I agree... this is why I've been to every single one since i34 (Insomnia34)... it's about being with like-minded people... where a bunch of us make the effort to come together, so we don't disappoint... unlike some people... and why aren't you going to the next one Charmander?

Charmander: It's my Dad's 50'th birthday!

Bulbasaur: For four days? Disappointment!

This suggests that video game events provide an opportunity for video gamers, who are usually separated, by distance to come together – in particular; it is the desire to 'hang around, meet friends, just be' (Bloustein, 2003, p.166) as much and as often as possible, as part of their sense of independence (Ito et al., 2010). For instance, Squirtle (Group Interview: Insomnia) suggests that his motive for attending Insomnia (i-Series) is not just about playing games, but to 'hang out' with others;

Squirtle: I do enjoy playing but I mainly go to Insomnia (i-Series) to hang out

Researcher: What do you do in particular when you 'hang out'?

Squirtle: We mainly play games, but one where we can all sit together, rather than sit at our own desks... we talk... we drink... just have fun mainly and catch up...

From the research observations, it was common to hang out throughout the video game event with others of similar interests. In particular, 'hanging out' did not necessarily take place within a specific time and location, but through the use of other spaces, such as inside and outside the venue, and including 'out of opening hours'. Similar to a conversation that can carry on away from a video game screen, it was common for groups

of individuals to carry on ‘hanging out’ around the venue or venture into the evening (after the event) with other activities during ‘after-hours’ – such as hanging out in their hotel rooms, ‘grabbing food together’, ‘grabbing a drink’ from the pub, or going to both official and unofficial after-parties. The practice of hanging out and communicating with friends can create new kinds of opportunities to develop identities, connection, and communication. As Ito et al. (2010, p.36) states:

“Hanging out,” “messaging around,” and “geeking out” describe differing levels of investments in new media activities in a way that integrates an understanding of technical, social, and cultural patterns...

This suggests that when video gamers come together to socialise, it is about reuniting and strengthening bonds (MacCallum-Stewart, 2014). However, it is important to highlight that these means to come together can sometimes become an obligation, where the presence of others can influence the decisions of others to go to certain events. For instance, participant Ness (Interviewee: Smash UK), a recently recruited sponsored Smash player, felt obligated to attend Cabin Fever 1 (2014), due to other team members attending.

Researcher: What made you decide to come here today?

Ness: I dunno, just did... everyone else was going... so I felt that I had to come... because I’m part of the crew...

Researcher: What do you like about the crew in particular?

Ness: It’s my home boys... my friends... that I see every week... where we play games, have a chat... and have a bit of a laugh, that’s about it...

Ito et al. (2010) suggest that individuals use all that is available to craft and display their social identities and interact with their peers. Although those who struggle to fit in are often subject to ‘peer pressure’, it can also be considered a powerful peer-based learning environment, where individuals are constructing and picking up social norms, tastes, knowledge, and culture from those around them (Ito et al., 2010).

A common feature amongst socialisers is conversation. As mentioned in the literature review (in chapter 3), conversation amongst video gamers can continue away from the video game screen – in particular, video game events, where individuals with similar interests are drawn together. As Ness (Interviewee: Smash UK) states:

Ness: I use to play a lot of games online and there were no communities like this online... and no sense of belonging... it was more of, yeah I play this game... whereas, now it's more like, yeah I play Smash and I’m part of

Smash UK and I have it on my shirt and everything... and we're all part of the community... and I'm really bad at talking to people when I don't know them,... but whenever I come to 'Smash Festivals', I can talk to someone... because we have the same interest of Smash and... like... I know enough about Smash to hold a conversation with someone... and we can talk about stuff... like there are things that they don't know and there are also things that I don't know...

Ness (Interviewee: Smash UK) compares similarities and differences within video game communities and suggest that offline communities offer a sense of belonging in comparison to online communities. In particular, Ness (Interviewee: Smash UK) states that he often meets other Smash players face-to-face and talks about Smash amongst other things. Taylor (2003) suggests that most video gamers often enjoy the sociability of video gaming and conversations will tend to continue away from the sight of a gaming screen. Therefore, it is important not to underestimate the non-playing experience in gaming cultures - sometimes a video gamer culture can consist largely around social interactions, talk and community with a little emphasis on gameplay (Newman, 2008). This suggests that video gamers may not necessarily be passive in their gameplay, but have a particular focus on their social interaction (communication) with other video gamers. For instance, Charmander (Group Interview: Insomnia) identified that he had spent more time socialising with others, than playing video games over a 4-day event at Insomnia (i-Series).

Charmander: I think I spent more time hanging around with the new peeps (people) I made this weekend than actually playing games at my desk...

This suggests that video game events may not necessarily be about playing games nonstop, and living up to the stereotypical anti-social gamer. For instance, Taylor (2012) suggests that LAN events consists of video gamers whom attempt to stay up for 4 days straight playing video games using the consumption of energy drinks. However, studies suggest that video game events are not just about playing video games, it is about getting to know people and spending time with others. As Jansz and Martens (2005) highlights that gaming events are frequently attended by gamers for the talk, conversation and discussions. For instance, video gamers can form common associations or friendships with other gamers. This suggests that the identity of individuals and the cohesion of communities can be built amongst video gamers that are able to interact with each other to form their own webs of personal relationships, based on their set of shared values and common interests (Rutter and Bryce, 2006). As Mr. Game and Watch (interviewee) states:

Mr. Game and Watch: I have my smash friends and I also have my normal friends. I consider them to be different because we talk about different things... like I don't talk about smash with my other friends and they also don't know I play smash... I probably met a good 100 people from smash and some are international smashers (Smash players) too... I probably have more friends from playing Smash than anything else...

Mr. Game and Watch (interviewee) suggest that he has two groups of friends; his 'Smash friends' and 'normal friends'. Similar to Crawford and Gosling's (2008) study, video gaming provided a sense of community and group of friends separate from their other social networks. In particular, Mr. Game and Watch (interviewee) states that he does not 'talk about Smash' with his other friends. This suggests that the separation from other social groups was the shared culture and understanding of video games. For instance, those who do not play smash may not necessarily fully understand certain aspects of the game and its culture around it. For example, as previously mentioned in the literature review, game knowledge is an important aspect within video game communities. As Captain Falcon (Interviewee: Smash UK) suggest that he talks about different things to his 'Smash friends' and 'normal friends'. For instance, 'game language' that used specific terms and slangs were considered markers for understanding the language of the community. As Captain Falcon (Interviewee: Smash UK) defines:

Captain Falcon: Bodied... it basically means you lost extremely badly... so it's like getting 4-stocked or 8-stocked. And 4-stocked is a Smash word anyway because it's how many stocks you can take off your opponent that happens while playing... there's also JV, it doesn't stand for anything, but I think there was a guy with a tag called JV

Researcher: So it was a term named after a smasher (Smash player)?

Captain Falcon: Yeah, there's a lot named after smashers... but basically, a JV is when you 4 stock someone and you have 0% on your stock, you can JV5 them and if you 3 stocked someone on 0% you've JV'ed 4 them... Yeah, these come from other Smashers names... it's like they've 'set the trend' and everyone just refers it to that...

Researcher: Is this information you've gathered over time?

Captain Falcon: Yeah, I spend a lot of time reading up on Smash stuff

Researcher: Is this knowledge that everyone is expected to know within the Smash community?

Captain Falcon: No, not everyone... but it's useful to know, so you know what everyone else is on about... and if you hang around long enough, you'll learn the terms eventually...

Although Captain Falcon (Interviewee: Smash UK) suggests that not everyone is expected to know these 'game terms', he does propose that these terms will eventually be learned. This suggests some aspects of a knowledge community – in particular, a 'collective intelligence' (Lévy, 1997), where communities collectively act to pool resources and add individual work to a greater whole. This suggests that self-organised groups are held together by shared patterns of production and mutual knowledge. For instance, video gamers often organise themselves into groups and behave in ways that are based on particular games, or a particular genre, or the broader phenomenon of gaming (Mäyrä, 2008). This includes those with particular interests, values, norms and sometimes even languages – in this instance, game terms and 'slangs words'. This suggests that video games have now become a way for people to identify themselves, to find like-minded individuals, and participate in a world that merges with their 'real life' in new and exciting ways.

Despite the stereotypical anti-social representation of video games, when attending video game events, being social can play an important role in making connections and networks. For instance, Scott Pilgrim (Interviewee: Eurogamer) considered video game events to be an opportunity to network with people within the video games industry.

Scott Pilgrim: It's a great opportunity to meet people... and you may even meet people with potential job opportunities.

Amongst the 'socialisers' networking was a common feature, where it consists of individuals exchanging information and business cards – especially amongst game designers, exhibitors, photographers, cosplayers and graduate students for potential career opportunities. This suggests an importance of networking amongst those within the video games industry – such as those with a similar background, of like-minded people.

'It is important to be friendly'

From the data gathered, it seemed important for video gamers to be social within an event environment. Taylor (2003) highlights that communication within a virtual environment requires 'people skills' during gameplay; such as being known as a good player or being a reliable team player. Taylor (2003) suggests that knowledge to actual gameplay becomes

crucial to being known as a ‘good player’; where these skills can act as a real commodity and be transferrable to other aspects of ‘ordinary’ life. One important aspect within video game communities is the representation of oneself; whether if it is being friendly, nice, horrible or rude, these personalities often reflect off individuals, which can sometimes determine their inclusiveness or exclusiveness to a video game community. For example, from the group interview, Bowser (Group Interview: Smash UK) mentions that; ‘...usually, everyone is really nice... no-one will want to play with you if you’re not nice’. Similar to aspects of being a ‘good player’ within the virtual world, as Taylor (2003) describes it, these rules also apply to communities that meet face-to-face.

In addition, Rengar the Pridestalker and Kah’Zix the Voidreaver (Group Interview: Insomnia) mentions that it is considered ‘weird’ to be anti-social;

Rengar the Pridestalker: That was weird... there was a 14-year-old kid who bought his mum to LAN... don’t get me wrong, we see kids often, but mainly in the expo hall, not in the LAN hall... she basically just sat with him throughout the entire time, she looked so bored... and the kid didn’t even get to make any friends because the mum was so over-protective... she should have just let him embrace it... How else will he grow up? He needs to learn... hopefully, he learnt not to bring his mum next time...

Kah’Zix the Voidreaver: It’s hard though, but at the same time, I didn’t see anything wrong with that... he’s at an age where he’s not quite old enough to go with friends and definitely not by himself...

Rengar the Pridestalker and Kah’Zix the Voidreaver (Group Interview: Insomnia) mentions a situation where a 14-year-old boy goes to LAN while being accompanied by his mother. It is important to highlight that the majority of the video game events have the option to purchase a family ticket for admission during public opening hours (usually between 10am-6pm) - however, due to the nature of a LAN event, in particular BYOC (bring your own computer) gamers, a BYOC tickets grants 24/7 access to the BYOC hall - therefore, this requires BYOC gamers to independently ‘look after themselves’ throughout the duration of the four-day event; from food, sleep arrangements, etc. This suggests that age and video game events can be considered an important matter. For instance, attending video game events requires video gamers to be of a certain age to participate in certain activities – such as age appropriate language or behaviour. For example, from the field-

notes during Insomnia55 (i55), there was an incident where the tabloid made an announcement;

Tabloid: ...please can 'Jay Cartwright' report to the information desk. Your friends are waiting for you.

LAN Gamers: *Everyone laughs*
'Oooooo... friend....'
'Friend...'
'Reception friend...'
'I'm not your fucking friend!'
'I'm so glad we don't have any kids around us, we can be so inappropriate...'

In this particular situation, the LAN gamers were 'making fun' of the 'lost child' announced on the tabloid with the 'friend' reference from the TV series 'The Inbetweeners' ('Will Gets a Girlfriend', 2008). Despite video games being stereotyped to be played amongst children, within an event environment, age mattered. In order to 'fit in' to certain video game communities, you could not be too young, nor too old. Even though some video game events were family based, where there were options to purchase a family ticket, those who were considered themselves old enough to attend video game events without parents, but too young to consume alcohol legally, often 'missed out' on participating in certain video game related practices.

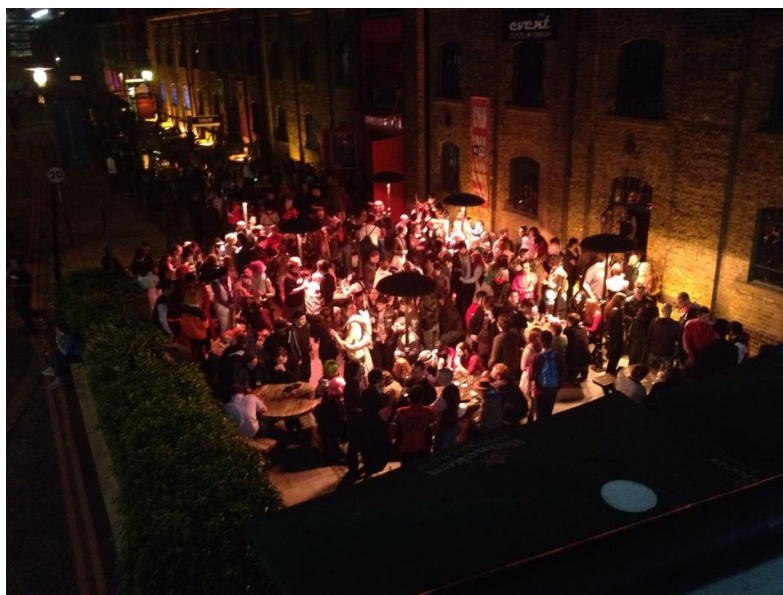


Figure 5.2: The 'after-party' pub gathering after London MCM Comic Con
[Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

For example, MCM Comic Con (London) often involved (unofficial) ‘after-parties’ at the end of the day at a nearby local pub (see Figure 5.2), where numerous individuals attend to socialise with each other. However, this required ‘ID’ (18+ identification) to get in – of which the researcher was ‘ID’ed twice by the security guard, once upon entry and twice while sat down with a Diet Coke. It is important to highlight those who attend video game events and participated in the consumption of alcohol often ranged between the ages of 18-25 years old – as a researcher at 26 years old, I was considered on the higher end of the age spectrum – although I was often mistaken for looking younger. For example, from my field-notes, after revealing my age to REXXAR (Interviewee: Insomnia), he was surprised that my age did not match my appearance;

Rexxar: Oh my god, you’re 26?! I thought you were younger.... I’m 18... you’re like, 10 years older than me! You’re old enough to be my Mom!

Despite being identified as ‘old’, I often kept quiet about my age, because I did not want to be considered as an ‘outsider’. For instance, as mentioned earlier (in chapter 4), Taylor (2012) faced power imbalances related to her age when compared to her participants, where she was considered as an ‘outsider’. Therefore, within a video gamer culture, communities may restrict members, even without stating explicit requirements. Even though video games have been considered to consist of a friendly environment, some of them involve forms of inclusion and exclusion, including age.

Finally, it’s about keeping in contact afterwards...

In relation to video game studies, there has often been a dominant focus on online communities, rather than offline communities; of which I argue that they should be examined simultaneously. From the research findings, it was common for participants to come together at video game events, but at the same time, it was also important for them to stay connected until they meet again. As previously mentioned, video game events provide a unique opportunity for individuals, who are usually separated by distance, to come together and share their interests in video games. It is important to highlight that not all communities are evolved on conversation alone and sometimes requires face-to-face interaction. As previously mentioned (in chapter 3), Pearce and Artemisia (2009) identified patterns among ‘*The Gathering of Uru*’ (TGU) and *There.com* players, where they migrate outside of the virtual and into the real world. This suggests that video game

events can provide online communities the opportunity to meet in person. As Luigi (Group Interview: Play Expo) states; 'It's nice to put faces to names you've seen on forums'. Despite coming together within a temporal time and space, the research findings suggests that the 'socialisers' often stay connected and look forward to meet again; whether if it is over social media (such as Facebook and Twitter), Skype or other forms of online and offline socialisation. It is important to highlight that the social dynamics shifts once you have met someone in person, in comparison to someone you have not met in person online. In particular, online communities have often been criticized for its lack of repercussions, due to its online nature that individuals can be kept hidden from identification (Boellstorff et al., 2012). In comparison, once you have met someone in person, it becomes 'easier' to identify individuals within a video game community; whether if it is online or offline. These forms of online and offline socialisation suggest that they both provide a rich variation of social life and community (Taylor, 2003). For instance, online communities are still real communities populated with real people:

Online communities are not virtual. The people that we meet online are not virtual. They are real communities populated with real people which is why so many end up meeting in the flesh... They teach us about real languages, real meanings, real causes, real cultures (Kozinets, 2010, p.15)

Kozinets (2010, p.27) suggests that online communities consist of real people with patterns of relationship development, that is no different to real communities, where; '...specialized language and sensitized concepts, norms, values, rituals, practices, preferences, and the identities of experts and other group members... a group structure of power and status relationships is learned'. This suggests that other types of communities that form quickly or temporarily can also consist of similar attributes. For instance, MacCallum-Stewart (2014) provides an example using Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) *DotA 2* (Valve Corporation, 2013), a game in which teams of players fight each other in short player-versus-player (PvP) battles that last between 20 minutes and an hour. Although there are plenty of opportunities for communication amongst video gamers during game play (before, during and after) in in-game chats, and for conversations to carry on away from the video game screen, it is important to highlight that good social relations are not only encouraged, but elements to sustain them are also an integral part to acknowledge groups formed outside of gameplay and demonstrate how video gamers can form certain type of relationships amongst each other (MacCallum-Stewart 2014). This suggests that video gaming does not take place in a vacuum and players' responds to their

experiences of play frequently spill over into other contexts (Crawford, 2005). Video game events have begun to be held on a much larger scale, where the creation of forums via magazines and conventions highlights the level of importance communication had to the overall formation of both the genre and its community. Without the establishment of this network, it is arguable that the cultural aspects of video gamer culture, in particular those that attend video game events, would not be as highly developed today. Therefore, it is important to consider the video game events are not just about individuals coming together, it also consists of social and cultural practices, such as the various activities individuals participate in – hence the importance to explore the ‘participator’.

5.2.2. The Participator

The ‘participator’ refers to individuals that attend video game events for participation purposes. As mentioned earlier, Newman (2008) suggests that it is not just the act of *playing* video games, but also how people play *with* video games. Therefore, participating at video game events tells us something more than just what games people play. Crawford (2012) suggests that there are various forms of productive activities of secondary or video game related texts; such as video game mods, walkthroughs, fan fiction, art, cosplay and so forth - in particular; we see how gameplay has integrated into and across everyday life (Crawford, 2012).

From the research findings, common forms of participation at video game events (besides gaming itself) included exploring the exhibition hall, purchasing merchandise, attending signing sessions and workshops, cosplay, and community practices (such as ritual and traditional practices) - this also includes competitions and tournaments (as examined later in chapter 5.2.3).

Unlike the socialiser, the participator refers to those who participate in various activities with the intention to ‘do something’, or simply to ‘take part’ in something within an event environment, but not necessarily competitively. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, these characteristics (socialiser, participator and competitor) can overlap. One example of a socialiser and participator overlap can refer to those who participate in community practices for the purpose of taking part and to be with others. Meanwhile, those who cosplay for social, participative and competitive purposes can consist of all three characteristics – this will be examined later. Despite the examples provided for the

three characteristics, the following activities analysed in this section can consist of characteristics from the socialiser and competitor - therefore, it should not be taken literally.

Exhibition Hall - 'Have you been to the exhibition hall yet?'

Throughout this research, I have noticed the growing numbers of video game events and visitors, as well as the increasing capacity of the exhibition hall and changing location of the venue itself – usually to a bigger venue. Amongst the participants, it was a common activity to ‘walk around’ the venue - in particular, the exhibition hall and purchase merchandise; ‘It’s always worth having a look at the exhibition hall... even if you don’t intend to buy anything’ (Teemo the Swift Scout – Interviewee: Insomnia). Most video game events usually consist of one exhibition hall (the main hall - such as Eurogamer and Play Expo), one exhibition hall and one BYOC hall (such as Insomnia/i-Series), or two exhibition halls (such as MCM Comic Con), amongst other rooms for various purposes. The exhibition hall represents the cultural theme of the convention itself, where ‘everything is happening in one big hall’ (Annie the Dark Child – Interviewee: Insomnia), from game demonstrations, exhibitor stalls, tournaments, and competitions, signing sessions and workshops, and much more (see Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3: The exhibition hall of Insomnia57 (i57)

However, the exhibition hall has experienced changes over time – in particular, the expansion of the exhibition hall. According to the participants, a few pointed out that

several video game events consist an element of history, especially amongst those who had been continuously attending year after year – such as, MCM Comic Con and Insomnia (i-Series). For instance, the video game events examined in this research, MCM Comic Con and Insomnia (i-Series) was considered one of the ‘oldest’ conventions, compared to the other video game events (see Table 5.2).

Event	Date	Venue	Attendance
Insomnia (i-Series)	1-2 March 1999	Bicester Army Camp - in conjunction with Wireplay	20+
MCM Comic Con (formerly known as London MCM Expo)	18-19 May 2002	EXCEL London Centre	10,000+
Smash UK – Judgement Day	10-11 July 2004	Organisers House - Newcastle	20+
Video Games Live	25 th November 2006	Hammersmith Apollo	3,000+
EuroGamer	28-29 October 2008	Old Truman Brewery – part of the London Games Festival	4,000+
Play Expo (formerly known as R3play Expo)	6-7 November 2010	Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool	1000+
EGX Rezzed	6-7 July 2012	Brighten Centre	4,000+
Final Fantasy Orchestral Concert – Distant Worlds	5th November 2011	Royal Albert Hall, London	5,000+

Today, MCM Comic Con has been considered one of the biggest multi-genre fan conventions, focusing on anime, manga, video games, comic books, sci-fi, cosplay and popular media from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan. However, it has been suggested that MCM Comic Con was originally based on comic books – hence the title MCM Comic Con for Movie Comic Media (MCM) Comic Convention. As Master Chief (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) states:

Master Chief: It’s not based on gaming at all... er... MCM should really be based on comics... but it’s expanded since the Americans did it... because some of the exhibitors mentioned... erm... that some comic conventions like MCM Comic Con has

been bombarded by video games, and anime... but when it comes to the actual comic books... they are hidden in the corner...

Like... it belittles the people who are meant to be here... but then there are people that are getting paid to be here to sell stuff that you can get everywhere else... Like if you go to an artist... you can't go and get that artist's painting again and again... you can get it once, and you can get it signed... Or a sketch... done specifically for yourself...

Master Chief (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) suggests that the expansion to include video games, anime and manga has often 'belittled' the Comic Village – in particular, this suggests a shift from organisations by and for enthusiasts, to expansions that have been considered to be 'profit driven', or become more 'corporate' for capitalistic measures. For instance, Master Chief (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) mentions that several exhibitors from more established companies (such as retailers Game and CEX) often overcrowd the exhibition hall with bigger stalls and banners, even when these stalls sell the same items that are already available on high streets; in comparison to enthusiasts (such as artists) that provide a unique service. From the field-notes, several exhibitors from more established companies mentioned that they often occupy a company policy to exhibit if there are over 10,000 visitors. Hence, smaller events usually consist of smaller organisations, which has been considered to be 'more intimate' or 'community based' - such as 'Manchester Anime and Gaming Con' and 'Doki Doki'. Consequently, this has led Master Chief (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) and several other participants to visit other events, such as 'Thought Bubble', which continues to have comic books as its main focus and organisations by and for enthusiasts.

Similarly, Insomnia (i-Series) has also been through a transitional change; from having no exhibition hall to begin with, moving to bigger venues, expanding the exhibition hall, and eventually being bought by the UK retailer GAME. Therefore, these historical elements have been considered to be important amongst video gamers because these are considered of what constitutes the foundations of the event itself, through changes and development, and how it came to what it is today.

As mentioned earlier, amongst the participators, it was a common activity to 'walk around' the exhibition hall. However, it is important to highlight that 'walking around' the exhibition hall consists of more than the physical motions of walking and 'looking around'. Similar to visits to a museum, individuals do not just 'walk around', museum

visitors 'emotionally prepare themselves to come and take a journey of personal introspection' (Gurian, 2006, p.173). As, Pac-Man (Interviewee – Play Expo) states:

Pac-Man: The most awesome thing I've seen here... to me it's got to be the 'Puck Man' cab (arcade cabinet), before the name change to 'Pac-Man'... that thing must be so rare... seeing a machine that you've not seen since you played on as a kid, that still works, is amazing... it like taking a trip down memory lane... and yeah, there's also a feeling of oh my god, that was years ago... I feel so old...

In this instance, Pac-Man (Interviewee – Play Expo) suggests a connection to certain senses that have been utilised in constructing the experience. Although Gurian's (2006) study examines the Holocaust Museum, unlike a museum, which often imposes 'an optionless route' on the visitor (Gurian, 2006, p.173), a video game event allows the visitor to find his or her own way without 'a predetermined sequence' (Hein, 1998). This suggests that the different ways in visiting video game events, can become an important part of life: money is saved for these trips, they come with social and emotional expectations, and the time of everyday life is organised around them.

Merchandise - 'I'm looking to buy a nice figurine, t-shirt and maybe some games'

Within the exhibition hall, there are various exhibitors, from big companies to small companies, artists, and enthusiasts selling items that are related to video games, anime, manga, sci-fi, comic books and much more. From the research findings, it was common for visitors to visit the exhibition hall to browse and sometimes purchase merchandise. Amongst the participants, several mentioned that they purposely attended video game events to purchase merchandise, because it was considered 'cheaper' and 'more of it' compared to 'other places' – such as specialised stores.

Consumption is one of the basic ways in which society is structured and organised through differential powers, resources, and life chances, of which consumer patterns are routinely produced and reproduced. Previously consumption was an outcast, until a period of expansion and there was a major consumer boom in many countries around the world. There was a growth in affluence and a change in work patterns, where people started to work more to be able to spend on leisure activities. In relation to video games, there became a shift from bedroom coders to video games becoming readily available on shop floors; from specialised game stores, entertainment stores, department stores and even

supermarkets. The levels of advertising in the mass media dramatically increased to introduce new products into the market and encourage consumers to purchase goods. Wrigley and Lowe (1996) highlights that there was a rise of a whole series of new forms of shopping, including the ‘captured market’ which consists of different sites intended for other purposes to become shopping opportunities. For example, video game events consist of exhibition halls with themed merchandise stalls to attract people of similar interests. Also, the rising popularity of video game events has produced a demand to increase the number of video game events, where several video game events have begun to ‘repeat’ more than once a year and included different locations to capture consumers on a wider scale, both geographically and internationally. Therefore, the increased availability of video games events becomes a part of ‘taking consumption to the consumer’ (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996). Consequently, consumption became more readily available through strong retail industries, including the video game industry.

From the research findings, it was common to purchase merchandise from the exhibition hall. For instance, Blinky (Group Interview: MCM Comic Con) mentions the accessibility of merchandise from the exhibition hall;

Blinky: I usually buy my stuff online... but then there're shipping costs, customs... so it can become quite expensive... there are some stuff that you can buy from specialised stores, but they don't always have what you want... and sometimes you want to see the items physically if that makes sense... This is why I loved going around the expo hall... because it's something you have an interest in... where all the stuff you like is in one location...

Similar to the other events examined, the main importance is visiting the exhibition hall, where there are similar themed merchandise stalls that becomes worthwhile to ‘check it out’. However, it is important to highlight that video game events do not solely sell video games – when I refer to merchandise, I am not referring to official merchandise, such as video games, consoles and game guides available on high streets – I am referring to merchandise by and for enthusiasts, from video game related T-shirts, jumpers, belt buckles, jewellery, cupcakes, fanart, cosplay and much more. For example, Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde (Group Interview: MCM Comic Con) mentions their purchase from the exhibition hall;

Researcher: Did you buy anything from the exhibition hall?

Blinky: I got a few cosplay items... we're thinking of dressing up as maids for the next one... so mainly just stuff for that...

- Pinky: Yeah, I bought a really cute headband from this Lolita cosplay store for my maid outfit... but we're gonna go back again to take another look... and maybe buy some cupcakes, I really want the Pikachu cupcake!
- Inky: I'm skint, so won't be buying anything...
- Clyde: I didn't buy anything, just browsing... because it's all the same stuff every year... same exhibitors... same items... it seemed special the first time you go, like these guys (Blinky, Pinky, and Inky)... because it's their first time going... but after a few more times, you'll start noticing it's the same every year, then eventually find it pointless...

Video game events consist of organisations by and for enthusiasts; where exhibitors sell video game related items from official and unofficial merchandise, to fan-made items. Similar to aspects of a subculture, Hodkinson (2002) considers the productive or organisational activities that are undertaken by and for enthusiasts, suggesting a connection to the society and politico-economic system. Even though video gamers may not necessarily share a distinctive taste in fashion or music, similar to goths, those who attend video game events, share a way to identify themselves to find like-minded individuals and similar interests; such as purchasing merchandise in the exhibition hall.

However, Clyde (Group Interview: MCM Comic Con) suggests that some video game events, in particular, MCM Comic Con and Play Expo, have repetitive merchandise across these exhibition halls, '...it's the same stuff every year'. This suggests that it is common for exhibitors to visit the same events year after year. For instance, from my fieldwork, I have encountered several exhibitors from attending various video game events, and while I went on holiday to Hong Kong in 2012, I recognised an exhibitor from previous video game events in the United Kingdom, who travelled to Hong Kong to exhibit in the Hong Kong Comic Convention, selling the same merchandise – small world indeed.

To an extent, I consider consumption a form of participation – it is about enthusiasts setting up stalls for people and by people with similar interests, and engaging in patterns of consumption with themed items that reflects self-interest and identity. This suggests that consumption functions as a way for the consumer to communicate with a society where they fit within the social structure (Todd, 2012). Drawing on semiotics, Baudrillard (1998) uses the sign/signifier technology to explain consumption, and suggests that what we purchase is not just a product, but also a piece of 'language' that creates a sense of who we are. For instance, Pikachu (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) suggests that these items

provide a sense of identity from owning ‘a piece of the game/show’ and ‘something that’s part of me’:

- Researcher: Do you purchase much merchandise?
- Pikachu: I use to... but I stopped now...
- Researcher: What did you buy?
- Pikachu: Too many figures... from everything I liked... Final Fantasy... One piece... Tales of... stuff like that...
- Researcher: Do you have a nice collection at home ?
- Pikachu: Yeah, that does nothing! I bought them because I wanted to own a piece of the game/show... in my house... if that makes sense... like to own something that’s part of me... I just really liked them for personal reasons...
- Researcher: So what do you do with the items now?
- Pikachu: They just sit there... maybe dust them once in a while... I spend so much money on them, so I dust them...
- Researcher: Do you look at the items and appreciate them after a while?
- Pikachu: Yeah.... It’s like... good memories...
- Researcher: What kinds of memories are attached?
- Pikachu: Er... like moments in the game... and some of the characters that drive you... they push you forward to be able to do things... some characters actually put you out of your own comfort zones... like ‘Shonen’ – an action anime – these characters have the strength to push you forward to go past the anime... like you take their strength and you kind of apply it to yourselves to push you forward... and you can apply their logic to your own universe... and because it’s part of my identity, I buy these items... It’s just something nice to have...

Despite spending too much money on figurines and stopping after realising; Pikachu (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) suggests that his figurines also provides good memories. This suggests that the items can consist of memories, of which can be triggered, and define our identities – hence, items can retain sentimental value, that can also be shared collectively. As Sternheimer (2012, p.1) states:

Memories seem like one of the most personal aspects of who we are. What we remember, what triggers memories, and how we remember things help define our identities. But memories are more than just personal. They can be something we share collectively too.

To some degree, there are aspects of fandom involved in purchasing merchandise. For instance, Sandvoss (2005, p.8) defines fandom as ‘the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text in the form of books, television, shows, films or music’. However, Baudrillard (1998) suggests that different objects are consumed in different ways that drive a capitalist society – especially when fan collectors collect for the sake of collecting. Postmodern consumers can never be fulfilled because the product they consume are only ‘sham objects, or characteristic signs of happiness’ and ‘do not have any real power to bestow happiness to the possessor’ (Malpas, 2005, p.122). For instance, Sephiroth (Interviewee: Final Fantasy Orchestral) considers himself a Final Fantasy Series fan, who spent over £200 from the Square Enix store on Final Fantasy related to merchandise purchased from London MCM Comic Con (2014).

Sephiroth: It’s for my FF (Final Fantasy) collection... I’m a big fan... I was going to buy these items regardless, so best buying them now, in case any of the items goes out of stock... especially the limited edition items, otherwise you’ll end up paying a lot more to obtain it later...

Researcher: I see. Do you have plans to display the items you’ve bought today?

Sephiroth: Oh no, I have no room to display these... I usually look at them, then put them in storage like the rest... I’m hoping to convert one of the rooms into a games room... one day... but until then they’ll be kept in their original boxes so they retain value...

For Sephiroth (Interviewee: Final Fantasy Orchestral), he considered his purchase a ‘necessity’ for his Final Fantasy collection, consisting of figurines, keychains, posters, towels, CD’s, limited edition vinyl’s, plushies and much more. Harris (1998, p.6) argues that collection of fan products, ‘serves both as an admission to fandom and as a form of ritualised maintenance’. This suggests that collecting fan objects can serve as a form of cultural capital in fandom, as Fiske (1992) points out, the distinctiveness here often lies in the scale of the collection rather than in the uniqueness or the authenticity as cultural objects.

According to Crawford (2004), changes within the wider society and moves towards a post-industrial, post-Fordism consumer culture have increase opportunities for fans to connect with the mass media in the ever-growing market of consumer goods. Crawford (2004) even goes as far as to suggest that being a fan is primarily a consumer act; consequently, fans can be seen primarily as consumers. Thus, for Crawford (2004), consumption is a key component of fandom, which is often associated with consuming.

However, as previously mentioned (in chapter 3), fans are more than just consumers. In Sephiroth's (Interviewee: Final Fantasy Orchestral) case, despite having a fairly large Final Fantasy collection, he considered himself more than a consumer, who also attended Final Fantasy related musical events, signing sessions, fan festivals and fan gatherings to be part of the Final Fantasy community.

Signing Sessions and Fan Gatherings – 'This hand has touched Nobuo Uematsu!'

Signing sessions amongst video gamers were considered an important aspect of amongst certain video game events. For instance, video game events such as MCM Comic Con, Play Expo, Insomnia (i-Series) and Final Fantasy Orchestral concerts often consists of signing sessions and panels with celebrities, 'elite fans' or 'Big Names Fans' (Hills, 2006), with specific time-slots and sometimes at a charged rate. For example, prices can range from autographs (£15), photoshoots (£15) and 'Emperor's Throne' photoshoot (£25) with Dave Prowse at Play Expo Manchester (2015); to an autograph (£45), photoshoot (£35), attending his talk (£25) and exclusive Comic Gold Pass including meet and greets (£195) with Stan Lee, at his last trip to Europe at the London Film and Comic Con (2014).

From the field-notes, I have attended several signing sessions; from the creators of *Tales/Tales of Series* (Bandai Namco Entertainment, 1995), *Dragon Ball Z: Battle of Z* (Namco Bandai Games, 2014), *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure: All Star Battle* (Namco Bandai Games, 2014), *Saint Seiya: Brave Soldiers* (Namco Bandai Games, 2013) (London MCM Comic Con, 2013); from the producer and members from Studio WIT of the animation 'Attack on Titan' (London MCM Comic Con, 2013); and from the composer, conductor and soloist singer from the Final Fantasy Series (Distant Worlds and Final Symphony, 2014). Although, it is important to highlight that the signing sessions at MCM Comic Con were often inclusive to the ticket purchase (no additional cost), whereas the signing session for the Final Fantasy Orchestral requires a purchase of an exclusive VIP ticket (£145), of which was not included in a regular ticket (£25-£65) – these VIP tickets were extremely hard to obtain – for instance, in 2013, all tickets to Distant Worlds (Final Fantasy Orchestral) were sold out in less than twenty minutes.

In relation to Final Fantasy signing sessions, upon meeting Nobuo Uematsu and Arnie Roth, Final Fantasy fans often mentioned the feelings of 'gratitude', 'happiness', and 'nervousness' when meeting them in person (see Figure 5.4).

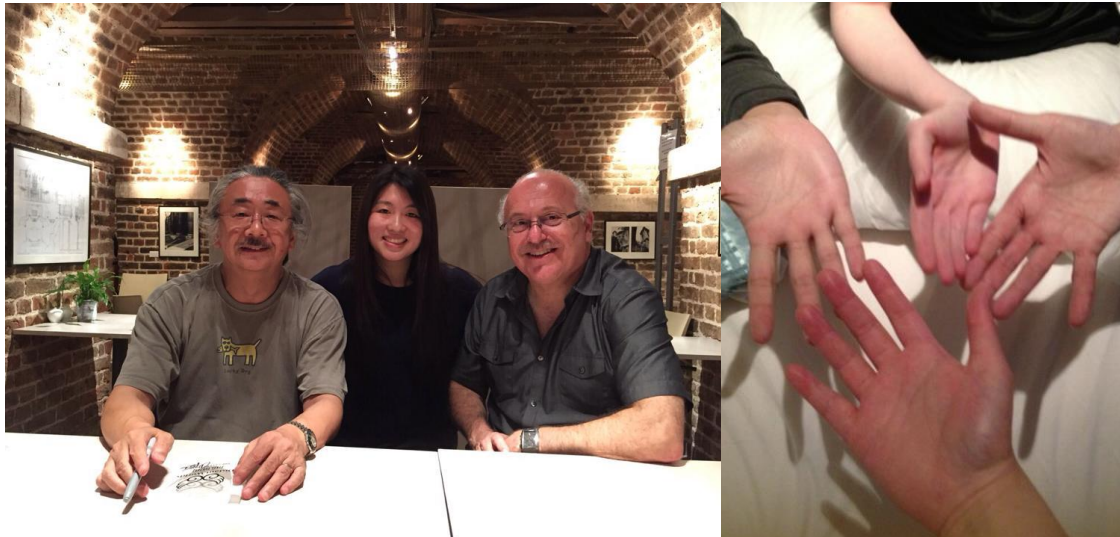


Figure 5.4: The Distant Worlds (2014) Meet & Greet [left], and ‘The hands that touched Nobuo Uematsu and Arnie Roth’ [right]
[Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

As Altman (2005, p.1) writes:

Ordinary folks treat them with awe and exaggerated rituals of respect when they come across a celebrity in person. We peons take a bizarre interest in the mythologized details of their lives, and we willingly grant them a portion of our harvest, as it were, in the form of movie tickets, CDs, live shows, and products associated — even if only contractually — with this modern aristocracy

This suggests that fans often felt various forms of emotion when meeting ‘celebrities’, ‘elite fans’ or ‘Big Names Fans’ (Hills, 2006). For instance, some Final Fantasy fans felt the need to show their respect through the act of ‘gift giving’; from bottles of wine, whisky, hand-made items, flowers, cakes, cards, letters and many more; while others considered purchasing products from the Square Enix store, or spending their time and tuition attending fan festivals provided a form of appreciation and support towards the creators of the Final Fantasy Series. For instance, Squall (Interviewee: Final Fantasy Orchestral) mentions his decision to get his rare Final Fantasy VIII box signed by Nobuo Uematsu as a form of appreciation towards the creation of the game.

Squall: I got my FFVIII box signed because it’s my favourite... Nobuo really liked it, smiled when he saw it because it’s a really rare item... Arnie saw it and went ‘oh’ and signed it too... I did think ‘noooooo’ because Arnie didn’t have anything to do with FFVIII and he’s gone and signed it... but he has contributed a lot to the rest of the FF Series, so I guess I don’t mind...

During signing sessions, Final Fantasy fans often had difficulty deciding which items to get signed, because it would be limited to a certain number (usually 2-3 items). Depending on the guests, Final Fantasy fans often selected items from; items with sentimental value

(such as favourite games or game guides), items to retain memories that captured specific moments (such as the concert ticket, concert brochure or polaroid photographs), or items that may be of value in future (such as rare items or limited edition items – the Final Fantasy VII vinyl was limited to 2000 copies, where copies alone are now worth double to triple its retail price) (see Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5. Signed items from the Distant Worlds (2014) Meet & Greet
[Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

Once items were signed, it was common for Final Fantasy fans to admire their signed possessions and post them on fan sites and forums. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this illustrates Harris's (1998) argument on fan collection, which suggests that objects can serve as a form of cultural capital in fandom – in particular, autographed copies that have high cultural capital. As Tidus (Group Interview: Final Fantasy Orchestral) states:

Researcher: What does it mean to get something signed?

Tidus: You get to meet someone who, like if you look at the early original soundtracks of 1 – 9 on the cover of the soundtrack it says written, produced and composed by Nobuo himself, so when you first have it its like ok yea. But when you meet him it's like, this one guy wrote all these arrangements, composed all of them and produced all of them by himself... he probably didn't do it all by himself but to get something you listen to, to meet the person and get him to sign it is like a stamp of approval... it just makes the soundtrack more nicer.

For Tidus (Group Interview: Final Fantasy Orchestral), he considered signed items to add sentimental value, such as a 'stamp of approval', which makes items appear 'nicer'.

In addition, upon attending the VIP signing session, where I met Sephiroth (Interviewee: Final Fantasy Orchestral) and Rinoa Heartilly (Interviewee: Final Fantasy Orchestral), and

they invited me to the Final Fantasy UK Fan group (closed group). This group distributed information on community forums to community members and often organised meet-ups; from Final Fantasy musical-related events, signing sessions, fan festivals and social gatherings.



Figure 5.6. Photographs of Final Fantasy fans at a social gathering, posing with the Louis Vuitton advert, featuring Lightning from Final Fantasy XIII
[Photographed by Final Fantasy Fans]

For instance, a Final Fantasy fan gathering was organised to meet near Westfield White City at the Louise Vuitton advert, featuring Lightning from Final Fantasy XIII for group photos – as well as individual photographs with the advert (see Figure 5.6). This suggests that the relation of fans with their object of fandom is not limited to the purely textual; performances and social interaction with other fans were also key aspects of these experiences (Sandvoss, 2002).

Cosplay – ‘Oh my god, I love your cosplay!’

Newman (2008, p.147) suggests that video games have other uses and significance beyond merely the act of play – where academic considerations should expand beyond game studies narrow focus on playing video games, to consider, what he refers to as playing *with*

video games. This includes what individuals do with video games, beyond simply playing them: writing walkthroughs, producing modifications, making machinima or, another area considered Newman (2008), using video games as an inspiration for costume production and dress, often termed ‘cosplay’. Crawford (2012, p.135) refers the word ‘cosplay’ to the contraction of the words ‘costume’ and ‘play’ and ‘role-play’. The meanings and boundaries of cosplay can vary, but generally cosplay involves wearing costumes, which have usually been made by the individuals themselves, to depict a specific fictional character, most commonly from Japanese popular culture; such as manga, anime, and video games (see Figure 5.7).



Figure 5.7. The researcher in cosplay – Character: Hanji (Attack of Titan)

Early observations of cosplay date back to Poole’s (2000) observations at Tokyo Game Show, that consist of live stage shows, young Japanese men and women come dressed as their favourite video game idol and a variety of game related merchandise;

Game characters are also available everywhere in the form of Action Man–style figurines, or on collectors’ cards. They feature in posters, on T-shirts; in Japan, a video game character can be an idol as much as a pop star or an actor in the West (Poole, 2000, pp.243-244)

Cosplay remains primarily associated with Japanese culture – with the biggest Japanese convention ‘Tokyo Game Show’. Although there has been an increase within North America and Europe with Japanese inspired cosplay – which continues to blur with western fan traditions of dressing up as science fiction television and film characters, such

as those from star trek, along with live action role-players (LARP) and historical re-enactment participants, such as those involved in civil war battle re-enactments. Hence, there is a significant blurring in cosplay between the culture of video gaming and other fan cultures.

From the findings, cosplay was considered a popular activity amongst those who attended video game events; such as MCM Comic Con, EuroGamer, Play Expo and Final Fantasy Orchestral Concerts. Almost all the video game events consist of at least one or several cosplay communities. The cosplay community consists of those who cosplay the current trend (see Figure 5.8), those who cosplay one particular series (such as video game, anime, movie, or television series), those who cosplay in groups for certain themes (such as cross-gender), and those who cosplay for fun. As Levi (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) states, ‘...last year it was all about Sword Arts, but this year it’s all about Attack on Titan... it’s usually based on the hottest anime’.



Figure 5.8. Cosplay trend in 2012 (Sword Arts Online),
2013 (Attack on Titan) and 2014 (Frozen)

In addition, several participants mentioned that MCM Comic Con consists that most ‘friendliest’ cosplay communities amongst other events, due to its community culture. For instance, the ‘Attack on Titan’ (anime series) community often organises a photo-shoot

together as a group, where community members invite all Attack on Titan cosplayers through organised meet-ups on fan websites and Facebook or invitations to those who are spotted in the same cosplay throughout the day. Unlike traditional communities, cosplay communities can often be considered fragmented, due to their shifting nature of current trends, from community members moving to other cosplay communities or being part of more than one cosplay community. This form of fluidity relates to characteristics of a neo-tribe (Maffesoli, 1996), where communities are loosely organised and by no means fixed, yet still places an emphasis on community and belonging. Hence, cosplayers often ‘nip in and nip out’ of specific cosplay communities and follow other people into various series of commitment. In relation to fandom, this suggests that the similar series of interests can facilitate greater communication amongst those who share common interests or possess compatible tastes (Jenkins, 1992). The impact of worldwide communication via the internet has changed the cultural aspects of fandom, where the interactivity between fans increased dramatically through the creation of forums and blogs. Therefore, fans are able to participate more readily and easily in multiple fandoms.

Although it is important to highlight that not all the participants (from the interviews and group interviews) cosplayed, but those who did, either cosplayed as one specific character or cosplayed several characters on separate days. For instance, Daenerys Targaryen (Interviewee: Play Expo) cosplayed as Daenerys Targaryen, a fully hand-made costume, from the television series ‘Game of Thrones’, throughout both days during Play Expo Manchester (2014). Meanwhile, Sonic (Interviewee: Eurogamer) cosplayed as Sonic (Sonic the Hedgehog), Link (Zelda), Mario (Super Mario Land) and Ash Ketchum (Pokemon), all shop-bought costumes from eBay, on the four separate days during Eurogamer. I wanted to highlight the relationship between hand-made and store-bought because these were common ‘types’ of cosplays amongst those who attended video game events. For instance, cosplay costumes are usually hand-made by the individuals themselves, or sometimes cosplayers commission other to make costumes for them. For example, for my Attack on Titan cosplay, my costume was a mixture of shop-bought clothes and a hand-made 3D manoeuvre gear (see Figure 5.9).



Figure 5.9. A photograph of the researcher making 3D manoeuvre gear
[Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

However, Lamerichs (2010) argues that most respect is given to those who make their own outfits, and shop-bought costumes are usually frowned upon. To some extent, hand-made outfits were given more respect over those that were shop-bought; however, shop-bought costumes were not necessarily frowned upon. From my field-notes, when I cosplayed as an Attack on Titan character, 'Mikasa Ackerman', my whole costume was bought from eBay, from the white pants, white shirt, brown jacket, belt, red scarf, leather straps, leather boots and wig. I would often receive compliments on my cosplay and receive requests for a photograph, even though I had exactly the same costume as other Attack on Titan cosplayers. However, with limited cosplay experience and never really been approached for a photograph, I was unsure how I should pose and what the photographer was expecting – I was asked to do a pose to place my right fist over my heart – in that moment of panic, I was unable to locate my heart and incorrectly posed with my right fist in the middle of my chest. At that moment, another cosplayer as 'Titan Eren Yeager' (a man wearing nothing but boxers with make-up to emphasise a six-pack) walked by, and the photographer asked if we could take a picture together (again I became unsure how to pose), then the Titan cosplayer asked, 'Do you mind if I pick you up?' - I then realised that somewhere on the internet, there is a photograph of me being carried by a Titan. The photographers were 'ecstatic' to have obtained a photograph of a 're-enactment from the anime series' - although, this scene never happened, it was commonly reproduced amongst fans in fanfiction and fanart, but usually the other way round, where Mikasa would be carrying Eren. This suggests a process of fans taking characters, scenarios or narratives from existing texts, and use them to produce their own cultural artefacts, such as art, stories and performances and so on – also known as 'textual poaching' (Jenkins, 1992).



Figure 5.10. A group photo of Attack on Titan cosplayers (London MCM Comic Con, 2013)

On the other hand, it is important to highlight that store-bought cosplays are not eligible to enter the cosplay competitions held at the video game events. Most cosplay competitions have banned store-bought costumes and require candidates to submit hand-made costumes, to demonstrate creativity, skill, and performance. However, the Attack on Titan cosplayers did not have the intention to enter the cosplay competition, rather they cosplayed to socialise with other Attack on Titan cosplayers and for the purpose of taking photographs, such as group photographs together (see Figure 5.10). For instance, when I walked around in my cosplay at London MCM Comic Con (2013), I was approached several times by Attack on Titan cosplayers providing the same information; ‘Group photo, 1pm’ – but no location was provided, so I became unaware where I should be going for the group photo. Upon approaching 1pm, I was spotted by other Attack on Titan cosplayers and directed to the meet-up point, where we were positioned and posed for a group photograph, then ‘hanged-out’ together, along with a little role-playing. Lamerichs (2010) suggests that part of cosplay is about adhering to character traits, and cosplayers receive encouragement for acting like the character they are portraying. Cosplay can be considered to be subversive, where it challenges and plays with ideas of identity (Newman, 2008). This suggests that cosplay is not just about individuals dressing up for the day; rather it involved various aspects of play – such as role-playing (see Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.11. The researcher and Attack on Titans cosplayers role-playing – encountering a Titan [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

However, not all cosplayers necessarily role-played: as Princess Leia Organa (Interviewee; Play Expo) mentions her purpose to cosplay was because it ‘looked fun’ and wanted to ‘join in’;

Princess Leia Organa: This is my first cosplay... last time I came here I remember really wanting to join in, so this time I did... so far I’ve had loads of fun... I was asked if I’d be interested in some role playing with Luke Skywalker *laughs* I gave it a pass...

Newman (2008, p.88) suggests that ‘what is particularly interesting about cosplay is that, despite the inference in its name, it does not typically involve role playing’.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that within the three characteristics of video game event attenders, cosplay can consist of all three characteristics; socialiser, participator and competitor. For instance, cosplay is considered a social and participative activity amongst those who cosplay and interact with others, as well as a competitive activity for competing in cosplay competitions – such as the cosplay masquerade. Amongst the video game events, MCM Comic Con, Eurogamer, Play Expo, Insomnia Gaming Festival and Video Games Live often held cosplay competitions – from hand-made costumes to performing a skit or talent. It is commonly assumed that cosplayers often dress up or display their love for their favourite characters – hence, those who cosplay ‘incorrectly’ are often frowned up. For example, EuroGamer was considered an event based solely around video games; and among a somewhat smaller minority, there were individuals that decided to cosplay

anime characters or certain video game characters without playing the game; as Scott Pilgrim (Interviewee: Eurogamer) mentions;

Scott Pilgrim: No I wouldn't consider cosplaying, but if I did, I'd do it right... I wouldn't come to this event in an anime cosplay because that's just wrong... and I'd cosplay something that you've actually played and genuinely like... I spoke to this girl in a Tomb Raider cosplay earlier. She knew nothing about the game... why cosplay something you don't know about?

Similar to Hodkinson's (2002, p.46) study on Goths, 'vampire goths' were considered to be 'missing the point' and looked down upon. The majority, whose interest was essentially in video games, valued a more subtle, appropriation of unknowledgeable individuals to their cosplay characters, and tended to regard these cosplays as a form of attention seeking from the general public.

LAN Culture – 'You have to do it, it's LAN tradition'

LAN (local area network) parties have a long and vibrant history. These are real-time face-to-face events, bringing people together who already know each other to strangers coming together to meet for the first time, and their machines, for several days of intensive interaction and play. Unlike the other events examined in this research, Insomnia (i-Series) is a LAN event featuring the exhibition hall (as examined earlier) and the BYOC hall. The BYOC halls usually consists rows of tables and chairs, extension cables, and Ethernet cables, ready for BYOC gamers to set up their equipment on arrival. However, throughout the research, Insomnia (i-Series) events have moved locations three times, from Telford (International Centre) to Coventry (Ricoh Arena) to Birmingham (NEC). Hence, the BYOC halls changed from one big hall (Telford), to several big rooms and small rooms (Coventry), then back to one big hall (Birmingham). The changing layout of the BYOC hall has said to provide a 'different' BYOC experience; as Bulbasaur states;

Bulbasaur: ...I liked the little room we were in, because it was mainly people from 'Pallet Town' (anonymised clan name)... like our little LAN room... we were still able to go into other rooms to hang out with other people, but it seemed nice to come back into a room where everyone else is... when we were in one big hall, it was fun... but when something happened, it escalated very quickly and it was just too much...

Traditionally, Insomnia (i-Series) events consist of one BYOC hall, where everyone would often seek activities from the Insomnia community– of which some activities have

remained popular, such as the opening ceremony, pub quiz and raffle. However, due to the rising popularity of Insomnia (i-Series) events, smaller communities have started to attend, where there are able to 'pick and choose' or 'nip in and nip out' of certain activities, whether it be Insomnia community activities or their own community practices. As mentioned in the literature review, this suggests that neo-tribes may provide a more profitable way to analyse BYOC gamers that attend Insomnia (i-Series) events; as it considers the foundation of a fluid and loosely organised community, yet still places an emphasis on community and belonging (Maffesoli, 1996).

In relation to video game related practices, Taylor and Witkowski's (2010, p.3) conclude that the image of a small niche of teenage boys or young men gathering together for a weekend of only intensive play, or file-sharing, doesn't quite match what they observed:

It is in the space of the LAN we also see glimpses of how being there, together – playing and participating in one's preferred ways – can feed into a welcoming and almost celebratory atmosphere where there is a general appreciation of gaming no matter the game genre, level of play, or ways (however bizarre) of being a gamer. What the participants of an event like DreamHack do is stamp gaming as a worthwhile leisure lifestyle, whatever your taste may be.

This suggest that video game events provide a space for video gamers to come together, into a welcoming and almost celebratory atmosphere, and participate in various video game related practices that considers gaming to be a worthwhile leisure lifestyle. For instance, it was common for BYOC gamers to participate in other community practices of their own (besides gaming itself); these included playing Mafia/Werewolves, card games (Cards Against Humanity, Maids), drinking games (Never Have I Ever, Ring of Fire), Hide and Sleep (when someone attempts to find a 'hiding spot' to sleep from the security guards – because sleeping at your own desk is not allowed), or seeking LAN treasure (finding 'unwanted' items that others have left behind). These forms of participation tells us something more than just what games people play; as Taylor and Witkowski (2010, p.3) writes; 'we see how game play is integrated into and across everyday life' (Taylor and Witkowski, 2010, p.3). For instance, Jörissen (2004) highlights that LAN parties provide Counterstrike clans space for video gamers to come together and publicly demonstrate and renew their values and connections with each other and verify one's membership in a game culture. As he writes, 'the social order of a community becomes staged as well as renewed by the participation of the community's members' (Jörissen, 2004, p.36). This suggests that video gamers are able to interact with each other to form their own webs of

personal relationships based on their set of shared values and common interests (Rutter and Bryce, 2006).

In addition, the findings for this research suggests that LAN gamers, in particular, BYOC gamers, often participated in various forms of LAN practices, of which some have been considered as a LAN ritual/tradition amongst certain communities. Common practices included attending the opening ceremony (obtaining ‘The Box’), the pub quiz (beer towers and boat races), searching for ‘LAN treasure’ and surviving ‘LAN Death’. These rituals often promoted a sense of community and a sense of identity; ‘You have to do it, it’s LAN tradition’ (BYOC gamer – field-notes). Hence, there are often boundaries drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’, of which resisting the important messages of the group can be a relatively hard thing to do (Bauman, 1990). In many cultures, there are ritualistic practices that are interwoven into the fabric of the culture as a means to socialise individuals who participate within that culture.

The Opening Ceremony & Pub Quiz

During Insomnia (i-Series), it was often for BYOC gamers to attend the Opening Ceremony and Pub Quiz together. The Opening Ceremony usually takes place on the Saturday morning where people would gather around the main stage to obtain information on the latest gear from computer games companies, as well as to obtain free swag and ‘The Box’ (the box that once contained all the prizes) (see Figure 5.12).



Figure 5.12. Opening Ceremony at i50 – BYOC gamers trying to obtain ‘The Box’

These forms of participation were common amongst BYOC gamers, which were considered more ‘community based’ with a shared understanding amongst community members. For instance, Bulbasaur (Group Interview: Insomnia) mentions that there is a story behind ‘The Box’;

Bulbasaur ...there’s a story to the box... we didn’t become randomly obsessed with ‘The Box’... it happened years and years ago, early I-LAN... on the opening ceremony, they ran out of stuff to throw out... so people started chanting for the empty cardboard box... and it became a thing since... like all try to obtain the box... some of the boxes are so big, it’s fun to sit in them... or stuff small people in them *giggles*... it use to mean something... to have the box... but now it isn’t since the kids ruined it all...

Throughout the duration of the data collection, Insomnia (i-Series) have had a couple of changes applied - since March 2015, GAME, the UK’s largest specialist gaming retailer acquired the company Multiplay for £20 million. This has led to expansions towards widening the scope of audience to attend Insomnia (i-Series), in particular ‘kids’, or ‘Minecraft Kids’ – of which BYOC gamers have felt that it is no longer an event about them;

Bulbasaur: LAN is good, but just not the same anymore... it used to be all about the BYOC, of which it still is... but not as much as it should be... because so much is going on... and now it’s been taken over by fucking Minecraft kids...

Squirtle: I still remember when they first introduced Minecraft to i-Series... there were so many complaints, ‘we don’t wanna play Minecraft’, ‘it’s a kids game’, ‘booooo’... I hate Minecraft!

Charmander: ...but it’s what keeps i-Series going and what makes the ‘dollar dollar’ (money)... because it has such a big attraction where kids, or more precisely, their parents throw money at... and it’s probably what’s paying the bills to run this place...

Bulbasaur: I know, but it’s just a shame that everything is changing... like the opening ceremony...

Squirtle: Oh my god, this year’s opening ceremony was awful... it was literally bombarded by kids...

Bulbasaur: It’s been like that for the past few i-Series now, hence why I stopped going... It used to be all about the big game computer companies, like Overclockers, Corsair... where they give out their little speeches and tell us about the latest gears... then they throw out loads of free shit, like keyboards, mouse, memory sticks... now they just throw out bags of Haribo to feed the kids!

Despite the transition (from Multiplay to Game), several BYOC gamers have noticed the changes that have been applied to later Insomnia (i-Series) events – such as requests have been made for a separate opening ceremony for BYOC gamers only. However, it is important to highlight that not all the changes are ‘bad’, as Rengar the Pridestalker (Group Interview: Insomnia55) suggest positive changes;

Rengar the Pridestalker: There has been some good changes... the event itself has gotten bigger, pool prizes for tournaments has gotten bigger, there is now dedicated e-sport stages and a spectators area... famous YouTube people and signings...

Although, the Opening Ceremony has been ‘bombarded by kids’, the Pub Quiz still remains ‘sacred’ to the BYOC gamers, where it has been kept a separate activity during the Saturday evening, away from the general public (see Figure 5.13).



Figure 5.13. Pub Quiz – i56

For instance, Annie the Dark Child (Interviewee, Insomnia) mentioned that the most exciting moment of the show was the Pop Quiz, which happened on Saturday evening – the quiz being on video games of course.

Annie the Dark Child: I’m really looking forward to the pop-quiz. It’s the main highlight of the weekend. Well... I think it is anyway. People get dressed up. And we’d work together in our own groups to try to win a keg of beer.

During the pub quiz, there are also several activities that happen; such as teams attempting to build the biggest beer and pizza box towers or competing in the boat race (see Figure 5.14).



Figure 5.14. Building the biggest beer and pizza box tower [left], and competing in the boat race [right]

This suggests that amongst the various activities LAN gamers participate in, they also look to the ‘Insomnia community’ for activities, where some aspects have remained part of their focus for their entertainment.

LAN Treasure & Raffle Tickets

On the final day of Insomnia (i-Series), it was common among LAN gamers to participate in the search for ‘LAN Treasure’. As Bulbasaur, Charmander and Squirtle (Group Interview: Insomnia) explains:

Researcher: What is LAN Treasure?

Bulbasaur: LAN treasure can be anything someone has left behind... usually anything consumable...

Researcher: Do you all participate in this activity?

Charmander: Yeah, I do it every time because it’s fun... mainly going round looking for cans... mostly cans of energy drinks or coke left over... couple of cables... nothing like amazing, but random scraps that are

fun to look for... we usually do this once all our stuff are packed... but we did find a case one LAN, like a new PC case

Researcher: A PC case? Did you take it?

Charmander: Nah, we left it cause no one wanted it... we presumed it was an unwanted prize, and too big to take home... I think someone went and handed it in to staff... because when we find items like that, we often hand those in... because the whole point is to look for stuff people don't want... so when you're looking for LAN treasure, you don't go unplugging shit or stealing people's belongings... that's just dodgy...

Researcher: Does everyone at Insomnia take part in this?

Squirtle: No... not everyone takes part in this... only some do it 'religiously'... like some LAN ritual amongst friends to look for the 'best LAN treasure'... I pretty sure the yellow team (Insomnia BYOC staff) look for LAN treasure every LAN... they usually go round collecting all the unopened booze, and made a pile to drink together at the end of the day

In simple terms, 'LAN treasure' refers to items that others have left behind after LAN, to claim and take home. It was often participated amongst certain communities that follow these 'ritual practises', which is then passed down to other community members – such as new members to the community or the researcher herself. From the field-notes, it is important to highlight that participating to look for LAN Treasure also consists of certain (unspoken) rules:

- 1) Thou shall not steal – no unplugging or swapping PC's
- 2) Thou shall be fair – check if it belongs to someone and hand in 'high' or 'sentimental' value items
- 3) Finally, on the last day of LAN, internet shuts off from 12pm (time varies), raffle starts around 2pm (check forum for accurate time), cleaners start work around 3am (they will bin everything, including LAN Treasure), and everyone must be out by 4pm (for the tear down).

Firstly, it is not acceptable to steal. This includes 'unplugging' items from other people's PC's or swapping/taking other people's PC's. During registration for Insomnia (i-Series), all BYOC gamers are provided with individual lanyards with their signatures on the back and matching stickers (usually three stickers – monitor, tower and spare) to attach onto their equipment for security purposes. Upon approaching security, all electronic goods are checked for matching signatures on the lanyards and stickers. Although there has not been many reports on stolen equipment during Insomnia (i-Series), several participants have criticised the security measures, as the basic design of the lanyard and stickers are generic,

with the only difference of having signatures signed on the day of arrival; ‘The system is stupid, there’s nothing stopping me going round looking for a nicer PC and placing my sticker over someone else’s monitor or tower and ditch mine... not that I’ll do that, but it’s worrying that someone can do that and get through security with it...’ (Teemo the Swift Scout - Interviewee: Insomnia). Consequently, it is common for BYOC gamers to ‘sit together’ amongst others, so they could ‘keep on eye’ on each other’s equipment.

In addition, LAN treasure usually consists of ‘unwanted’ items that others have left behind, of which mostly included consumables, from items of food and drinks that are safe for consumption. Occasionally, some equipment can also be considered LAN Treasure, such as items that are partially or completely broken, items that are of no use because it has been replaced (such as a new mouse or keyboard), and items that could not be taken home due to transport and space limitations. For example, during Insomnia (i-Series) it was often for BYOC gamers to new purchase merchandise to replace their ‘old stuff’. Usually these ‘old’ items are ‘flogged’ on the ‘trading post’ forum (buy and sell stuff), of which all BYOC gamers have access to seek for deals, swaps and trades – but if items were ‘unsold’ and not worth much, these items were often left behind, for others to seek as LAN Treasure – sometimes with an attached note stating ‘LAN Treasure’.

Secondly, when participating in LAN treasure, is it important to be fair, such as checking if the item belongs to someone and to hand in items of ‘high’ or ‘sentimental’ value. As Teemo the Swift Scout (Interviewee: Insomnia) states:

Teemo the Swift Scout: ...when I look for LAN treasure, I usually look around my area to see if we left anything... as I sort of know everyone from my clan, so it’s quite easy to return stuff to them if anything was left by accident... then we usually wonder around checking under tables and chairs...

In particular, items located close by were often ‘checked’ if it belonged to a member of the community or clan. For instance, the researcher found a cushion of the Mt Fuji Mascot, Fuji-san, which was left behind. Upon considering if it was LAN treasure, as it did not seem to be an item of high value and fairly used, another BYOC gamer recognised that it belonged to a someone sat on the end of our row, who was described as ‘one of us’ from Manchester - because the person had already left, the researcher was provided with their contact details (because I was also from Manchester) to arrange a time and place to return

the item back to its owner, of which they were very grateful for, as the Fuji-san cushion was obtained from their trip to Japan.

In addition, while seeking for LAN treasure, amongst the items the researcher found; 3 cans of coke, 2 cans of energy drinks and an extension cable - the researcher decided to take the extension cable home as LAN treasure (see Figure 5.15.). After collecting LAN treasure, it was common to compare ‘treasures’ amongst other BYOC gamers or ‘clan members’. For instance, upon presenting ‘my LAN treasure’, the four-way extension cable that is probably worth a couple of pounds, I was provided ‘tips’ to look for ‘better’ items; ‘I’ve got four of those... and you don’t really want that one, you want the ones with switches on and longer cables’ (LAN Treasure seeking BYOC Gamer – Field-notes) (see Figure 5.1.5).



Figure 5.15: LAN treasure, an extension cable (left) and a grimy keyboard (right)
[Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

Guidance and tips were often offered to members of the community when looking for LAN treasure, as well as sharing and distributing items. For instance, during Insomnia53 (i53) a BYOC gamer found an old keyboard, placed inside a new keyboard box, of which was presumed had been replaced and left behind; ‘Ewwwww... this thing is disgusting, it’s so grimy and you can see the ‘food bits’ wedged between the keys... anyone want this?’ (LAN Treasure seeking BYOC Gamer – Field-notes) (see Figure 5.15).

Finally, on the last day of LAN, when seeking for LAN treasure, it is important to remember that the internet shuts off from 12pm (time varies), raffle starts around 2pm (check forum for accurate time), cleaners start work around 3am (they will bin everything, including LAN Treasure), and everyone must be out by 4pm (for the tear down). Once the internet shuts down, it is ‘natural’ for BYOC gamers to pack up and go home, as LAN has finished. This suggests that LAN treasure was usually searched between the time when

BYOC gamers pack up and before the cleaners and tear down begins – because they were known to ‘bin everything’.

Besides seeking for LAN treasure, BYOC gamers often stayed for the raffle that happens in the afternoon. Upon collecting your lanyard, each BYOC gamer is provided with one raffle ticket, with the option to purchase more throughout the LAN event from the tuck-shop. The raffle consists of numerous prizes with several high tickets items, such as high-end PC’s, laptops, monitors, headphones and much more. It is common for a crowd of BYOC gamers to form around the tuck-shop, while numbers are drawn out from a two to three big black bins (because there was so many). All BYOC gamers were instructed to keep hold of their raffle tickets, because once the raffle is drawn, there was no redraw, and winning raffle numbers were posted on the forum to be claimed, of which then the moderators will be contacted to provide proof, then prizes will be posted. After the raffle, it was common for BYOC gamers to start making their way home, while others continue to seek for LAN treasure, before the cleaners start ‘binning everything, including LAN treasure’ from 3pm.

However, as from Insomnia54 (i54), when Multiplay was bought by the retailer Game, the raffle stopped – because it was considered to be ‘unprofitable’. We tend to view rituals as ageless; ‘rituals tend to present themselves as the unchanging, time-honoured customs of an enduring community’ (Bell, 1997, p.210). At the same time, rituals do tend to resist change. However, from the field-notes, on the last day of LAN from Insomnia54 (i54) onwards, with no raffle, the BYOC hall looked fairly empty by 1pm, where the majority of the BYOC gamers had already packed up their equipment and making their way home, while several stayed behind, continuing to seek for LAN treasure, then saying their ‘goodbyes’, before heading home.

Surviving LAN Death

According to the Urban Dictionary (2016), a LAN Death is:

...when you go to a LAN party and you drink too much caffeine, causing lack of sleep, and eat too much. You start to feel really sick until you can't game anymore and usually ending up going home’ (Urban Dictionaries – LAN Death)

Occasionally, several BYOC gamers will experience something called ‘LAN Death’, either during or after LAN. For instance, from the field-notes, after attending Insomnia56 (i56) the researcher caught LAN Death:

LAN Death is real. After returning home for Insomnia56 (i56), I unloaded my equipment into my flat, and then collapsed into a deep sleep. Days of conducting research, competing in tournaments, consumption of energy drinks and mostly Subway sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner (I am sick of Subway right now), and lack of sleep (especially with only an hour of sleep before checkout from my hotel room), has been damaging to my body - even if it was for four days. After fourteen hours of sleep, I woke up feeling even more tired... my throat hurting, my head spinning, my nose congested, and I've thrown up, twice. I have LAN Death and I feel awful (Field-notes – LAN Death)

Although this was not necessarily a ‘community practice’ that everyone participated in, it was considered ‘common knowledge’ that LAN Death can spread and to take precautions during LAN. This included taking care of one’s health and personal hygiene, such as regularly washing hands, taking showers, using hand sanitiser, and bringing medication (multivitamin/ vitamin C tablets and painkillers). In addition, once infected with LAN Death, it was common to ‘warn others’ (as it is known to be contagious) and to ‘feel sorry’ for those with LAN Death. Therefore, similar to Mäyrä’s (2008) understanding of video game culture, it is useful to consider ‘subcultures’ and its cultural force that influences individuals in complex ways through cultural trends. This suggests that video gamers often organise themselves into groups and behave in ways that are based particular norms, values, and sometimes even languages. As Taylor and Witkowski (2010, p.7) writes; ‘days of little sleep, energy drinks, and near-constant party-like atmosphere have taken a toll and people seem to cycle between exhaustion and trying to soak up last bits of time with friends’. Hence, it was common for BYOC gamers to become ill from lack of sleep (fatigue, tiredness and ruined sleeping patterns), too much caffeine (caffeine withdrawal), consumption of ‘junk-food’ (poor diet and constipation) and being in a big room with thousands of people for several days (circulation of germs). This can sometimes led to ‘unpleasant drawbacks’ to the body, especially those who go back to their ‘normal’ and ‘routine’ everyday lives the next day. Hence, similar to aspects of a holiday, several participants mentioned taking days off work to ‘recover’ from their trip to catch up with

sleep, correct sleeping patterns, and get over the ‘LAN blues’ (sadness that LAN is over and back to reality).

5.2.3. The Competitor

The ‘competitor’ refers to individuals who attend video game events for competitive purposes, such as competing in video game tournaments and competitions. Hence, one of the main purposes in competing is for the ‘chance to win’. This is important; because unlike the socialiser, competing in a tournament may not necessarily mean to socialise with others, but to compete against them – especially in online tournaments, where players swiftly move from one opponent to the next. Likewise, the difference between a participator and a competitor is determined by the ‘desired outcome’, where the participator participates in something for the ‘sake of taking part’, whereas the competitor competes for the ‘chance to win’. This suggests that there are video game related practices that are considered more specific to those competing competitively; such as approaching the ‘competitive game scene’, building public relations (PR), seeking sponsorship, spectating live matches and much more – examined further later.

However, as mentioned earlier, the three characteristics (socialiser, participator and competitor) can overlap, especially within a video game event that requires video gamers to meet face-to-face. For instance, those who compete in tournaments at video game events are able to socialise with others competing in the tournament; as well as participate in other video game related practices, besides gaming itself. Although competing in a video game tournaments and competitions is a video game practice that takes place in front of a video game screen, this section considers the importance of video game related practices away from the video game scene, using a comparative analysis on competitive gaming amongst the Smash community and the Hearthstone community.

In addition, this section examines the findings from several participants that attend video game events, which include competitive and sponsored Smash and Hearthstone players. It also considers the researchers’ reflections on competitive gaming, in particular from a non-competitive and competitive researchers’ standpoint: from being a non-competitive player within the Smash community, as well as a competitive/sponsored player within the Hearthstone community. In comparison to other studies in video games, there has been limited research focusing on those who attend video game events, and those who have;

such as Taylor (2012) study on eSports and spectatorship, has approached eSport players from an outsider's perspective, by not participating in eSports competitively. As mentioned earlier, upon attending live events, Taylor (2012, p.29) felt her 'otherness'; 'I was a non-competitive, a woman, and a bit older than most attendees... my otherness also sometimes kept me at distance from the people I encountered'. Taylor (2012, p.30) also mentions her envy about the mundane hanging-out time Michael Kane, author of the book '*Game Boys*' (Kane, 2008), spent with the eSports teams he was writing about, or the easy conventional rapport he had managed to achieve when at a bar with the guys after a match; 'these kinds of moments remained elusive to me'. Hence, I began to question my ethnographic standpoint, is it ethnographic? How can a researcher research something they are not part of? And what difference does it make to research competitive gaming to those who research from a non-competitive and competitive perspective? It is important to highlight that examining video game communities from a two different standpoints was not intention. However, this has created an importance to consider comparisons for conducting research from a non-competitive and competitive standpoint; and reflect on the researchers 'otherness' and 'stamp of familiarity' within video game communities (Taylor, 2012). For instance, from a non-competitive perspective (non-competitive Smash player), I understood Taylor's (2012) notion of 'otherness' - I did not play Smash competitively, I knew how to play, but not at high-level or attempt to be better, and this sometimes kept me at distance from the people I encountered. Therefore, conducting research from a non-competitive Smash player perspective provided an insight to consider 'other roles' within the Smash community, such as support roles. This included taking on the roles as a volunteer to support the Smash community; from working in the kitchen, to transporting gaming equipment, and becoming a tournament organiser. In comparison, from a competitive perspective (competitive Hearthstone player), I attempted to regularly attend Hearthstone tournaments to become a 'recognised competitive player' through socialising and participating in video game related practices, besides gaming itself. Hence, conducting research from a competitive perspective provided an insight to consider the competitive elements of gaming, which may not necessarily be related to the direct engagements with video games – examined further later. It is important to highlight that there has been limited research focusing on competitive gaming from a competitive gamers perspective – this is one of the key features that considers this research to be unique. Hence, it is the non-competitive and competitive perspectives I now turn to.

Spectating From a Distance - The Non-Competitive Smash Player

From the data gathered, the local Smash events (Manchester Monthly Regionals) often consist of an attendance between 5 – 15 turning up to weekly practices located at the hosts accommodation (usually hosted by a fellow Smash player that invites others to their own home (see Figure 5.16); between 20 – 30 turning up to monthly regional tournaments located in a local venue; and between 80 – 100 turning up to annual national tournaments located in a venue with accommodation facilities.



Figure 5.16: A photograph of seven pairs of shoes outside the hosts flat

[Photographed by Ying Ying Law]

Due to the nature of the game being played offline, it required face-to-face interaction and to physically be in front of the video game screen with your opponent, in comparison to other video games that can be played online and over the internet. Hence, the Smash community was considered a more ‘traditional’ community, with regular meet-ups and face-to-face interaction. The Smash community mainly consists of Super Smash Melee (Nintendo, 2011), Project M (Project M Development Team, 2011) and Super Smash 4 (Nintendo, 2014) players (from October 2014) – Super Smash Brawl (Nintendo, 2008) and Smash 64 (Nintendo, 1999) was considered the smallest communities within the Smash community. For instance, the Manchester scene was mainly focused on Project M, with Melee and Smash 4 set-ups. Heir to the Throne 2, the 2nd edition of the Heir tournament series, currently stands as one of the largest Project M tournaments to date, with 257

entrants and the second-largest European Melee tournament with 269 entrants, behind B.E.A.S.T 5's 375 entrants.

Upon researching the Smash community, I entered the field as a non-competitive Smash player. I would often attend Smash events and spectate from a distance and approach Smash players when they were not playing. Earlier in my research observations I often felt that I had to learn new ways of behaving and possibly new skills to overcome the overwhelmed feeling with unfamiliar events – in particular, the ‘strange language’ amongst Smash players. For instance, Powdermaker (1968, p.419) describes the problem for field anthropologists:

During the first month or so the field worker proceeds very slowly, making use of all his sensory impression and intuitions. He walks warily and attempts to learn as quality as possible the most important forms of native etiquette and taboos. When in doubt he falls back on his own sense of politeness and sensitivity to the feelings of others. He likewise has to cope with his own emotional problems, for he often experiences anxieties in a strange situation. He may be overwhelmed by the difficulties of really getting “inside” an alien culture and of learning an unrecorded or other strange language. He may wonder whether he should intrude into the privacy of people’s lives by asking them questions. Field workers vary in their degree of shyness, but some people of any sensitivity experience some feelings of this type when they first enter a new field situation.

Dealing with the unfamiliar is bound to produce at least some formative experience. Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) suggest that the use of unstructured procedures in field investigations, the pursuit of new propositions, and the participation in strange activities are the stuff of which memorable involvements are made. Hence, field researchers always live, to some extent, with the disquieting notion that they are gathering the wrong data, that they should be observing or asking questions about another event or practice instead of the present one. However, these feelings of uncertainty diminished as the researcher grew more familiar with the group (Shaffir and Stebbins, 1991). For example, I was often approached by other Smash players teaching me how to play Smash, provided guidance to get better, and support to understand specific game terms and slangs. However, due to the high levels of dexterity and button pressing precision, I was unable to play one’s role to be a competent Smash player. Therefore, as an ethnographic researcher that did not just want to ‘turn up’ and observe from a distance, I considered taking on other roles within the Smash community – in particular the role of a volunteer and participating in community practices that took place away from the video game screen.

Volunteering – The S.W.A.G team

Firstly, volunteering is an activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause (Wilson, 2000). Although there is limited research in video games and volunteering, the importance of volunteers in sporting events has been extensively acknowledged during the past decade (Giannoulakis, Wang and Gray, 2008). Blanc (1999) noted that volunteers remain essential to the viability of the sport system and many community-based and sport organisations would have difficulty surviving without volunteers (Auld and Cuskelly, 2001). For example, the Turin organisation committee recruited 18,000 volunteers for the 2006 winter Olympic Games (International Olympic Committee, 2006). Furthermore, 40,000 candidates applied for the 2006 FIFA World Cup volunteer program and a total of 15,000 volunteers were ultimately recruited to support the soccer tournament (FIFA World Cup, 2007).

Amongst the video game events examined, the majority of the events seek volunteers, either to help with setting up, tearing down, running tournaments, or doing specific tasks – sometimes in exchange for tickets, food, and accommodation. For example, Insomnia Gaming Festivals provided volunteers options to select from several (coloured) teams that help to run the event from Stewarding to infrastructure – where some selected positions include a BYOC seat, food, and accommodation (see Figure 5.17).

Choose Your Team	Green	Yellow	Red	Black	Grey	Orange
Earliest Arrival Time:	Thurs PM	Weds AM	Thurs PM	Weds AM	Weds PM	Weds AM
Latest Departure Time:	Mon PM	Tues	Mon PM	Mon PM	Mon PM	Tues
BYOC Seat:	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Technical Knowledge Required:	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Customer Facing:	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Food Included:	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Accommodation Included:	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minimum Age Requirement	18	18	18	18	18	18

- **Festival Volunteers (Green Shirts)** – Stewarding, management of activity zones and more.
- **Technical Support (Yellow Shirts)** – Power and network infrastructure.
- **Tournament Administration (Red Shirts)** –managing and supporting various tournaments.
- **Stage team (Black Shirts)** – Stage and Video Production.
- **Event Administration (Grey Shirts)** –Check in and customer service.
- **Event build and break team (Orange Shirts)** – Event Build up and break. Steel toe cap boots are mandatory and are not provided.

Figure 5.17. Insomnia Gaming Festival Event Crew Application

Meanwhile, PlayExpo events seek volunteers in exchange for a ‘work half, play half’ scheme, where volunteers are able to ‘play for free’ in exchanged their ‘work’ for half a day. However, it is important to highlight that this was not necessarily the same case within the Smash community. From the research observations, volunteers consist of tournament organisers and several selected members of the Smash community. It was common for tournament organisers to look to members of the Smash community for gaming equipment/set-ups (from TV’s, GameCube’s, Wii U’s, copies of the game itself, and controllers). Rather than an ‘exchange’ for their voluntary services, it was often a community effort to provide set-ups or help set-up to run a Smash tournament for little to no profit in return. Similar to Hodkinson’s (2002) use of the term ‘subcultures’ and the remarkable levels of commitment, those who were consistent with the operation of social pressures relating to tastes and norms tended to received more social rewards, in comparison to those who ‘flirted’ around the boundaries. Hence, those who contributed high levels of commitment received benefits in forms of recognition and status; as Captain Falcon (Interviewee, Smash UK) states:

It can be a tricky to run your own tournament... we usually know the ones who make the effort for the community and runs the most tournaments... well good tournaments... because there can be good and bad ones... you usually have to ask around for help and if you’re a good TO (tournament organiser), most people will offer help back... usually it’s the old Smashers that help run the tournaments for the new Smashers... and after a couple of tournaments the new Smashers often offer help... so it’s like a cycle to keep the community building...

Captain Falcon (Interviewee, Smash UK) suggests a sense of perception that individuals are involved in a distinct cultural grouping and share feelings of identity with one another. In particular, the description of ‘old Smashers’ (old Smash player) and ‘new Smashers’ (new Smash players) provides and identity distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which

suggests a rites of passage to be identified from a ‘new Smasher’ to a ‘regular Smasher’ (Van Genneep, 1908).

In relation to voluntary work, during Edintines 2 (Smash UK), I volunteered to be a kitchen staff and joined the S.W.A.G Team (Smash Wives and Girlfriends) with other female volunteers – as I was an ethnographic researcher, the team name was suggested to include ‘+E.R’ on the end (the S.W.A.G+E.R Team – Smash Wives and Girlfriends, plus Ethnographic Researcher). While volunteering in the kitchen over a weekend, preparing food, drinks and snacks for Smash players, I was given a free team T-shirt with the words ‘Edintines volunteer’ on the front and ‘S.W.A.G.’ on the back, and I was offered to take the ‘left-over’/un-used food home when the event finished. In relation to volunteering and satisfaction, Elstad (1996) researched the role of volunteers during the Winter Games in Lillehammer and found that the volunteer group reported overall satisfaction with their participation. Several determinants of volunteers’ satisfaction were identified, such as personal networking, being a part of the celebratory atmosphere, job-related competence, welfare issues, and job characteristics. From the researcher’s perspective, volunteering provided a satisfaction from personal networking and being part of the celebratory atmosphere. For example, while volunteering for Play Expo, several staff and volunteers were able to approach VIP’s or invited guests located in the staff room, and during Play Expo Blackpool (2014), the staff photo included Jesse McClure from Storage Hunters (TruTV, 2011) (see Figure 5.18).



Figure 5.18: Play Expo Blackpool (2014) staff photo with Jesse McClure

In addition, as mentioned earlier (in chapter 4), for further Smash events (because I could drive), I was asked by members of the Smash community to transport gaming equipment and provide support running local Smash tournaments. Hence, I considered my voluntary activity to be purposive (related to doing something useful and contributing) and solidary incentives (related to social interaction, group identification, and network), as described by Farrell, Johnston and Twynam's (1998) examination on sport volunteers by investigating the attributes of satisfaction and motivation for 300 volunteers at an elite sporting competition.

Community Practices – Playing Man Hunt

Secondly, from the research observations, the Smash events happened on a regular basis, which promoted a sense of belonging amongst community members. Although I did not play Smash competitively, these community practices provided a gateway to be part of a video game community through other means and build rapport with members of the Smash community. For instance, besides the tournament itself, the organiser for Edmas, Edentines Day, Cabin Fever 1, Cabin Fever 2 and Heir to the Throne (Smash events) often promoted various social activities for Smashers (Smash players) to get to know each other; from crew battles, money matches, watching live streams and playing 'man hunt' – as the 'Organiser' explains below (see Figure 5.19).

Organiser: Right everyone, I'm now going to explain how to play 'man hunt'...

At midnight, we're all going set off from my house and walk down the canal, until we reach a forest that's in the middle of no-where... We form two teams – Team Red and Team Blue. Without using phones, torches or flashlights, Team Red's objective is to walk across the forest, while avoiding Team Blue to get to this bridge [points at bridge], which is safety. While Team Blue's objective is to catch Team Red while they go through the forest, so they don't get to safety. There will be a time-limit of 30 minutes, and then we swap over, so we can determine which team has won, based on the number of people on the bridge at the end...

Finally, everyone must participate, or you won't be allowed back in my house!

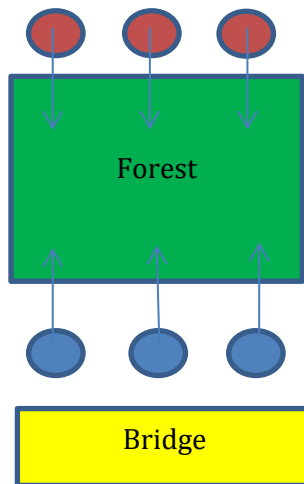


Figure 5.19: A diagram showing rules on how to play ‘man hunt’ (Cabin Fever 1, 2014)

This was one of the responses from a participant that took part in playing ‘man hunt’:

- Researcher: How was it?
- Captain Falcon: I couldn’t see shit! I kept falling over, bumping into trees and the worst part was after struggling through that forest and almost reaching the bridge, some lazy git from the opposite team was camping behind a tree near the bridge and tagged me!
- Researcher: Oh dear, did you find it worthwhile though?
- Captain Falcon: Yeah, it was actually quite fun. Something definitely worth experiencing. Not sure if I’ll do it again though. But we did work as a team to get across, as we could see the other team cheating and using their phones and shouting. So we tried to avoid them, by going round them. The forest was pitched black, but after time your eyes do get used to it. I was actually quite surprised that my eyes managed to adapt to it and I could see more I anticipated in that darkness.
- Besides that, yeah it was worthwhile. I found it to be a great way to work together and get to know each other.

This suggests that Smash players often enjoy the sociability of video games, where social activities and conversations tend to continue away from the sight of a gaming screen (Taylor, 2003). For instance, Ness (Interviewee, Smash UK) mentioned that Smash provided them a sense of belonging from participating in a social activity.

- Researcher: So what do you like about smash events?
- Ness: It’s all about the people and people here are really friendly. So sometimes it’s not so much about showing what you got, but also talking to other people and meeting new people. It’s about making connections. Like ‘Jigglypuff’ over there [waves at ‘Jigglypuff’]

[‘Jigglypuff’ waves back], after getting to know him a couple of times, he housed me for this tournament. He said I get the sofa tonight, man.

Rather than simply ‘attending’ and ‘participating’ in tournaments, the Smash community provided a space for Smashers (Smash player) to come together, which may not necessarily be to play, but to meet new people. This suggests that Smash players frequently attend to these events for the talk, conversation, and discussions, which create social ties and bonds within a community (Jansz and Martens, 2005).

You Play Hearthstone? - Being a Sponsored Hearthstone Player

This section considers the reflections from the ethnographer’s participation in competitive gaming – in particular a competitive and sponsored Hearthstone Player. It is important to highlight that becoming a competitive gamer was not intentional nor was it the purpose for this research – it was something I enjoyed playing, and it became very popular, very quickly.

Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2014) is a ‘free-to-play’ online collectable card video game, which is turn-based between two opponents, using constructed decks of thirty cards along with a selected hero with a unique ‘hero power’ – hero class consist of Druid, Hunter, Mage, Paladin, Priest, Rouge, Shaman, Warlock and Warrior. The game has been favourably reviewed by critics and proven successful for Blizzard. By April 2016, Blizzard has reported more than 50 million *Hearthstone* players. The game has become popular as an eSport with cash-prize tournaments hosted by Blizzard and other parties (Nunneley, 2016).

From Insomnia53 (i53), I began gathering data from a competitive gamers’ perspective and remained in the field for an extended period (until December 2015). Unlike studies that examine video gamers from a distance, I wanted a section that provided an insight from being a competitive Hearthstone player within the Hearthstone community. From a researchers’ standpoint, this prompts the question, do you have to be a competitive gamer to study competitive gamers? The initial answer to this question is no, however, in a field investigation, the pursuit of new propositions can sometimes require the participation in strange activities for the purpose of researching the unfamiliar (Shaffir and Stebbins, 1991). As mentioned previously, Powdermaker (1968) suggests that field investigating can

sometimes lead to feelings of being overwhelmed by the difficulties of really getting “inside” an alien culture and of learning an unrecorded or other strange language. Hence, to overcome these difficulties, I suggest becoming a competent player is essential and becoming familiar with the community – this does not necessarily mean winning tournaments, but at least competing in enough tournaments to grasp an understanding from a players’ perspective in competitive gaming. It is important to highlight that this work has been challenging in terms of the researchers’ relationship with the field – especially the levels of commitment, social progression and tuition involved in competitive gaming, which are often taken for granted. Hence, this section argues that competitive gaming involves more than players simply competing against each other and coming out on top, rather it involves a significant amount of preparation, practice and interaction with other players to compete in eSport events.

Competitive Gaming and eSports

From the data gathered, the majority of video game events examined consists of video game tournaments with high stakes – in particular, electronic-sports (E-Sports/eSports) tournaments. Cobban (2016, p.1) states that; ‘in order for a game to become a successful eSports, the game needs to be competitive, have a large player base, and be well funded’. This suggests that it must be a game where people play against each other; have skill involved; have enough players; have regular players who watch twitch streams, read interviews, attend tournaments events; have people to drive the game and community forward; and most importantly have funds to support itself (Cobban, 2016). Similar to traditional sports, eSports has attracted a vast community of professional players (pro-gamers), teams, commentators, sponsors, spectators and fans. The rising popularity of eSports has caught the academic attention to examine this phenomenon, such as Taylor’s (2012) work on eSports, spectatorship and women. Taylor (2012) suggests that enjoying video games at a professional level is not a young boy dream anymore and the best evidence is the amazing evolution of electronic sports over the last decade. However, it is important to highlight that within the study of video games and eSports, there has often been focus on the live streaming aspect of eSports, rather than the presence of video gamers attending eSports events. For instance, eSports consist of competitive gaming in front of fans from around the world. The fans not only watch them via streaming platforms

(like YouTube and Twitch Gaming), but also meet often in packed stadiums where they watch the game on a big screen. This suggests an importance to consider the rising popularity of eSports and video game events.

The Hearthstone Community

This refers to a community of players that play Hearthstone. The Hearthstone community consists of various groups of individuals: from casual players, competitive players, sponsored players and professional players. As a gaming community, hearthstone players often communicate on Twitch (see Twitch Communities), online forums and Facebook groups, with access to participate in regular online tournaments (a few online tournaments a week), along with the occasional fireside gatherings and public tournaments at video game events. Despite there not being much research on competitive gamers at video game events, the Hearthstone players that attended video game events had a strong sense of community and identity. Hearthstone players often collaborated amongst each other at video game events and ‘hung out’ together. Besides the Hearthstone tournament itself, it is important to highlight that the players often socialised as a group and united as one when needed. For instance, during iSeries i54, there was a seven-hour delay in the Hearthstone tournament and the Hearthstone players united together (after communicating in the live-chat) to ‘march’ downstairs to the administration desk to meet together and resolve issues causing the delay with the administration staff. However, despite the welcoming atmosphere with considerations to a worthwhile leisure lifestyle shared amongst gamers from ‘being there’ and ‘together’, it is important to highlight that aspects of inclusion and exclusion should be considered (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011) – this is not exclusive to the Hearthstone community or other communities at iSeries, but across all events and communities in this research. For instance, during Insomnia56 (i56) the first major the Hearthstone tournament, ‘TrueSilver Championship’, with invitations to 16 professional Hearthstone players (mostly international players, which separated Hearthstone players into two groups; the ‘VIPs’ (professional/semi-professional players) and the ‘plebs’ (competitive players) – to enter the restricted VIP area required a VIP pass, which was obtainable if you were an invited player or reached Top 8 in the tournament.

Therefore, to provide an understanding on how communities hold and express different norms and values from those of a wider society, this section will consider the processes of

career progression and socialisation. Van Gennep's (1908) concept of 'status passage' considers the idea to describe the passage of an individual through various stages in life courses, such as shifting from being unmarried to married. This has been expanded greatly within sociology, most notable from the University of Chicago, to incorporate the study of processes of career progression and socialisation (Glaser, 1968). For example, Becker's (1963) notion of the 'deviant career' considers the career progression from the minor acts of delinquency through to full-blown criminality. However, Becker's (1963) progression along this path is primarily linear, this may not always be the case and individuals may regress or leapfrog certain positions. As with employment career progression in industry, demotion or a rapid rise to the top, are always possible. Hence, it may be useful to consider Crawford's (2012, p.62) concept of the 'video gamer career path', which refers to; 'a career path involving aspects of socialisation, tuition and social progression'. Crawford (2012, p.64) suggests that adopting a theorisation of career progression has several advantages over using tradition categories or typologies;

First, it moves away from restrictive typologies that can caricature patterns of behaviour and force individuals into rigid 'types'. Second, it allows for an understanding of how an individual's position within a career structure can change and develop over time. Third, and relatedly, it also permits a consideration of how the career structure and community itself can change and develop over time. Fourth, since career paths do not categorise individuals as types, it allows for a greater understanding of the fluidity of contemporary identities and social roles, allowing a consideration of how individuals can follow several, often intersecting, career paths, such as following the career paths of being a science teacher, a science fiction fan and a player of Star Trek Online.

This suggests that 'career' is usually linked to ideas of progression with formal organisations, but can also constitute any form of everyday social development (Goffman, 1968). However, rather than adopting a model that consists of casual gamers, competitive gamers, sponsored players and professional players into a linear career progression model, which suggests certain 'types' of video gamers in certain 'career stages', it seems useful to consider Shaffir and Stebbins's (1991, p.7) four stages of field experiences: '(a) entering the field setting; (b) learning how to play one's role while there, whether it be that of researcher or someone else; (c) maintaining and surviving the several kinds of relations that emerge; and (d) leaving the setting.

5.3. The Four Stages of Competitive Gaming

Similar to Shaffir and Stebbins's (1991, p.7) four stages which field experiences may be coordinated (as mentioned earlier in this chapter), I also consider the process of becoming a competitive gamer in four stages (see Table 5.3.).

Table 5.3 – The Four Stages of Competitive Gaming	
Four Stages of Field Experiences	Four Stages of Competitive Gaming
Entering the field setting	Entering the game scene
Learning how to play one's role while there, whether it be that of researcher or someone else	Learning how to play one's role within the game community – from casual to competitive to sponsored to professional gamers. As well as tournament organisers, casters, coaches, managers and streamers
Maintaining and surviving the several kinds of relations that emerge	Maintaining and surviving the several kinds of relations that emerge within the gaming community
Leaving the setting	Leaving or retirement – retiring from the game itself

Entering the game scene, like many scenes, was considered a similar experience to starting out as a 'fresh-man' – the new player. Amongst the participants, several mentioned similar experiences upon approaching the game scene for the first time;

I always played at home with my brother and friends... I'm usually the one who always wins... so you build a mind-set that you're really good... but when I went to my first tournament, I got **rekt**... I was terrible... not so terrible where I came last, but enough to see a gap between myself and the higher level players... that's when I learned I wasn't as good as I thought I was... but it wasn't all bad, as I got to meet a load of cool people... and now we practice together at weekly's... (Parappa the Rapper: Group Interviewee – Smash UK)

I'm sure most players have had that moment of realisation that they aren't the best player in the world when attending their first tournament... it's rare for a new player to come to a tournament and win the entire thing first time... especially someone unknown to the Smash community... it has happened before, like FalcoMaster3000 *laughs*... but again its very rare... (Bowser: Group Interviewee – Smash UK)

For instance, Parappa the Rapper (Group Interviewee – Smash UK) suggests a noticeable 'gap' between himself and other players, after competing in his first tournament. This

suggests a hierarchical ranking system amongst players within a competitive gaming community. For instance, in certain matches with favourable odds to the considered ‘stronger opponent’ upsets can be made when the ‘weaker opponent’ wins – in particular, to new players who turn up to tournaments for the first time. However, Bowser (Group Interviewee – Smash UK) suggests that it is often rare for a new player to win tournaments, especially those unknown to the Smash community. For example, Bowser (Group Interviewee – Smash UK) mentions FalcoMaster3000 – a mysterious Smash player who competed in a Smash tournament wearing a balaclava and sunglasses. During the tournament, he did not speak for the entire nine hours, surprised everyone with his skill in the game (using Marth, Falco and Fox), and effectively taking 1st place. FalcoMaster3000 kept his identity hidden - to date, his identity remains unknown amongst the Smash community and there has been a couple of hunches that he may be a high level Smash 64 (Super Smash Bros. – Nintendo: 1999) player, based on his play style, character selection and geographical location.



Figure 5.20: FalcoMaster3000 playing in tournament (left) and a short animated video of FalcoMaster3000 on YouTube (right)

Amongst the Smash community, several contributed making a short animated video to commemorate FalcoMaster3000, ‘whoever he may be’ (see Figure 5.20) – after a month from uploading (16th April 2016), the animated video received over 135,126 views on YouTube. This suggests that the fan-made animated video of FalcoMaster3000 can promote fan creativity and demonstrate a sense of community among community members (Sihvonen, 2011).

In comparison, from the field-notes, I summarise my first experiences from competing in Hearthstone tournaments at Insomnia53 (i53):

Throughout the duration of my PhD, I found myself reading, writing and playing Hearthstone. While carrying out research at several Insomnia (i-Series) events, I came across several Hearthstone tournaments, but it was until Insomnia53 (i53) that I decided to complete after competing in a few local tournaments in Manchester. During my first tournament at Insomnia53 (i53) I found myself panicking (unsure what to do), worrying (that I came across as a **noob**) and starving (from not planning ahead and attempting to play a 10 hour back to back tournament with only a bottle of water) due to my lack of competitive gaming experience – in my defence, I did not expect myself to go that far in the tournament. The tournament consisted of group stages followed by a double elimination tournament (Top 16). During the group stages, players were friendly enough to locate your BYOC seat and offer a ‘well-played’ handshake, but once you were in the Top 16 bracket, it was common for players to approach you, discuss tactics, exchange information (such as Skype, Twitter and Twitch) and hang out together. My matches became more intense the further I got in the tournament, and after causing an upset (knocking a sponsored player out the tournament), I felt that I caught other player’s attention, ‘She’s good’. I finished coming Top 8 in the Hearthstone tournament at Insomnia53 (i53) – a respectable position for my first major tournament (Field-notes – Insomnia53)

Upon approaching the gaming scene for the first time, it was common for players to meet face-to-face within an event environment – hence, first impressions are important. As Freud (1933, 113) states: ‘when you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is ‘male or female’ and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty’. Thus, being a female field-worker in a male dominated setting is something of a double-edge sword;

...the presence of a female researcher may be a definite asset, especially in a male dominated setting, because females generally are perceived as warmer and less threatening than males (Weitz, 1976). Of course, the other side of this coin is that women may not be taken as seriously as men, which poses a threat to the validity of the information a female field-worker obtains... (Shaffir and Stebbins, 1991, pp.55-56).

Despite the researcher being recognised as a female player, it is important to highlight that there were times where she was not taken seriously within a male dominated environment. For instance, there were several occasions where the researcher was mistaken to be a male player, such as when opponents sought for a ‘well played’ hand-shake; ‘I’m looking for Munchkin, is that your boyfriend?’ – of which I usually responded, ‘No, I left the Mrs at home, I’m Munchkin’. In addition, the researcher was also perceived to be a **noob** (inexperienced player) on several occasions after accidentally registering using her full name, rather than her gamertag, leading to a confusion when playing against her opponents (see Figure 5.21). Hence, with these presumptions of being an inexperienced player; even

though the researcher came Top 8 at Insomnia53 (i53), there were assumptions that the outcome may have been a fluke, an off chance, which was not fully credited – unless proved otherwise. For instance, the researchers credit for being recognised as a ‘good player’ was not acknowledged until Insomnia55 (i55), when the researcher came Top 8 again; ‘You’ve come Top 8 twice now... and at the UK’s biggest LAN tournament... there’s no fault in that you’re good’ (Hearthstone player: Insomnia55).

GROUP 'C'				
PLAYER / SEEDING	PLAYED	WON/LOST/DRAWN	FOR/AGAINST/DIFF	POINTS
Leckergano (N/A)	4	4/0/0	12/6/6	12
yingying157 (N/A)	4	3/1/0	11/6/5	9
Plazmuh (8)	4	3/1/0	11/7/4	9
Realrib (N/A)	4	1/3/0	9/9/0	3
ultimatox (N/A)	4	1/3/0	7/11/-4	3
Gambo Chris (N/A)	4	0/4/0	1/12/-11	0

GROUP 'E'				
PLAYER / SEEDING	PLAYED	WON/LOST/DRAWN	FOR/AGAINST/DIFF	POINTS
Infused.ExplodingCow (5)	3	3/0/0	9/0/9	9
Fatpower (N/A)	3	2/1/0	6/4/2	6
Milkybadger (N/A)	4	2/2/0	7/7/0	6
Tomas (N/A)	3	1/2/0	3/6/-3	3
(N/A)	3	0/3/0	1/9/-8	0

Figure 5.21: Group stages (Insomnia53)

However, it is important to highlight that most competitive gaming communities are welcoming to all players; ‘...a gaming community is open to anyone... without new players, how else will you make the community grow?’ (Mario – Group Interviewee: Play Expo). For instance, although the researcher was ‘new’ to the Hearthstone scene, Hearthstone players commonly ‘hung-out’ together, discussing tactics and arranging plans for the next tournament.

Once entered into the gaming scene, it is important to learn how to play one’s role within the gaming community – whether it is a casual, competitive, sponsored or professional gamer – as well as tournament organisers, casters, coaches, managers and streamers. As mentioned earlier, this section considers Shaffir and Stebbins’s (1991) four stages of field experiences to provide an understanding on the progression points of those engaged in competitive gaming. I have purposely not adapted Crawford’s (2004) career of a sport fan/video gamer model, however, this does not mean the model is useless to examine the

career of a video gamer – where career progression may demonstrate different characteristics in their patterns of play and attitudes (Crawford, 2012) (see Figure 5.22).



Figure 5.22: The career of a sport fan/ video gamer (Crawford, 2012, p.63)

For instance, casual gamers could be located within ‘engaged’, where players take on an interest in the game and may play casually. Competitive gamers could be located within ‘enthusiastic’, where players are fairly dedicated in their patterns of play and their gaming interests will occupy a comparatively important location in their everyday life. This may consist of regularly playing games, such as tournament games, and identify themselves as a fan of their enthusiasm – which may involve wearing signifiers to identify the individual as a fan of a particular enthusiasm (Crawford, 2004). Sponsored gamers could be located within ‘devoted’, which tend to be a smaller section of (primarily) long-term gamers. Sponsored gamers are likely to have a significant knowledge and understanding of the game/rules (Crawford, 2004). I consider sponsored gamers above competitive gamers, because to become a sponsored gamer requires a further step, either to be recognised as a good player to be picked up by an eSport organisation or forwardly approach eSport organisations to be picked up. However, it is important to highlight that sponsored players are not necessarily professional players. For instance, within the Hearthstone community, it was common for players to be sponsored with varying levels of support; from a monthly wage, gaming equipment to a team T-shirt. Hence, I consider sponsored players, those who receive smaller returns, such as a team T-shirt, which is not enough to be considered a professional or semi-professional. Professional gamers could be located within ‘professional’, where professional games make up a very small ‘elite’ group of gamers, who will usually make at least a partial amount of income from their involvement in their gaming career, ‘these individuals tend to have been following their sport or enthusiasm for a considerable period of time, and will often have quite detailed knowledge of the sport’s rules, tactics and history’ (Crawford, 2004, p.48). Finally, tournament organisers, casters, coaches, managers and streamers could be located within ‘apparatus’, where individuals are involved with running and administration of the enthusiasm.

Although Crawford's (2004) career of a sport fan/video gamer model is useful to consider the fluidity and temporality of fan/ gaming communities, Shaffir and Stebbins's (1991) four stages of field experiences also provides an understanding on learning how to play one's role within the gaming community; as well as maintaining and surviving the several kinds of relations that emerge within the gaming community. For instance, amongst the participants that competed in gaming tournaments, it was important to be considered a 'good player' or at least a 'competent player', as it proves self-worth, by living up to community norms and development towards a certain amount of social capital (Taylor, 2003). For example, to be considered a 'good' Hearthstone player, and for some eSport tournament requirements, it states that that players must have reached 'Legend rank' (see Figure 5.23).

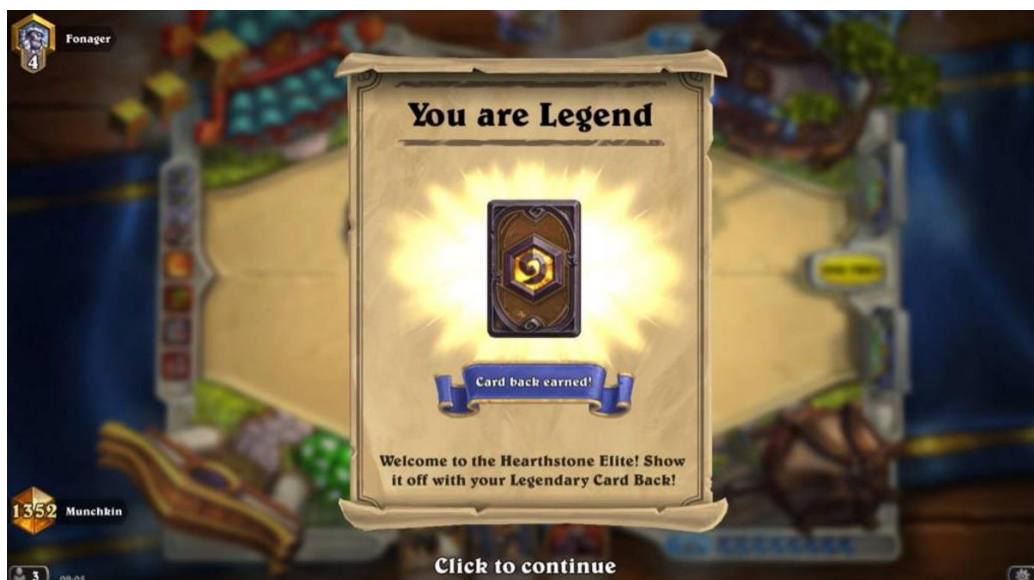


Figure 5.23: Researcher hitting Legend in Hearthstone

One of the hardest achievements in Hearthstone is hitting Legend, especially for those who have never done it before. In Ranked Play, players usually start at Rank 25 and every win rewards one star above the player's medal – win streaks (2 consecutive wins) rewards one additional star (up to Rank 5), but every lose loses one star. To rank up, each rank requires 2-5 stars, where more stars are required the higher you climb. Once a player reached Legend rank, the rank cannot be lost until the season ends (end of the month). Therefore, hitting Legend can be considered a time-consuming, but also a skilful task too - Blizzard states that only 0.5% of Hearthstone players hit Legend rank; out of 20million players, roughly 100,000 reach Legend (Hass, 2014). Although, hitting Legend was considered an achievement for first timers, hitting Legend every season (every month), in the top 100, on

both EU and NA accounts, was considered a more superior achievement - of which 'devotees' and 'professionals' often aimed towards.

However, it is important to highlight that amongst reaching Legend rank, Hearthstone also required more than just playing in front of a video game screen – it also consists of other video game related practices. For instance, from the field-notes, I learned to prepare myself better for tournaments and to become a more 'competent' player, where I did more than just play Hearthstone to hit Legend:

After attending Insomnia53, I consider there to be a learning curve for those who have never participated in a tournament before, especially one of the UK's biggest LAN events. I felt that I was just someone who turned up with three decks and played. I didn't know how to register correctly, I didn't know how to submit decks and scores (I had to ask another player for help), I occasionally contacted TO's (tournament organisers) for help too, and I didn't know how scores tallied up in the group stages – so I was surprised when I was told I made the Top 16 bracket. And most importantly, I did not prepare myself to play 10 hours of Hearthstone, back-to-back, with minimal toilet breaks and limited food (Field-notes, Insomnia53)

After attending Insomnia55, I felt a lot more confident with the procedures of the tournament, and I began to focus on the preparations for the tournament itself... Becoming a 'competent' player was difficult, as it was more than just playing well and attending regularly; it was about attending with the latest knowledge where conversations do not appear out of your depth when talking to other Hearthstone players. Hence, it became important to build bonds with other Hearthstone players – so you wouldn't feel left out. It was common for Hearthstone players to hang out together - in particular, sit together in the BYOC hall.... After competing in several tournaments, you start recognising the 'regular' Hearthstone players within the Hearthstone community (such as the casters/streamers/sponsored/professional players)... Therefore, to fully prepare myself, besides playing the game, I acquired more knowledge; from learning match-ups, win conditions, deck testing, discussing tactics, play styles and player attitudes, practicing matches, communicating with other Hearthstone players on TeamSpeak and watching streams on Twitch... For Insomnia55, I came Top 8 again and won £120 in prize money. After being considered a 'good player', I was picked up by an eSports organisation providing support and a sponsored Team T-Shirt (Field-notes, Insomnia55).

In particular, the field-notes illustrates Shaffir and Stebbins's (1991) stages from learning how to play one's role within the gaming community (from Insomnia53); as well as maintaining and surviving the several kinds of relations that emerge within the gaming community (from Insomnia55). Hence, once you have learned how to play one's role within the gaming community, it is important to maintain it – such as keeping up to date with the latest card release, strategies and tactics to continuing being a consistent player; as well as keeping in contact with other Hearthstone players within the Hearthstone community.

Finally, similar to field-researchers leaving the setting, players may also wish to leave the game scene or retire from the game. Amongst players that leave the game, this may be due to various reasons, such as something else becoming popular, or simply not enjoying the game or the sense of community – such as **cancerous communities**. For example, the Hearthstone community, (in particular, the online community) has often been described to be quite ‘**cancerous**’, where it is socially accepted to ‘behave like a bitch’, calling it ‘I’m salty’, and therefore it is ‘ok’ to whine and throw abuse at each other using in-game chat; ‘...your deck is **netdecked** cancer, mine is a cleverly-crafted, finely-tuned masterpiece!’ (Reddit, 2015).

Meanwhile, others players may choose to retire. As Mario (Interviewee: Play Expo) stated; ‘I retired a couple of years ago... I just wasn’t enjoying it as much’. However, even though some players may leave or retire, some do come back. For instance, Mario Interviewee: Play Expo) suggested about going back to playing Smash again; ‘I might get back into it... it’ll be nice to see old faces again’.

5.4. The Hearthstone Metagame

Even though competing in a video game tournament consists of playing video games in front of a video game screen, there are aspects of competitive gaming that takes place away from the video game screen – in particular, the ‘metaculture’ or ‘meta-communication’ (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). As mentioned previously, this can involve gamers coming together in out-of-game meeting places, discussing and sharing strategies, creating ranking systems based on their performance, modding, and poaching (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). Using Garfield’s (2000) metagame model metagames in four categories (as discussed in chapter 3), this section will use examples from Hearthstone tournaments, held at Insomnia Gaming Festivals, to provide an analysis on the following; what players bring to a game, what a player takes away from a game, what happens between games, and what happens during a game other than the game itself.

To: What a Player Brings to a Game

Garfield (2000) suggests that players usually bring something to a game from the four components; game resources, strategic preparations, peripheral game recourses, and

reputation. In relation to Hearthstone, the game resources that Hearthstone players bought consists of deck lists (usually 3 decks from 3 different classes) – depending on tournament rules) to submit to tournament organisers (for registration purposes), and sometimes gaming equipment, such as PCs, laptops, tablets and phones (from April 2015, Hearthstone became available on mobile). Similarly, Smash players also bought gaming equipment, such as their own controllers (depending on the tournament rules), either customised themselves or purchased customised controllers through ‘official’ or ‘unofficial’ retailers – from ‘painted’ controllers to GCC (game cube controller) mods for consistent shield drops, hybrid gate and more (see Figure 5.24) (Smashboards, 2016) – currently there is no rule in Smash tournaments where modified controllers are banned, except for Genesis 2 (2011) and Genesis 3 (2016).



Figure 5.24: A ‘painted’ customised controller (left) and GCC mod controller (right)

Similar to most video games, it was common to bring strategic preparations and peripheral game recourses, such as analysis of opponents (knowing which classes opponents play in Hearthstone), knowledge on play patterns (such as match-ups) and a note-pad and pen – however, note-taking is banned at Dreamhack. Finally, player reputation involves the reputation of the player itself. It is important to highlight that player reputation mainly applied to those who attended regularly, in comparison to those who attended infrequently. For instance, from the research observations, after competing in several Hearthstone tournaments, you soon recognise the same ‘gamer-tags’ that keep appearing in the bracket and see ‘familiar faces’ building of reputation of a ‘regular’ Hearthstone player.

From: What a Player Takes Away From a Game

Garfield (2000) suggests that players often take something away from a game, whether it's some kind of stake or experience of the game itself. In relation to tournaments and competitions, whether it is Hearthstone tournaments, Smash tournaments or the cosplay masquerade, it is often for those who compete to take away some winning stakes. For example, Insomnia56 (i56) introduced their first major the Hearthstone tournament, 'TrueSilver Championship', with invitations to 16 professional Hearthstone players (mostly international players) for the share of \$30,000 prize fund, as well as their own dedicated eSports stage for spectatorship.



Figure 5.25: A Hearthstone player receiving a cheque for coming third at Insomnia52

In the photograph above, the Hearthstone player participated in a Hearthstone tournament at Insomnia52 (i52) (see Figure 5.25). Although the player did not come first, the player still takes away some winning stakes, as well as experience from taking part and knowledge of other players, play styles and so forth.

Between: What Happens Between Games

Garfield (2000) suggests that the space between games is filled with a rich palette of metagame activities that can add value to the core experiences. For instance, it was

common for players either to take short breaks or reflect on strategy, training, or planning for the next game. In particular, depending the time between games, some Hearthstone players often ‘scouted’ on their next opponents, watching their game from over their shoulder, sometimes with pen and paper to take notes, and reflecting on strategy and planning for the next game. Due to the nature of a turn-based game, there is often time for opponents to take notes during a game; this can include information from cards mulligan, opponent cards played, cards remaining in your deck and much more - hence this can bring a significant impact to the game.

Meanwhile, during a money match on *Project M* (A fan generated Super Smash Brothers game) at SKTAR 3 [2014], Prof Pro and Rolex had a \$100 money match for the best ‘Snake’ (a character from *Metal Gear*). Between games, Prof Pro performed a ‘salt dance’ (victory dance) to tease his opponents reputation and for the appeal of other players watching the game on live stream (see Figure 5.26). Rolex later returned the ‘salt dance’ when he won the next game (see Figure 5.27).



Figure 5.26: Prof Pro vs. Rolex \$100 money match – Prof Pro’s ‘salt dance’ from winning the first game



Figure 5.27: Prof Pro vs. Rolex \$100 money match
– Rolex’s ‘salt dance’ after winning the second game

This form of exploration of player reputations, which can also include trash talking or playing ‘head games’, can also affect the meta-game as well (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). While this live stream was happening, the stream feed was filled with spectator comments from both supporters.

During: What Happens During a Game Other Than the Game Itself

Finally, Garfield (2000) suggests the influence of real life on a game in play. For instance, the physical environment of play such as a noisy atmosphere, temperature of the room or good lighting can have an effect on the game amongst players playing in these situations – in particular, the internet. During Insomnia53 (i53), there were issues with the internet disconnecting during tournament games –the internet connection was connected using Ethernet cables, and entire rows of computers disconnected occasionally, creating problems for tournament organisers to make ‘rematch calls’. Similarly, during Insomnia55 (i55), a few of the smaller BYOC halls experienced a power-cut, which caused tournament delays until the issue was resolved.

In addition, during video game events, video gamers have a choice to participate in various video game-related practices, such as playing game demonstrations. For instance, during the time between games, video gamers can either reflect on the game itself amongst others

to consider if it is worth purchasing (such as new game release) or strategically think between games.



Figure 5.28: Video game-goers queuing at Eurogamer Expo [2013]

Besides what happens during the game, other than the game itself; in particular, Eurogamer Expo [2013], queuing to play the next game demonstration is a common feature that occurs at video game events that is often recognised amongst video gamers, which can often take around two hours, depending on popularity (see Figure 5.28) – the waiting game.

5.5. Patterns in Video Game Communities

From the data gathered, almost all the participants considered themselves to be part of a community in some form. These communities varied in many ways; from range in size and involvement; how active the community is, to how the community is maintained and supported; the representation of the community itself; and the accessibility for community members through the processes of inclusion and exclusion. As Denlaty (2003) writes;

Communities have been based on ethnicity, religion, class or politics; they may be large or small; ‘thin’ or ‘thick’ attachments may underlie them; they may be locally based and globally organized, affirmative or subversive in their relation to the established order; they may be traditional, modern and even postmodern; reactionary and progressive (Denlaty, 2003, p.2)

Hand and Moore (2006) suggests that video gamers often consider themselves to be part of a video game community with extensive and complex patterns of social interactions, culture, and norms.

For instance, video game communities within video game events can differ in size, from a small group of individuals that attend video game related events together (such as going with a small group of friends), bigger groups of individuals that organise amongst themselves to 'stick together' throughout the event (such as being seated together for LAN events) and individuals that consider themselves to be part of a wider community from being surrounded by others with similar interests. In addition, these complex patterns within video game communities varied amongst video game events. Every year there has been an increase in the number of video game events available year after year with more activities to appeal to more people. Therefore, the motive for attendance amongst video gamers can differ too.

Nonetheless, several video game events only occurred at certain times or irregularly throughout the year, sometimes two or three times a year; of which consists of people who are usually separated by distance to come together. This suggests that video game communities within video game events may differ to 'traditional' communities. For instance, Delanty (2003) suggests that early time community was often highly political and even contractual, in comparison to the opposition to today's society and based on non-contractual ties. Community lies at the formation of politics but it was eroded by modernity, which led to the disenchantment of community. Delanty (2003) states that the discourse of community has been dominated by the narrative of loss and recovery; where modernity destroys community which must be recovered and realised in a new form. Therefore, what is stressed is the fluid nature of community as an expression of modalities of belonging. This suggests that the concept of 'neo-tribes' from Maffesoli (1996) may provide a more profitable way to theories video communities within video game events, which refers to the formation of these tribes being fluid, loosely organised and by no means fixed, yet still places an emphasis on community and belonging. For instance, Bulbasaur (Group Interview: I-Series) talks about his experience from attending Insomnia Gaming Festivals since 2008;

Bulbasaur: I went in 2008... so 7 years ago? So from i34... to i54?! Wow... 20 times! Well... it was weird, only because how it has been developed... i34 was probably still the biggest I've ever been to, in contrast... like they moved from Newbury to Stoneleigh... and it

was 2500 in one room, there was no VIPs, no small rooms, it was just one massive thing with everybody in it, which was awesome but at the same time horrific because if something happened, it escalated very fast, there's no real place to hang about, no real community aspect... but it was massive and so tournament based... but literally after a couple of events the recession came.... It just crashed really badly, they couldn't get responses, they couldn't get enough money to pay for it, so they ended back up to Newbury... and reduced it to like a really community LAN... which was really cool, everyone was like 'yay we got it again', but now I think we've got both... like you choose which room you want to be in... you can go explore or be anti-social... you can have your own kind of event... it's like 'we did this' and other people would be like 'I didn't know about that'... which is good in a way, maybe there should be more communication, but it seems that certain groups of people have their own way to have fun...

Bulbasaur (Group Interviewee: I-Series) suggests that the move back to Newbury promoted a stronger sense of community from being in one room, rather than several smaller rooms. For instance, during i53, i54 and i55 the venue was moved to Coventry from Telford, which consists a number of smaller rooms in comparison to 'one big hall'. With the increasing numbers of attendance at Insomnia Gaming Festivals, Craig Fletcher (Multiplay 2015) announces that it has become more than a LAN, where it is not just about the BYOC experience, rather it will be the core of the event with more cosplay, bands and board games, including hobbies we pursue as gamers that bring us all together and become more open to the general public through the celebration of gaming. As Charmander (Group Interview: I-Series) states; 'iSeries feels, to me, like the place where existing communities come to meet up, rather than being part of an 'Insomnia community' that we all use to look to for activity...' Hence, within a busy packed schedule with so many things happening, these 'certain groups of people' often 'do their own thing', rather than 'act as one'. This suggests the fragmentation of separating people into smaller groups, rather than a BYOC community as a whole.

However, Cohen (1985) states that community is to be understood less a social practice than a symbolic structure. Cohen's (1985) argument tended to shift the focus away from the older emphasis on community as a form of social interaction based on locality to a concern with meaning and identity. This approach was also reflected in Anderson's (1983, p.6) book, *Imagined Communities*, which 'are to be distinguished not by their falseness/genuineness, but the style in which they are imagined'. Anderson (1983) suggests that community is shaped by cognitive and symbolic structures that are not

underpinned by ‘lived’ spaces and immediate forms of social interaction. For instance, ‘Sonic’ mentions that queueing is a common feature at Eurogamer:

Researcher: Is queueing common at Eurogamer?

Sonic: Oh yeah. Queueing is very common at Eurogamer. Like yesterday, I’ve queued three hours for *Battlefield 4*, two hours for *Titanfall*, one hour for *Assassin’s Creed 4* and one hour for *FIFA 14*. Usually, the first two days of the event (Thursday and Friday) is generally quieter in comparison to the weekend (Saturday and Sunday). Today, I’m queueing for *Playstation 4*, *Xbox One* and *Oculus Rift*. So I’m trying to get the big ones out of the way first before it hits the weekend. Otherwise, the queues would be even bigger over the weekend.

From my observations, most of the participants recognised that queueing was a common feature, which ranged between ten minutes (after ‘running in’ with the crowd when the show opened), to over 4 hours to play on the latest video game releases and video game consoles. In relation to communities, the Eurogamer community consists of several communities, where groups and individuals come together in one location. In particular, gamers with an interest in certain video games and queue for several hours for video game demonstrations before game releases; ranging from the latest game releases to indie game developments. However, when a participant was asked whether they felt Eurogamer provided them a sense of community, Chell (Interviewee: EuroGamer) responded

Chell: I don’t feel as though I’m part of the community as such. But it feels more like... a community as a whole, if that makes any sense. Like we are not connected, when we come together... with... erm... we like the same stuff or similar interests, so we’re like a collective group that isn’t connected to each other physically, but emotionally? Atmosphere-ly? If that’s a word?

Even though the participant mentioned not being part of a community, Chell (Interviewee: EuroGamer) felt, to some extent, connected to the physical environment that was surrounded by others with similar interests and a sense of community ‘as a whole’ – the imagined community (Anderson, 1983). Therefore, due to the disparate nature, the gaming community amongst those who attend Eurogamer is not possible to measure its size. This suggests that the concept of ‘imagined communities’ may provide better understanding of communities, which suggest a collective connection through similar interests and being ‘imagined’.

Throughout this research, there were several communities that were connected to certain video game events; from the LAN communities that attend LAN events together; the Final Fantasy Fans that dedicate themselves to attend every Final Fantasy event; the Smash community that regularly attend weekly gatherings, regional and national events. However, it is important to highlight that several participants did not just attend one series of events, rather it was common to attend more than one series of events; such as those who attended Final Fantasy orchestral concerts also attended London MCM Comic con for the Square Enix store; and those who attended Insomnia Gaming Festivals to compete in tournaments also travelled to Sweden for Dreamhack. Therefore, this supports the argument that video games can be consumed in different ways, where particular gaming interests to attend certain events can attract gamers to travel from one event to another.

This suggests that it may be useful to explore video game events from the crowd audience, the excitement and so on. For instance, Gustave Le Bon (1985) study on *The Crowd: A study of the Popular Mind* explores the concerns with how crowds can make participating actors feel and act in a different way than they would in isolation. This form of transformative power parallels the work with Durkheim's (1995) work on 'collective effervescence'. Durkheim's (1995) study on 'Elementary Forms of Religious Life' introduced the notion of 'collective effervescence', suggesting that its presence in religious assemblies helped revitalize the spiritual beliefs of the group and foster feelings of social solidarity amongst its members:

Vital energies become hyper-excited, the passions more intense, the sensations more powerful; there are indeed some that are produced only at this moment. A Man does not recognize himself; he feels somehow transformed and in consequence transforms his surroundings (Durkheim, 1965, p.422).

Durkheim observed the following in the ceremony's social environment:

When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds, which are very open to outside impressions; each re-echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others. The initial impulse thus proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance. And as such active passions so free from all control could not fail to burst out, on every side one sees nothing but violent gestures, cries, veritable howls, and deafening noises of every sort, which aid in intensifying still more the state of mind which they manifest (Durkheim, 1965, p.215)

For Durkheim (1995), the ‘hyer-excited’ moments that happen at certain events can be considered to be ‘magical’ in itself - similar to the magic circle, which can be transformed. This suggests that Durkheim’s (1995) work on ‘collective effervescence’ can be considered to be useful as a metaphor to apply to video game events.

In addition, with considerations to explore video gaming as a culture (metaculture) and video gamers as part of a community (game communities), Brian Longhurst (2007) notion of ‘elective belonging’ provides a useful way to theorise video gamer culture, where it seeks the divide of video gamers into distinct categories and considers the movement of ‘groups’ (such as neo-tribes), while also allowing moments of the exceptional. Therefore, it is important to consider the extent of how video gamers interpret the meaning of video gaming within these exceptional moments away from the video game screen; through the attendance of various video game events and participation of various video game related practices that may not necessarily take place in front of a video game screen.

5.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter considered two principal research questions, who are the visitors and what motivated them to participate in video game events?

Firstly, most studies often explore the question ‘who plays video games’, rather than those who attend video game events. Although the stereotype of video gamers as predominately white male adolescences is commonly assessed, there is no specific pattern of representation across various video game events. Therefore, the social demographic of consuming games has shifted to the extent where we can no longer identify an ‘average gamer’ amongst people who can access a computer – correspondingly the social demographic of visitors that attend video game events can also be as diverse as someone who can access the venue.

Secondly, there has been limited research focusing on the motives of video gamers attending video game events. Previous studies have often focused on the immediate forms of play, where academics have ignored the social context of playing *with* video games (Newman, 2008). Therefore, by focusing on the motive of video gamers attending video game events, it may provide a shift from examining video games with narrow understands of (direct) play, and consider the wider social aspect of video gaming away from the video

game screen. Hence, the findings suggest that there were three characteristics amongst the reasons for attendance – in particular, to the social, participative and competitive elements of video gaming.

The ‘socialiser’ usually consists of individual that come together for social purposes, besides playing the game itself. This can include the opportunity to meet like-minded people, communicate through social networking, or simply to ‘hang out’ with others. This suggests that ‘being there’ and together’ provides a welcome atmosphere with considerations to a worthwhile leisure lifestyle share amongst gamers (Jonsson and Veragen, 2011). The socialiser illustrates that video games can be considered a social activity that extends beyond the video game screen.

The ‘participator’ refers to individuals that attend video game events for participation purposes. Video game events consist of various social and cultural practise, besides gaming itself, where communities come together and interact in meaningful ways; from exhibitions showcasing products and selling goods, cosplay, signing sessions, workshops, and much more. Many of those who attend video game events often engage themselves through various forms of socialisation, tuition, and social progression, that are often taken for granted – in particular, where groups of individuals participate in various video game related practices, forming a sense of community within a temporal time and location. The participator illustrates the social and cultural video game practices within video game events, besides gaming itself.

The ‘competitor’ refers to individuals who attend video game events for competitive purposes, such as competing in video game tournaments. One of the main purposes in competing is for the ‘chance to win’. Even though competing in a video game tournament consists of playing video games in front of a video game screen, there are aspects of competitive gaming that takes place away from the video game screen – in particular, the ‘metaculture’ or ‘meta communication’ (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). This can involve gamers coming together in out-of-game meeting places, discussing and sharing strategies, creating ranking systems based on their performances, modding and poaching. Hence, the competitor illustrates that there is more to video game tournaments than playing video games – it can involve various video game related practices away from the video game screen, which can support the social interaction amongst those who compete in video game tournaments.

The purpose for identifying the three types of video game attendees (socialiser, participator, and competitor) is to categorise the various reasons for attendance within their different forms of social encounters within video game communities. The continuum of socialness, activeness and competitiveness suggest that there can be varying levels of commitment amongst those who participate in video game related practices. For example, those who participate in various video game related practices may nip in and out of certain communities and follow other people into other series of commitment. This form of fluidity relates to characteristics of a neo-tribe (Maffesoli, 1996), where communities are loosely organised and by no means fixed, yet still places an emphasis on community and belonging. This suggests that gaming is performed in the context of existing social and cultural networks, friendships, and relationships, where various video game practices implicated in video gaming can contribute to the construction of gaming communities and identities.

In addition, this chapter considers the importance on examining competitive gaming from a non-competitive and competitive researchers' standpoint: from a non-competitive player within the Smash community, as well as a competitive/sponsored player within the Hearthstone community. For instance, conducting research from a non-competitive Smash players' perspective provided an insight to consider 'other roles' within the Smash community. This included taking on the roles as a volunteer to support the Smash community from working in the kitchen, to transporting gaming equipment, and becoming a tournament organiser. In comparison, from a competitive Hearthstone players' perspective, this provided an insight to consider the competitive elements of gaming through the processes of career progression. Hence, competitive gaming involves more than players simply competing against other players and coming out on top, rather it involves a significant amount of preparation, practice and interaction with other players to compete in eSport events.

Furthermore, this chapter does not explicitly examine gender in a separate section. Due to the scope of this thesis, it only focuses on the findings related to gender, rather than other diversities, including sexuality and race – as the findings suggest patterns in attendance amongst male and female attendees, trends in participation of video game related practices and elements of player identification. The findings suggest that LAN events (such as *Insomnia: iSeries*), exhibitions that consist of a vast number of the latest game demonstrations (such as Eurogamer) and more tournament-based events (such as Smash

and MBA events) tend to consist of a higher proportion of male attendance, than seen at video game related conventions (such as MCM Comic Con), smaller exhibitions (Play Expo), and video game related orchestral concerts (such as, Distant Worlds and Symphony Legends), which tend to have a 'more balanced' ratio of males and females. Although, Taylor and Witkowski's (2010) study on LAN events (Dreamhack) suggest that there was an increasing presence of female gamers; my research observations suggest that women still appear significantly under-represented at LAN events. Consequently, due to higher numbers in attendance to exhibitions that consist of a vast number of latest game demonstrations and competitive events, the findings suggest that playing video games and competing in tournaments were popular amongst men. In comparison, video game events that featured a variety of interests (including anime, manga, and sci-fi) tended to have a 'more balanced' ratio of male and female attendance. Although, it is important to highlight that, to some extent, women still remain in a supportive role within a male dominated gaming environment. For instance, volunteers working in the kitchen for Edintines 2 (Smash UK) were mostly women (Smash Wives and Girlfriends), and there were only 5 female Hearthstone players (including the researcher) whom competed in the 128-person tournament at Insomnia Gaming Events. However, due to the 'more balanced' ratio of men and women attendance to conventions and video game related orchestral concerts, the findings suggest that women are increasing participating in video game related practices in other ways – such as purchasing merchandising, cosplay and much more. Hence, the findings suggest that a specific pattern of representation may not be consistent across all video game events.

In relation to video game communities, almost all the participants considered themselves to be part of a community in some form. As previously mentioned (in chapter 3) MacCallum-Stewart (2014) suggests that it is no longer enough to analyse one type of community in order to understand the plethora of players who take part in various video game related practices (besides gaming itself) and the behaviours they exhibit. For example, MacCallum-Stewart's (2014) outline of case studies model briefly outlines the communities discussed as case studies to provide some context to each other. Even though the video game communities are defined separately, it is important to highlight that the majority of the participants have attended more than one event, and consider themselves part of more than one gaming community.

Overall, the findings suggest patterns of characteristics of video gamers and video game communities; from the socialiser, participator and competitor, as well as video game communities with similar characteristics to neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996) and imaginary communities (Anderson, 1983). Hence, this suggests an importance to consider the extent of how video gamers interpret the meaning to video gaming within these exceptional moments away from the video game screen.

Chapter 6

The Embodied Experience:

The Feels (A wave of emotions that sometimes cannot be adequately explained)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I considered two principal research questions, who are the visitors and what motivated them to participate in video game events? However, a third principal research question is essential to examine; what did they experience during video game events? The research data suggest patterns of embodied experiences that take place at video game events – where embodiment refers to the act of embodying or the state of being embodied. Therefore, this chapter examines the embodied experience of video gamers through the five senses; sight, sound, smell, taste and touch (feel).

Using Jonsson and Verhagen's (2011) concept of embodiment and video gamers, they suggest that playing video games is not about getting rid of the body; it is also about the corporeal and embodied experience.

SIGHT: the sight of video gamers: visual experience and spectatorship

SOUND: the sound of video gamers: conversations and controllers

SMELL: the smell of video gamers: body odour and warm machines

TASTE: the taste of video gamers: junk food and energy drinks

TOUCH (FEEL): the touch of video gamers: physical presence and comfort

Although Jonsson and Verhagen (2011) do not directly refer to the five senses, it can be considered to be a useful tool to understand the embodied experience outside 'ordinary' everyday life. The shifting focus away from what occurs on-screen provides recognition that the video gamer is a person, with a physical and corporal existence, and that play is an embodied experience (Crawford, 2012) - where practices of play can extend beyond the video game screen. This suggests that participating at video game events tells us something more than just what games people play. In addition, Kalekin-Fisherman and Low (2010) suggests a person's personal experience of participation can be recognised and translated through our senses. Hence, it may be useful to consider the significance of the senses in culture and society through 'sensory ethnography' (Pink, 2015).

6.1. Sensory Ethnography

Sensory Ethnography originates from social anthropology, which has reflected a growing interest across other disciplines; such as geography and sociology. It refers to the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice (Pink, 2015). It is a process of grasping ‘the most profound type of knowledge [which] is not spoken of at all and thus inaccessible to ethnographic observation or interview’ (Bloch, 1998, p.56). This suggests that it is a critical methodology that departs from the classical observational approach to insist that ethnography is a reflective and experimental process which academics have applied understanding, knowing, and knowledge are produced (Atkinson, Delamont, & Housley, 2007).

The initial impulse towards the sociology of the senses was proposed by Simmel (1997), in his work, ‘*Sociology of the Senses*’; which focused on the importance of micro-sociology and suggested that our sensory perception of others play two key roles in human interaction. Firstly, our ‘sensory impression’ of another person invokes emotional or physical response in us. Secondly, our ‘sense impression’ becomes ‘a route of knowledge of the other’ (Simmel, 1997, p.111). Although Simmel (1997, p.120) concluded by proposing that ‘one will no longer be able to consider as unworthy of attention the delicate, invisible threads that are spun from one person to another’. In part, Simmel’s (1997) legacy encouraged sociologists to focus on a sensory sociology of human interaction. For that reason, this chapter considers the sensory forms of embodiment within video games – where little has been researched.

In relation to video game studies, embodiment has often been applied to the virtual worlds of video games and the interaction of the player with the virtual world; rather than the embodied experience of video gamers at video game events. For instance, as mentioned earlier (in chapter 3), Boellstorff et al. (2012) does not consider networked environments or online communities sustained via chat forums or other media virtual worlds, due to their lack of worldness and embodiment. However, the findings from this research suggest that embodiment is both social and sensual. For example, Jackson’s (2004) ‘*Inside Clubbing: Sensual Experiences in the Art of Being Human*’, suggests that sensual experiments take shape through music, dance, dress, drugs, sex and the over-arching “vibe” that characterises alternative club spaces – alternatively, this can also be applied to video game events. Video game events often consist of a wide range of activities to promote

attendance amongst the interest of video gamers. Although, it is important to highlight that these ‘embodied practices’ are different to practices in everyday life. For instance, Jackson (2004) considers sensual practices to be different from practices which normally characterise everyday life and its accompanying habitus:

...this experiential shift expands the parameters of clubbers’ sensual landscape and moves them beyond their own habituated social practices, emotional boundaries, fears, insecurities and their ingrained perceptions of the world in which they are immersed (Jackson, 2004, p.115).

In relation to everyday life, Crawford (2012) suggests that there are still moments of the spectacular in the midst of the everyday and the mundane. However, it is important to consider moments with a sense of **communitas** and a release from mundane structures – which differentiate between the everyday and sensual practices (McCaffrey, 2012) – such as video game events. This suggests that sensory ethnography may be a useful tool for consideration for data analysis – in particular, the embodied experience of video game events, including sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

6.1.1. Sight

Sight is something that we often take for granted. Synnott (1993) conducted a survey with students asking which sense they would least like to lose: which sense is more precious to them? Results indicated that 88 percent (N = 49) said sight; 10 percent said touch; and 1 said hearing. Despite the necessity of sight, we tend to think that being blind would be much worse than being deaf or dumb or anomic. This suggests that sight is supreme (Synnott, 1993).

The primacy of sight is particularly clear in our folk sayings. The folk saying ‘seeing is believing’ suggest that we establish sight as the paradigm of belief (Synnott, 1993, p. 207). For instance, Pikachu (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) suggests a necessity to establish sight as the ultimate in empirical verification, and definitive:

Pikachu: But I tell you what, if they put Final Fantasy XV down, I’d definitely go... just to see it’s alive...

Researcher: Why Final Fantasy XV in particular?

Pikachu: I need to play that like, like ASAP! That game has been in development for 8 years, I need to see what they've been doing for 8 years...

The folk saying 'believe nothing of what you hear, and only half of what you see' suggests that sight is far more reliable than hearing. In relation to fandom, fans often desire certain things, whether if its news on the next series or merchandise related items. Also, even when certain things are heard, fans may not necessarily believe what they hear until they have seen it and experienced it in person. As Master Chief (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) states:

...I use to get really excited about new games coming out, especially the ones with really good reviews... but once you've bought the game, sat down to play it, you then realise it's not what you expected... this is why I don't bother with reviews anymore, you're better off making your own judgment... some people just don't know what they are going on about...

Similar to the ancient dialogue between children and parents: 'I didn't do it!' 'You did! I saw you!' suggests that one's own eyes are far more reliable than someone else's tongue. This suggests that language lies, and hides the truth; sight sees the truth, or at least part of it – hence we should consider the dimensions of visual supremacy (Synnott, 1993). For instance, several participants mentioned their visit to video game events to 'check it out' after being recommend by family, friends; as well as advertisements on billboards and over the radio. As King Dedede (Group Interviewee: EuroGamer) states; '...my friends told me about this... it's my first time... so far I've enjoyed myself... I'm impressed'. Similarly, Clyde (Group Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) stated: 'I heard about it on the radio... told these guys... some of them already knew about it, so we decided to come together... some pretty cool stuff here... I think I'll come again...' This sense of confirmation or 'see it for themselves' suggests a recognition of a particular interest to attend video game events, and to make judgements to consider if it was worthwhile.

In relation to video game events, the majority of the participants mentioned several things that triggered their sight senses; from the latest video games and the length of queues, the thousands of people that have turned up, the star guests that they cannot wait to meet, the number of competitive players that attend to compete, the cosplays that they recognise, the specialised merchandise that they want to buy, and the big banners floating above the exhibitor stalls. Synnott (1993) suggests that sight is associated with reason, understanding, knowledge, wisdom and truth. Sight is an essential sense, which functions

simultaneously with the other senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch). For example, Newman (2004) suggests that spectators do more than ‘mindless’ observing; ‘It’s more to do with watching it together... being hyped together, shouting and cheering together...’ (Bowser, Interviewee: Smash UK). Spectators often travel to different locations to be amongst the best players, and watch them compete; although these people cannot execute commands with a controller, these are also people that are still involved in an important way in the division of labour that can occur during gameplay. As Newman (2004, p.409) writes;

While these players cannot be seen as having any interactive control because they possess no direct link to the interface of the game and cannot perform or execute commands, they nonetheless demonstrate a level of interest and experiential engagement with the game that, while mediated through the primary player, exceeds that of the bystander or observer...

This suggests that the sensual experience is connected between the body, mind, and the culture. Therefore, it may be useful to ‘...reconsider the body at the heart of sociology, rather than peripheral to the discipline, and more importantly at the heart of our social lives and our sense of self’ (Synnott, 1993, p.4). Most people assume their sensory responses are automatic and purely physical, but recent studies in the cultural processes of physical experience teach us that our responses are more complex than we realise (Vannini et al., 2012).

6.1.2. Sound

In relation to video game studies, academic writing with sounds is growing (Collins, 2013). For instance, Newman (2008) suggests that fan art includes the production of music, crafts and costumes. As Crawford (2012, p.134) stated:

Newman (2008) suggests that some video game fans will carefully and meticulously transcribe and re-perform video game soundtracks, sound effects and theme tunes, or remix them into new musical creations; many of which can be found posted on video game fan websites – such as chiptune

Chiptune (also known as chip music or 8-bit music) is a new genre of music that uses microchip-based audio hardware of early home computers and gaming consoles and repurposes it for artistic expression: ‘...chiptune artists reinvent the technology found in old computers such as Commodore 64, Amiga and ZX Spectrum as well as in out-dated video game consoles such as Nintendo Game Boy or Mega Drive/Genesis in order to

create new music' (Márquez, 2014, p.1). Similar to other subcultures (punk, teds, mods, rockers, etc.), Márquez (2014) suggests that since the early days of chip music a whole subculture scene has been created around it. It embodies different forms of expression sharing a common theme: a respect and devotion to the old sounds of the 8-bit era and the obsolete game technologies related to the. This suggests a distinction between the chiptune subculture and other social groups, where its members are centred around a specific era in the history of video games: the 8-bit era – in particular, its devotion to old forms of gaming devices through the playful exploration of their sound capabilities (Márquez, 2014).

In addition, Márquez (2014) suggests that games represent a growing sub-program of a much broader and 'ever-expanding entertainment supersystem' based on 'transmedia intertextuality' (Kinder, 1991; Gottschalk, 1995). For instance, Crawford (2012, p.134) mentions that 'machinema' is a contraction of the words 'machine' and 'cinema' – which refers to the act of film making using video games:

In machinema video characters and objects are manipulated to 'act out' scripts, with a sound-track, such as actors' voices, either dubbed on afterwards or provided in real time by actors voicing over the actions of the in-game characters

This suggests that games are a cultural force that look and interact with other media and other cultural trends in novel and creative ways; such as literature, art, cinema, and even with everyday objects such as T-shirts, posters, and much more (Márquez, 2014). For instance, Márquez, (2014) suggests that some of the most famous orchestras around the world have recorded music for video games. Some records companies have begun to use video games to promote their artists – such as Susan Calloway, soloist singer for Distant Worlds concert albums and her performance of the theme songs 'Distant Worlds', 'Suteki da ne', 'Melodies of Life' and 'Answers' during Final Fantasy orchestral concerts. However, there has been little research on sound and video gamers attending video game events. Amongst the video game events examined, unlike the conventions, exhibitions, and tournaments, video game related orchestral events (such as Distant Worlds, Final Symphony, Symphony Legends, and Video Games Live) produce sounds from the game itself to be heard in a performance setting.



Figure 6.1: Photograph of Distant Worlds (2012) [Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

Besides Final Symphony (Final Fantasy Orchestral) and Symphony Legends (Zelda Orchestral), the majority of the video game related orchestral (usually held at bigger venues, such as the Distant Worlds performed at the Royal Albert Hall and Video Games Live performed at the Hammersmith Apollo) performed live music, as well as visual screens showing clips from the game itself to be played along with the music (see Figure 6.1). This suggests that the senses can function simultaneously with the other senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch). For instance, from the interview, Master Chief (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) mentions the notion of memories being revisited during certain musical related video game events, in particular at video game related orchestral concerts; such as Distant Worlds, Zelda Symphony and Video Games Live:

Master Chief: They are just for the atmosphere... you'll have memories... you get to relive moments where you don't have to replay the games, but you know the game just by two bars the music... or like you know straight away what it is... like you'll know exactly where it is in the game... that you're playing... many memories... like when I go to Distant Worlds, I know straight away what song it is, the name of the song, and I know where I'm battling... walking through and stuff like that...

Master Chief (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) suggests that music; in particular, certain soundtracks can trigger memories from moments in the game itself. Serematakis (194, p.9) states that memory is a; 'culturally mediated material practice that is activated by embodied acts and semantically dense objects'. As Serematakis (1994, p.28) writes:

The memory of one sense is stored in another: that is tactility in sound, of hearing in taste, of sight in sound... The awakening of the sense is awakening the capacity for memory, of tangible memory; to be awake is to remember, one remembers through the senses, via substance.

Serematakis (1994, p.90) continues:

Memory... is cultural mediated practice that is activated by embodied acts and semantically dense objects. This material approach to memory places the sense in time and speaks to memory as both meta-sensory capacity and as a sense-organ in itself

This suggests that memories can be triggered through embodied practices – such as the memories that triggered Master Chief’s (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) through music from the game itself in moments away from the video game screen. Hence, this suggests the importance to consider the interactions to sounds, rather than just listening to sounds. For instance, in relation to conversation, we do more than just listen to the words, we often interpret and interact with others through the use of language – sometimes a shared language, such as slang or references to each other that can only be understood as it is centred around a specific game (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). As mentioned previously (in chapter 3), video gaming often consists of regular forms of conversation within both in-game (online) and out-of-game (offline). For example, during *Insomnia54* (i54), the researcher held a conversation with a *Hearthstone* player while spectating a tournament game together:

Hearthstone Player:	Oh My God! Another ‘Sunwalker’ [a 4/5 creature with taunt]? Has he not got any good cards?
Researcher:	Maybe that’s the only taunt he has in his collection? He may not have the cards to make that deck, so it may be a temporary replacement, rather than a bad choice of cards...
Hearthstone Player:	Yeah, but he’s still a noob. No-one plays that card anymore. I mean... there are so much better cards than Sunwalker... This is just awful, he’s misplayed too...
Researcher:	He should have played ‘Druid of the Claw’ [choose one – charge; or +2 health and taunt] in charge mode and gone face... his opponent doesn’t have many cards left, so that’s his only win condition...
Hearthstone Player:	Yeah, he’s playing too defensively now... GO FACE! DON’T TRADE! Aughhh... I don’t want to watch this anymore. It’s obvious who’s won. He’s just getting punished for playing awfully...

In the conversation above, the ‘Hearthstone Player’ was displeased to see ‘bad cards’ and ‘misplays’ being played, and discussed game tactics with the researcher. This suggests that

conversations can promote gamers to acquire the basic knowledge needed to play the game; from guidance on tactics and strategy, and initiation into the moral order or ethos of the game (Nardi et al., 2007). Hence, video gamers often enjoy the sociability of video gaming, and conversations will tend to continue away from the sight of a gaming screen (Taylor, 2003).

In addition, there are various sounds that can be heard within video game events, such as the sound of video games, controllers, conversations, and much more. For instance, Mario (Interviewee: Play Expo) mentioned that the ‘click-a-tee-clack’ sounds from the controllers to be relatively soothing to listen to during bedtime – also referred as the ‘sound of Smash’:

Researcher: ...is there anything else you miss when you return home after a Smash event?

Mario: Strangely enough, I miss the sound of people playing smash... the click-a-tee-clack noises the controller makes when you play. I find it soothing to fall asleep to...

Luigi Ahhhh... the sound of Smash... I know what you mean... you sort of miss it when you go home after a long weekend of hearing nothing but that... then silence...

During Smash events, it was common for Smash players to play till the wee hours of the morning (from midnight till dawn, more specifically, 5-6am). Amongst the Smashers (Smash players) that stay up, there are also those who go to sleep in the same room. Therefore, the ‘click-a-tee-clack’ sounds from the controllers is a recognisable amongst Smash players; which suggests a distinction from other social groups of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Bauman, 1990).

In comparison to the ‘click-a-tee-clack’ sounds, during Cabin Fever 1 (Smash event) the researcher was provided a space to sleep in the spare bedroom with the sounds of a roaring boiler from several Smashers attempting to take a shower before bed – the roaring sounds were not soothing and stopped around 4am. From the field-notes, the noisy experience became a conversation starter for some Smashers that did not know each other; ‘...did you hear the boiler last night? It sounded as though it was going to explode!’ (Smasher: Cabin Fever 1). This suggests that common embodied practices can promote a sense of community through sensual experiences (Vannini et al., 2012).

Similarly, during Insomnia Gaming Events (i-Series), it was common for BYOC gamers to opt for indoor camping (indoor sleeping area), of which was suggested to be difficult to sleep in a room with other BYOC gamers:

Bulbasaur: Last night was awful, I think I went to bed around 2am, which isn't really late... you go in quietly, because we know other people are asleep... some of us come prepared with airbeds, sleeping bags, eye masks, ear plugs... I was about to fall asleep, then someone ripped a huge fart... everyone in the room was trying hard not to laugh out loud, then suddenly there was a wave of farts coming from everyone else... it escalated so quickly... then someone shouted, 'right guys, stop it, some of us are trying to sleep and have a tournament tomorrow', then someone ripped a huge fart again, making everyone in the room laugh and start again... the room was also really hot, so not great being in a room full sweaty gamers and methane...

Bulbasaur (Group Interviewee: I-Series) referred himself and other BYOC gamers as 'us'; '...some of us come prepared with airbeds, sleeping bags, eye masks, ear plugs...' This suggests that common embodied practices can also promote a sense of identity – where BYOC gamers identify themselves through their preparations to sleep together in a big room. Although the sounds of farts may not be a pleasant one, to some extent, it did provide a sense of community amongst BYOC gamers, where the embodied practices can 'escalate quickly' amongst those who united to create a 'wave of farts'.

As mentioned earlier (in chapter 3), Garfield (2000) suggests that the meta game has four categories:

1. What a player brings to a game
2. What a player takes away from a game
3. What happens between games
4. What happens during a game other than the game itself

In the final category, Garfield (2000) suggests the influence of real life on a game in play. This includes the physical environment of play such as a noisy atmosphere, temperature of the room or good lighting can have an effect on the game amongst players playing in these situations. For instance, a noisy atmosphere can be distracting; especially whilst sleeping or playing games. For competitive players to 'perform well', it was important to get a 'good night sleep' for maximum abilities. For example, during Insomnia53 (i53), a BYOC gamer told the researcher that part of 'LAN culture' was to stay up all night and sleep in the morning with everyone else; 'Stay up with us, it'll be fun... otherwise 'Snorlax' will slap

(double-slap) you in the morning’ (BYOC Gamer). In comparison, during *Insomnia55* (i55), a *Hearthstone* player told the researcher to go to bed early for the *Hearthstone* tournament; ‘I’m going back to the hotel Munchkin, and you should get some sleep too... don’t stay up too late, or you’ll be tired for the tournament tomorrow’ (BYOC Gamer: i55). Although Taylor (2012) suggests that LAN events consists of video gamers whom attempt to stay up for 4 days straight playing video games using the consumption of energy drinks, there are also competitive gamers who go to bed early for an early start to compete in video game tournaments. Similar to professional athletes, sleep in nearly every sport, is now considered key to achieving peak performance (Schultz, 2014) – as well as, exercising, diet and training that are also crucial to maximising abilities. This suggests that the influence of real life can have an effect on a game in play – such as avoiding lack or disrupted sleep that may affect their game performance their physical mind-state, tiredness and fatigue during game play.

Meanwhile, in the BYOC hall, BYOC gamers are seated in rows, where players are able to be located easily. Amongst the BYOC gamers, it was common to bring headphones to block out noises from the surrounding. This was also a common practice during eSport tournaments - usually when tournament games are casted, players either played in an isolated room with their opponent or on the eSports stage, where noise-cancelling headphones are provided to avoid the casters or spectators being heard during game play. Similarly, upon approaching BYOC gamers in the BYOC hall, it is important to check if they are ‘in a game’, before tapping on their shoulder for attention. From the field-notes, the interactions between the BYOC gamer and machine, such as the eyes on the monitor, the motions of the fingers clicking on the mouse and keyboard, the position of headphones and in-built microphone often provided a symbol that the player should not be disturbed – in case it was a tournament game. Hence, it is important for other BYOC gamers to not disturb those who are competing in tournament, such as talking loudly behind them, especially particular game-tactics that may cause an unfair game. However, as mentioned earlier (in chapter 3), there is an under-explored ‘negative’ side of video game communities, which can include exclusion, oppression, and conflict within communities (MacCallum-Stewart, 2014). Conversations that happen behind the player in their BYOC seat can also be distracting, or even rule-breaking, especially those that are discussing game play and tactics behind the player during game play. For instance, during *Insomnia53* (i53), tournament organisers received several complaints from competitive

Hearthstone players detecting high levels of ‘back-seat playing’ (when a player competing in a tournament is provided verbal instructions on game play by another player observing from behind) – ‘back-seat playing’ is against the rules of the game, and if caught, tournament organisers can disqualify (DQ) players from the tournament – this is sometimes moderated by tournament organisers arranging staff/volunteers to observe the game from behind the players. This suggests that noise during gameplay is important, where it can affect the play in the game.

6.1.3. Smell

In relation to video game studies, there has been little research focusing on video gamers and smell. Within the mass media, video gamers have often been represented in a negative light, such as the stereotypical ‘sweaty gamer’, which links gaming addiction with poor physical hygiene. For instance, Video Game Addiction (2016, p.1) reports that signs of gaming addiction in adults can lead to physical symptoms, including difficulty sleeping, migraines, back and neck aches, dry eyes, carpal tunnel syndrome and poor physical hygiene; ‘video game addicts also may become so preoccupied with earning the high score or reaching the next level that they forget to eat, shower, shave, or take care of basic hygiene’. This suggests that an addicted gamer is not going to take the time to properly care for himself as it is less of a priority. However, the findings suggest that video gamers are aware of these stereotypes, where certain gaming communities have raised issues with the physical hygiene of gamers. For instance, during Cabin Fever 1 (Smash event), the Smash organiser announced a break for everyone to ‘freshen up’ when there was a noticeable build-up of human sweat; ‘...right guys, I think it’s time that we take a quick break and apply deodorant’ (Smash organiser). Simmel (1997 [1907], p.119) suggests that ‘smelling a person’s body odour is the most intimate perception of them’ since ‘they penetrate, so to speak in a gaseous form into our most sensory inner being’. Therefore, amongst the video game events examined, it was common for gamers to be attentive to personal hygiene, such as bringing clean change of clothes, deodorant, and sometimes even dry hair shampoo.

However, Largey and Watson’s study on ‘The Sociology of Odours’ (2006 [1972], p.34) suggests that odours are often associated with intimacy amongst an ‘in-group’. For instance, Jonsson and Verhagen’s (2011) study in a game café and a mass LAN party

[Dreamhack Winter 2006] identified that the ‘smell of LAN’ was different in a game café than in a mass LAN party, because the game café was not organised as a 4-day event. Jonsson and Verhagen (2011, p.6) suggests that gaming cafés were rather ‘proper and clean’; ‘...although the toilets could be rather filthy, and sometimes were out of toilet paper the environment of Galaxy was most of the time clean and thus did not smell’. In comparison, the smell of a mass LAN party implies the distinct odour which emanates from gamers gathered together in a limited space, human sweat and warm gaming equipment. As Jonsson and Verhagen’s (2011, p.5) writes:

The smell of a mass LAN party has a distinct odour which emanates from the thousands of people gathered together in a limited area, human sweat, burps, warm computer processors, stinking socks and shoes, the smoke from the air canons and people who have not taken a shower for several days...

Jonsson and Verhagen (2011) suggest that personal experiences from participating in a LAN event can be recognised and translated through smell. Hence, the smell of LAN events may reflect an identification with particular LAN culture, characterised by certain cultural markers – such as not washing for several days, eating fast food and drinking energy drinks (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011).

In relation to the video game events examined, some events ‘smelled more’ than others. For instance, video game related orchestral events, especially those held at the Royal Albert Hall, were often attended amongst individuals that ‘dressed up’ for the evening with the smell of perfume or cologne. Meanwhile, video game conventions and exhibitions were often harder to detect the smell of body odour, due to the size of the exhibition hall, circulation of air, and sometimes air conditioning. Similarly, the BYOC hall at LAN events, in particular Insomnia events, were often held at business venues (Telford International Centre), sport stadiums (Ricoh Arena) or national exhibition centres (Birmingham NEC) that also consist of a large room and air conditioning – hence, there was not a noticeable smell from the room, rather the smell sometimes came from individual gamers close-by. In comparison, video game events, such as Smash tournaments and some of the BYOC rooms located at Ricoh Arena, that were held in a smaller rooms with a significant number of gamers and warm gaming equipment often produced a ‘more notable’ smell of body odour. For instance, besides the ‘sound of Smash’ mentioned earlier, there was also the ‘smell of Smash’:

Researcher: What does ‘the smell of smash’ mean?

Luigi: The ‘smell of smash’ just implies that it stinks. It’s the smell of BO (body odour) mainly, from a warm room filled with people, warm game equipment... plus a TV that blew up earlier. It’s not a nice smell, but I don’t mind it. It smells familiar. Like a ‘true gamer’. And when I return home, it reminds me that I need to go shower *laughs*...

From the group interview, Luigi (Group Interviewee: Play Expo) mentioned that the ‘smell of Smash’ implies the distinct odour of body odour, warm gaming equipment and a blown up TV. In particular, Luigi (Group Interviewee: Play Expo) describes the ‘smell of Smash’ to be a familiar scent, of a ‘true gamer’, which relates to the build-up of body odour and a break from the ordinary routines that characterise their everyday life; from education, work and home. This suggests that the smell can be perceived as a fundamental domain of cultural expression where the values and practise of a society are enacted.

In addition, it is important to highlight that ‘smell of Smash’ can be particularly unappealing amongst members in the Smash community. For example, during Smash events where Smashers required housing (providing accommodation for other community members in their own homes), it was often that Smashers would share sleeping spaces and locate themselves away from those who ‘smelled bad’, as well as being attentive to personal hygiene for the ‘sake of others’. As Ness (Interviewee: Smash UK) states:

Ness: ...the one thing about Smash events is that we’re sweaty... like we have ‘apply deodorant time’ half way through the tournament when it starts to smell bad... and bring your own deodorant rule... well... not rule... its more like common courtesy... but sometimes you still get smelly gamers you try to stay away from... like... I manage to keep myself clean... and you’d expect others to do the same...

This suggests that those who smelled of extreme body odour were often deemed to be unpopular amongst community members. For instance, the tournament organiser from the Manchester Battle Arena (MBA) fighting game community created a YouTube video, titled ‘How to be the Ideal MBA Player: Episode 1’; advising gamers to shower before MBA tournaments (including applying deodorant and bringing deodorant), regularly wash hands (to reduce germs spreading onto borrowed gaming equipment and ‘well-played’ hand-shakes) and to be attentive to personal presentation (such as clean clothes), in hope to change the perception of a ‘smelly gamer’ and to build a better public perception of an ‘ideal gamer’ (MBA Gaming, 2016). This suggests that ‘the difference of smell stands as that which involves not only an identification of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ or ‘you’ vs. ‘me’, but, also, processes of judgement and ranking of social others (Low, 2005, p.405). Hence, to be

considered a ‘good gamer’ sometimes involved more than being competent at the game; it can also involve acceptable levels of physical hygiene to meet face-to-face to interact and socialise with others.

6.1.4 Taste

To date, there is still little empirical research conducted on video gamers and taste. The findings suggest that video gamers often tasted/consumed junk food, energy drinks and alcohol. These findings support the assertion of video gamers and their stereotypical intake of junk food, leading to obesity and health problems. For instance, Pentz et al. (2011) longitudinal study (which consists of three waves of measurement; with a six-month follow-up, and an 18-month follow up) suggests that the intake of high fat, high sugar snack food and beverages, and video gaming (as part of sedentary behaviour) has been shown to be a significant risk factor for obesity; amongst a sample of 964 fourth grade children over 18 months. This suggests that attention continues to be focused primarily on the diet of the stereotypical gamer that has often been viewed rather negatively (e.g. unhealthy and overweight). However, focusing solely on the consumption of food amongst video gamers often ensure that considerations of popular culture remains firmly focused on the stereotypical anti-social gamer, and we learn little about the cultural and social significance through the consumption of food, in particular at video game events and the significance of ritual practices. Although the findings support the assertion of the stereotypical representation of an unhealthy overweight gamer, it is important to consider the food related aspects of these consumers game-playing experiences; from how food fits into gamers lives and the kinds of meaning based food practices that video gamers are engaged within video game events. This suggests that it is important to explore the unique and multivariuous food ways of all cultures on their own grounds and without prejudice (Lupton, 1996). Hence, this section will explore patterns in food facilities, food sharing and commensality amongst video gamers at video game events, which could be considered to be a shared ritual practice amongst video game communities.

Food Facilities

From the research observations, food facilities differed depending on certain video game events. I identified two types of video game events, video game events that facilitated

attendees during certain opening hours without in-door/out-door sleeping areas and video game events that offered additional facilities for attendees after opening hours with in-door/outdoor sleeping areas – although there were some events that consisted of both facilities for different members of the public. For instance, Insomnia Gaming Festival provided several ticket options from ‘Day Visitor Tickets’, which included exhibition entry, main stage access and feature zones, while ‘BYOC Tickets’ also included evening entrainment, access to indoor sleeping area (+£20 per person) or weekend camping (+£20 per person), console eSports tournaments, BYOC tournament entry, seat in the LAN gaming halls and free car parking. Video game events that facilitated attendees during certain opening hours without in-door/out-door sleeping areas included Eurogamer, MCM Comic Con and Play Expo that provided local resources; from on-site vending machines, food stalls and nearby shops; and accommodation facilities either consist of booking their own hotel or hostel or travel via public transport or private vehicles. These events were often located within exhibition centres with a ‘food and drinks prohibited’ policy, such as the Royal Victoria Docks, Earls Court Exhibition Centre and Event City – although within these venues there were local amenities and several exhibitors that sell various exclusive items; such as games, merchandise, accessories and consumables. For instance, one interviewee, ‘Master Chief’ emphasised the attempt to go to video game events regularly, of which food, travel and accommodation is often organised:

I try to meet regularly... it’s quite hard considering... the expo’s are not based where I live... so seeing the people you want to meet... you can’t do it... it’s also quite expensive to come to expo’s too... like tickets... train... hotels... travel... and the whole place itself makes a lot of money – wherever the comic con is... there are hotels that will benefit, food places that will benefit, travel that will benefit... (Master Chief - Interviewee: MCM Comic Con)

Master Chief (Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) states that several local amenities often benefit within spaces where thousands of people gather into one location, from accommodation, travel and food. In relation to consumption, Bauman (1997) suggests that we live in a ‘consumer society’, which portray capitalism to keep the economy going. There has been a dramatic increase of advertising in the mass media, from newspapers, billboards and radio; and attention towards the ‘captured market’, which consists of sites intended for other purposes which have become shopping opportunities (e.g. airports, railway stations, petrol stations and hospitals) (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996) - video game events are also no exception. For instance, near Play Expo Blackpool (May 2014), there was a local takeaway that was closed from 2pm onwards. As a volunteer for Play Expo, I

was asked by members of staff to do a ‘food run’ for them, before the local takeaway closed. The following year, during Play Expo Blackpool (May 2015), the local takeaway owner decided to remain open (after 2pm) for the possibility to generate more profit from the increase number of people attending a video game event nearby:

Upon entering Play Expo, I noticed a pile of take-away menus on the reception desk. I recognised that it was the same shop I went to from last years ‘food run’. During lunchtime, I decided to go there for lunch again, because it was something quick. The local take-away was located just across the road from the venue. The shop was busy, with a queue to be served. The lady that served me commented how she couldn’t wait to finish work. I asked a takeaway staff, ‘What time do you close today?’ of which the owner responded with a shrug and said, ‘Whenever people stop coming. I heard there was an event happening today. We normally shut at 2pm, but we’re staying open for longer today’ (Field-notes – Play Expo Blackpool, 2015)

Despite the local amenities benefitting on potential profit from local events, there are also exhibitors that also take on this opportunity to ‘take consumption to the consumers’ and become more readily available (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996). From the field notes, several independent exhibitors (from Play Expo and MCM Comic Con) mentioned that they often travel from various locations across the United Kingdom with large amounts of ‘stock’ (merchandise and consumables) in their private vehicles for potential profit. Meanwhile, other ‘corporate’ exhibitors (from MCM Comic Con and Eurogamer) explained that their attendance depended on their company policy with the requirement of over 10,000 guests to the event. This suggest that there is a strong retail industry from the growth in affluence in the UK and a change in work patterns; people no longer worked enough to support the family, instead people started to work more to spend on leisure activities, while creating a greater ‘demand pull’ in consumption (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996).

In comparison, video game events that provided additional facilities for attendees after opening hours with in-door/out-door sleeping areas included Insomnia Gaming Festivals and Smash UK national events – the duration of these events often occurred over several days (between 2-4 days). Insomnia Gaming Festivals (2014-2015) often provided facilities from a 24-hour tuck shop, microwaves, fridges, free hot water and food deliveries to BYOC (bring your own computer) desks through venue catering. Meanwhile, the Smash UK national events provided the facilities of a fully equipped kitchen, of which either involved self-catering or volunteers preparing food for the gamers throughout the duration of the event.

From the findings, several participants often considered video game events with no accommodation to be 'day trips', in comparison to video game events with accommodation to be 'mini holidays'; 'I'm on LAN holiday' (Charmander – Group Interviewee: Insomnia). Similar to aspects of a holiday, Clarke and Critcher (1995, p.60) suggest that a 'real holiday' is not spent at home, but requires a change of environment within 'a special sort of time', which replaces the rhythms of paid and domestic work obligations with potential choice over the use of time;

Time and place: two of the constraints of everyday life from which the holiday offers relief. Another is self-restraint, replaced by self-indulgences. The pay-off for the saving of innumerable yesterday is to spend as if there were no tomorrow. Food and drink are consumed to excess, known as trivia purchased and treasured for their worthlessness. For a couple of weeks life is a funfair...

In relation to food, Clarke and Critcher (1995) mentioned that food and drink are consumed to excess. Cronin and McCarthy (2011) identified that the consumption of food was often linked as a form of escape, which reflected a drive for pleasure and an opportunity to 'cut loose' from their 'ordinary life'. For instance, several participants mentioned that their consumption of food differed when they went to video game events, in comparison to their 'regular diet' in everyday lives.

Yeah, I've eaten nothing but shit this weekend... kebabs, pizza, burgers... and more burgers... I can't wait till I get home and finally have a proper home-cooked meal... (Teemo - Interviewee: Insomnia)

Oh no, I don't always eat like this... when I'm home... I usually have pasta and salad... like... I had burger and chips earlier because it was just something quick and convenient... (Batman – Group Interviewee: MCM Comic Con).

The interviewee, Teemo (Interviewee: Insomnia) identified their affiliation of an unhealthy weekend and was looking forward to a 'proper home-cooked meal'. Notions of 'a proper meal' are often linked to nutrition, at a table, shared and promotes sociality and talk (Ashley et al., 2004). Charles and Kerr (1988, p.23) suggest a proper meal refers to a 'social occasion' where all the family sit down together and there is conversation: it is therefore 'defined by the social relationship within which it is prepared, cooked and eaten'. For example, Murcott's (1995) study in South Wales suggests that a proper meal was equated with meat, potatoes, vegetables and gravy. In comparison, eating out is the 'exotic other' of eating at home (Ashley et al., 2004). For instance, Hardyment's (1995, p.193) survey of food consumed in Britain, estimated that 'meals consumed out of the time constitution' almost half of the average household's meal occasions'. In relation to video

game events, it was common for gamers to ‘eat-out’, whether if it was food purchased at local supermarkets, takeaways or restaurants. In relation to food and cultural studies, most people in the UK eat out at least occasionally (Ashley et al., 2004). Mintel report ‘Eating Out’ (1999) concluded that 5 percent of British population has experiences eating out and/or purchasing takeaway food. Ashley et al. (2004) suggest it is apparently not possible to survive for more than a ‘very short time without snacking’ and that any commercial enterprise of any size today would appear to need to offer some form of sustenance.

In addition, Hauck-Lawson (2004) suggests that food choices can communicate aspects of a person’s identity or emotion in ways that words cannot do alone. For instance, the findings suggest that videogame events often provide food facilities, from microwaves, fridges, on-site food-stalls with ‘healthy options’ and so on. However, within a videogame event packed with various activities, the decision of what to eat can sometimes be puzzling, to the extent where a ‘balanced diet’ can be significantly reduced in order to ‘grab something quick’. Therefore, many video gamers will simply consume nothing but ‘junk food’, energy drinks and alcohol. For instance, from the group interview, Batman (Group Interviewee: MCM Comic Con) suggest that their consumption of food became complex to maintain in comparison to their ‘normal’ everyday lives - to the extent where a ‘balanced diet’ can be significantly reduced in order to ‘grab something quick’. Therefore, many video gamers will simply consume nothing but ‘junk food’ and energy drinks (see Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2: A photograph of a BYOC gamer’s dinner (Insomnia i53 – LAN)
[Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

Overall the facilities of food differed depending on various variables; from type of event, the audience, facilities available, location and so on. Despite the availability of various food facilities, the choice of food consumption amongst video gamers needs to be explored further.

Eating Together

Eating is an everyday activity that we often take for granted. Debates about eating have raised a range of questions that are central in understanding food cultures. In particular, it has raised questions about the role of food practices in producing, and reproducing the home, the family, gendered identities and the relationship between public and private spheres (Ashley et al., 2004).

What we eat, where we get it, how it is prepared, when we eat and with whom, what it means to us – all these depend on social [and cultural] arrangements (DeVault, 1991, p.35)

In relation to video game events, the findings suggest that the consumption of food at video game events mostly evolved around the choice of activity; it depended on certain roles within that context, either visiting the exhibition hall, exhibiting merchandise, queuing to play game demonstrations, entering a tournament or competition, cosplaying, working or volunteering and many more. For instance, from the field-notes (i53), during a game tournament the researcher was offered food on several occasions;

I decided to participate in a Hearthstone Tournament, despite not having much tournament experience, I was unprepared in many ways – I only had a bottle of water - because I did not expect myself to get so far in the tournament (I came Top 8). The tournament took up most of the day (in my case, eight-hours of back-to-back tournament games). Therefore, food options were often limited to either ‘junk food’ or ‘something quick’ to avoid disqualification from nonattendance. However, being an inexperienced competitive gamer I began starving myself and ‘eyeing up’ my neighbour’s bunch of bananas...

Researcher:	I’m so hungry!
Person sat next to me:	You playing in tournament?
Researcher:	Yeah. I still have two more games to play after this.
Person sat next to me:	Oh dear. Here, have a banana.
Researcher:	Thank you.

[Accepts Banana]

-----Two hours later-----

[Still in tournament, hungry and staring at my neighbours bunch of bananas]

Researcher: Do you mind if I have another banana?
Person sat next to me: Sure, but are you sure you'll be ok eating two bananas in one day? You may get a stomach ache from having too much fibre.
Researcher: I think I'll be fine. I'm too hungry at the moment. Thanks

Food offerings were common amongst video gamers. The researcher herself has been offered several items of food; from pieces of fruit, crisps, biscuits, cakes, sandwiches, energy drinks and alcohol.

Using Bauman's (2003) work, 'City of Fears, City of Hopes', Bauman suggests that newcomers are strangers to the city;

Strangers tend to appear ever more frightening as they become increasingly alien, un-familiar and incomprehensible, and as the mutual communication which could eventually assimilate their 'otherness' to one's own life-world fades, or never takes off in the first place (Bauman, 2003, p.33)

Bauman (2003) suggests that strangers within a town or a village were not allowed to stay strange for long and become 'familiarised' – so that they could join the network of relationships the way the established city dwellers do: in personal mode. Despite being a stranger, and a newcomer at Insomnia Gaming Festival events, the gamers identified the researcher to be part of their community within a video gamer culture within the duration of the four-day event. For instance, the photograph illustrates the interaction between the researcher and a gamer sat next to her BYOC (bring your own computer) desk at Insomnia i53 – the gamer offered to make the researcher a sandwich, using the contents in the box, along with other snacks and beverages (see Figure 6.3).



Figure 6.3: A photograph of the researchers' neighbours 'food supply' at Insomnia53
[Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

Although most of these items were high-calorie snacks, it is important to highlight that food offerings could be considered as a form of identity between 'us' and 'them'— where social ties and bonds within a community can also be intersected with food. Similarities and differences define identity categories, and without 'them' there cannot be an 'us' (Woodward, 2000).

...we recognize ourselves by what we eat and what we share. Any event, any social celebration usually relies on the sharing food that is more or less ritualized. Alliances are sealed, we rediscover ourselves, peace is made with the food that we share (Bricas, 2013, p.1)

This suggests that the identity of individuals and the cohesion of communities are built through food. Therefore, this supports Cronin and McCarthy's (2011) claim that food is a marker of inclusion within the gaming subculture and expression of internalised identities.

Another pattern amongst video gamers in relation to food consist of sharing food and eating food together. This form of 'eating together' is known as commensality; which involves eating and drinking together in a common physical or social setting (Kerner, Chou and Warmind, 2015). Commensality is the essence of food, and commensal acts are essential for the integration of a society;

Food is tasty only because of the pleasure derived from eating it in good company or of knowing that eating with the right company confers social distinction (Freedman, 2007, p.15)

Everyday commensality has an important role in this reinforcement as it consists of the sharing food, conversation, and the exchange of body-language between the participants.

People do not just feast – and much more frequently – take part in everyday meals that are eating in the company of particular sets of commensal partners. In mundane meals, as well as in special meals, the politics of inclusion and exclusion play a central role. In particular, the politics of inclusion and exclusion becomes evident with Cronin and McCarthy’s (2011) notion of rebellion and food as subcultural capital. For instance, from the field-notes, there were moments during the video game event where the researcher was considered as an ‘outsider’ for not conforming to stereotypical food intakes:

As a researcher who is lactose-intolerant, I seem to have been deemed as an ‘outsider’ for not conforming to stereotypical food intakes; such as pizza – instead, I was given a nickname of ‘Salad Queen’ when purchasing a chicken caesar salad amongst a group of gamers who ordered pizza together (Field-notes: i53).

As mentioned earlier, Cronin and McCarthy (2011) suggest that not conforming to the stereotypical ‘gamer foods’ can be considered to be a sin of ‘outsider status’ – in particular, not confirming to the gaming subculture’s affinity for junky, greasy, fat food (and cheese) and communal representation of rebellion. For example, Cronin and McCarthy (2011) investigated the food politic of the gaming subculture by providing celery sticks and fruit juices to a home console night. Consequently, jokes were instantly made with comments to the researcher to observe ‘a hard-core gaming party, not the minutes of a vegan meeting’ and to ‘leave that stuff outside for the birds’ (Cronin and McCarthy, 2011, p.735). Similarly, from the field-notes (Insomnia53), the researcher also had a similar experience when she brought carrot cake;

Person sat next behind me: Oooo... what have you got there? Hope it isn’t one of your salads again! *laughs*

Researcher: No, but would you like one?

Person sat next behind me: What is it? I don’t eat anything green...

Researcher: It’s carrot cake

Person sat next behind me: Yeah... I don’t eat carrots either... or anything healthy... you’re at a LAN event... you’re not meant to eat stuff like that...

This form of rebellion to eat things that are bad at a LAN event suggests an embodied experience amongst video gamers. For instance, Belle and Valentine (1997, p.125) refer to restaurant dining as a total consumption package – not just food and drink, but the whole ‘experience’. This suggests that the atmosphere is arguably important in promoting the

restaurant as if the food itself – and video game events are no exception – where video gamers eat junk food in the company of other gamers and ‘embrace LAN’.

For example, Jonsson and Verhagen (2011) suggest that energy drinks, with high caffeine content, was commonly consumed by young people in Sweden – this was also common amongst young people in the United Kingdom (see Figure 6.4). They identified that energy drinks consumed within a game café were used to relax and for recreational purposes; ‘...to stress off and relax than for sensational experience and to party’ (Jonsson and Verhagen 2011, p.7). In comparison, energy drinks consumed within Dreamhack was commonly used to ‘...endure the four-day event, to be able to stay awake... and not go to sleep’ (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011, p.7).

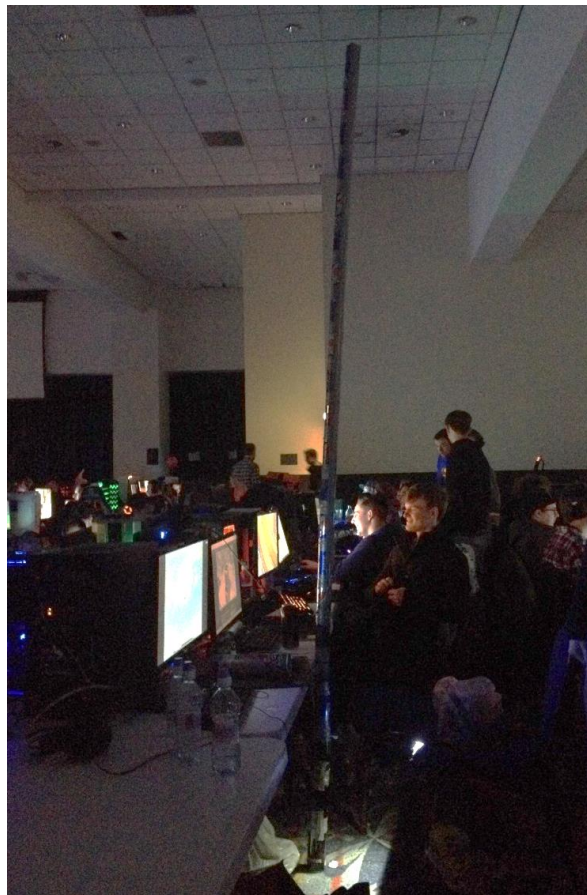


Figure 6.4: A photograph of a tower made from energy drinks (Insomnia i53)
[Photographed by Ying-Ying Law]

Similarly, Taylor’s (2006) provides a comparable finding with her study at Dreamhack, where certain tastes can be characterised by certain cultural markers – such as eating fast food and drinking energy drinks to give players quick energy that can be consumed instantly and does not interfere game play. Therefore, this supports Cronin and McCarthy’s (2011) suggestion that food itself is a term that makes a cultural distinction between

acceptable and non-acceptable organic matter for human consumption. For instance, drinking energy drinks has become a trend amongst young people and is not possess by the game culture solely. However, in the gaming culture, drinking energy drinks reflects social and cultural processes. Energy drinks are heavy on caffeine and are often consumed so gamers can ‘continue gaming’. To endure a 4-day event, gamers often consume energy drinks, to be able to stay awake and give players quick energy to perform, play video games, and not go to sleep. From the field notes, the researcher received a playful ‘wake-up’ slap for attempting to go to bed at 1am on the first day of LAN ; ‘No... you don’t go to bed... you stay up like the rest of us and embrace LAN... here, have an energy drink’ (Field notes – Insomnia53). This suggests that participating at video game events tells us something more than just what games people play. The space within video game events of ‘being there’ and together’ provides a welcoming atmosphere with considerations to a worthwhile leisure lifestyle shared amongst gamers.



Figure 6.5: A photograph and eating chicken together

For example, the picture above illustrates a group of gamers eating takeaway together (see Figure 6.5). Freud (1918) suggests that eating and drinking with someone at the same time is a symbol and a confirmation of social community and of the assumption of mutual obligations.

...events in which participants act jointly may be used to communicate meaning, not only about the self, but also about the relationships among individuals that bind them together into a ‘small world’ (Gainer, 1995, p. 253)

Commensality is about creating and reinforcing social relations (Bourdieu, 1984). Moreover, these are acts that must be continually reinforced through practice; ‘It’s tradition to have chicken on the first day of LAN’ (Field Notes – Insomnia50). This suggests that social gaming rituals can be intersected with food, which can provide feelings of connection and solidarity in a group. In relation to video game communities, it can be argued that the community is ‘imagined’ (Anderson, 1983) – video game events provide a unique opportunity for social gatherings where gamers, who are usually separated by distance, come together (sometimes over several days) to share their interest in videogames (Taylor and Witkowski, 2010) - similarly, video game events also provide an unique opportunity for gamers to celebrate through the necessary presence of food. The consumption of food at video game events - whether it is consumed before, during, in-between or after games – suggests a connection with a ‘sense of belonging’. For example, on the first day of LAN, it was common amongst the participants to purchase a KFC bucket each as a form of ‘celebration’ for coming together – it was considered to be a ‘traditional’ and a ‘cultural’ practice amongst community members. Likewise, this was also the same for ‘victory meals’ – to celebrate ones success; such as winning tournaments. Therefore, video game events could be considered to be a ‘social bonding ritual’, which consists of sharing food and playfully utilising food symbolically (Cronin and McCarthy, 2011).

6.1.5. Touch

In relation to touch, video game settings such as LAN events allow players to play in the physical presence of friends and experiences with other people. Players are able to touch each other, to interact physically, tactilely, corporeally and pat each other’s’ shoulders, arms and bodies during gameplay (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011). This suggests that these tactile interactions allow different kinds of togetherness, in comparison to playing online, and are experienced by closeness, intimacy and face-to-face interactions. As REXXAR (Interviewee: Insomnia) states:

Rexxar: There is definitely a difference playing online and in-person at gaming events... when I play online I usually get really salty when I lose... so I sometimes BM (bad manners) them using the emotes... but when your at a LAN event, you can’t really do that, because your physically there and players can easily locate you and hunt you down... I don’t usually BM during tournaments anyway...

otherwise it'll be awkward when give them a 'well-played' handshake...

Researcher: Is a 'well played' handshake important?

Rexxar: Ummm... yeah... it's a form of respect to your opponent that they played well... like you've acknowledged them for being a good player... it's also a nice ice-breaker if you want to get to know them after playing against them...

Rexxar (Interviewee: Insomnia) mentions that playing face-to-face can affect how aware people are of each other's characteristics and moods, such as being a 'good sport' or being 'salty' (being a sore loser) after losing a game. This suggests that players are able to support each other verbally and bodily in the presence amongst each other. For instance, from the field-notes, during LAN events, it was common for BYOC gamers to sit together and be in the presence of each other. As mentioned previously (in chapter 3), the space within video game events of 'being there' and 'together' provides a welcoming atmosphere with considerations to a worthwhile leisure lifestyle shared amongst gamers (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011). Hence, this suggests an importance to consider the interaction amongst players within video game events.

In addition, Taylor (2012) suggests that video games studies is not just limited to professionalising players and their engagements with video games in front of the gaming screen; it can also involve the role of spectatorship, fan and audience in constructing the play experience and gamer action. For instance, the presence of spectators can also be a fundamental domain of cultural expression through the embodied sense of touch. As Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008, p.161) writes:

Spectators fly into different locations just to be amongst the best players, and watch them compete. Media coverage is beginning to catch on, from traditional news venues like CNN, ABC, and the New –York Times to more focused coverage like PC Gamer and Tech TC. With an ever-growing industry in our hands, we must keep feeding the fuel to fire. There is no limit to where competition gaming will lead to...

Depict the development of technology to stream live eSport matches on Twitch (Edge 2013); there appears to be an importance of presence amongst spectators at various video game events; such as the physical support to be amongst the best players, and watch them compete at live gaming events. This suggests that the spectator observing video game activity, who does not actually have a controller is still involved in an important way in the

division of labour that can occur during gameplay (Newman, 2004). Similar to watching live football matches at the football pitch, Wann et al. (2001) highlights that the single most important factor motivating supporters to attend (and to continue to attend) a 'live' sport event is to be entertained. This suggests that sensual experiences take shape through the over-arching 'vibe' that characterises alternative gaming spaces – such as the physical touch between gamers, the feelings of emotion, and the atmosphere of video game events.

6.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, this findings chapter suggest patterns of sensory forms of embodiment – in particular, through the embodied experiences of video gamers and video game events.

In relation to video game studies, embodiment has often been applied to the virtual worlds of video games and the interaction of the player with the virtual world; rather than the embodied experience of video gamers at video game events – where little has been researched. In comparison to the virtual worlds that often lacked 'worldness' and embodiment (Bosellstroff et al., 2012), the findings suggest that a person's personal experience of participation can be recognised and translated through our senses (Kalekin-Fisherman and Low, 2010) – such as the embodied experiences that can be social and sensual. This suggests that it may be useful to consider the significance of the senses in culture and society through 'sensory ethnography' (Pink, 2015). For instance, Pink (2015) refers sensory ethnography to the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice; which may be inaccessible to ethnographic observation or interviews (Bloch, 1998). This suggests a critical methodology that departs from the classical observational approach to insist that ethnography is a reflective and experimental process (Atkinson et al., 2007). Hence, the five senses were considered to be a useful tool for data analysis – in particular, through the embodied experience of video game events, including sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

Firstly, sight refers to the visual experience amongst video gamers. In relation to video game events, the majority of the participants mentioned several things that triggered their sight senses; from the latest video games and the length of queues, the thousands of people that have turned up, the star guests that they cannot wait to meet, the number of competitive players that attend to compete, the cosplays that they recognise, the

specialised merchandise that they want to buy, and the big banners floating above the exhibitor stalls. Besides the use of sight for verification purposes, it is important that sight is an essential sense, which functions simultaneously with the other senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) – where the cultural processes of physical experience teach us that our responses are more complex than we realise (Vannini et al., 2012).

Secondly, the academic writing with sounds is growing (Collins, 2013). For instance, Newman (2008) suggests that fan art includes the production of music, crafts and costumes – including chiptune, soundtracks and orchestras. For example, several video game related orchestras perform live music, as well as simultaneously provide visual screens showing short video clips from the game itself. This suggests that memories can be triggered through embodied practices. Hence, an importance to consider the interactions to sounds, rather than just listening to sounds.

Thirdly, the smell of video gamers has often captured the negative light of a ‘sweaty gamer’ with poor physical hygiene. The findings suggest that it was common for gamers to be attentive to personal hygiene, to bring clean change of clothes, deodorant and sometimes even dry hair shampoo. For instance, Jonsson and Verhagen (2011) suggest that personal experiences from participating in a LAN event can be recognised and translated through smell. Hence, the smell of LAN events may reflect an identification with particular LAN culture, characterised by certain cultural markers – such as not washing for several days, eating fast food and drinking energy drinks (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011). This suggests that ‘the difference of smell stands as that which involves not only an identification of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ or ‘you’ vs. ‘me’, but, also, processes of judgement and ranking of social others (Low, 2005, p.405). Therefore, to be considered a ‘good gamer’ sometimes involved more than being competent at the game; it can also involve acceptable levels of physical hygiene to meet face-to-face to interact and socialise with others.

Fourthly, the findings suggest that video gamers often tasted junk food, energy drinks and alcohol. These findings support the assertion of video gamers and their stereotypical intake of junk food, leading to obesity and health problems. However, focusing solely on the consumption of food amongst video gamers often ensure that considerations of popular culture remains firmly focused on the stereotypical anti-social gamer, and we learn little about the cultural and social significance through the consumption of food, in particular at video game events and the significance of ritual practices. In relation to food, the

consumption of food at video game events amongst video gamers can consist of the symbolic task of sharing and celebrating group identity through its bond capabilities, whereby they experience the pleasure and consciousness from consuming together. For instance, video gamers often attend to events for the talk, conversation and discussions, which create social ties and bonds within a community (Janez and Martens, 2005). However, it is important to highlight that these social ties and bonds within a community can also be intersected with food. This suggests that the concept of taste to argue food, like in any culture, is a strong indicator of one's place in a community. Therefore, this suggests an emphasis to significantly widen the scope to study video games beyond the primary focus upon video gamers' direct and immediate use of the game text and interface; through considerations to game studies more generally – in particular, to consider the cultural and social significance to explore the complexity of food consumption within video game studies.

Finally, video game settings such as LAN events allow players to play in the physical presence of friends and experiences with other people though the sense of touch. Players are able to touch each other, to interact physically, tactilely, corporeally and pat each other's' shoulders, arms and bodies during gameplay (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011). For instance, from the field-notes, it was common for BYOC gamers to sit together and be in the presence of each other. This suggests that 'being there' and 'together' provides a welcoming atmosphere with considerations to a worthwhile leisure lifestyle shared amongst gamers (Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011). Hence, this suggests an importance to consider the interaction amongst players within video game events.

Overall, the findings suggest patterns of embodied experiences that take place at video game events. This suggests that participating at video game events tells us something more than just what games people play. This highlights an importance to consider the extent of how video gamers interpret the meaning of gaming within these exceptional moments away from the video game screen, where the importance of video gaming does not begin or end with the instances of play – especially through the embodied experiences of play *with* video games (Newman, 2008).

Chapter 7:

Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis is to provide an ethnography of video game events, with the intention to offer insights into the changing nature of video gaming, and its social patterns and the interaction that surround and characterise this. Therefore, this chapter reflects on, and revisits, the three main objectives of this thesis, and considers the key findings of the research in relation to each. The chapter then considers what I would suggest are the most significant contributions to knowledge that this thesis offers.

As I have argued, video game studies have most commonly focused on the isolation of video gamers (either individually or in small groups), or the textual analysis of video games themselves. These studies have often been too closely aligned with a very narrow understanding of (direct) play, which often ignore the wider social-aspect of video gaming away from the video game screen. In comparison to a number of video game studies that focuses on the instances of play in front of a video game screen, this thesis considers the social and cultural practise of playing with video games (Newman, 2008) — with particular attention to those who attend video game events and participate in various video game related practices within video gamer culture.

The introduction of this thesis (see chapter 1) sets out a number of key objectives, under three headings: the motivations of social and cultural video game related practices, characteristics of video gamers and video game communities, and patterns of social interaction within video game events. Each of these objectives will be discussed in turn as the major findings of this thesis are related to each, and both the significance and generalisability of this case highlighted and discussed throughout.

The first objective of this research aims to explore the reasons for video gamers coming together to participate in various video games related practices away from the video game screen – in particular, within video game events.

In relation to video game events, there has been limited research focusing on video gamers attending video game events, as well as their motives for participation in various video game related practices. Therefore, it becomes important to consider two principal research questions, who are the visitors and what motivates them to participate in video game events? As mentioned previously (in chapter 5), there has been limited statistical data

examining video gamer demographics attending video game events. The researchers that examined video gamer demographics (such as, most notably, Swalwell, 2003; Jansz and Martens, 2005; Jonsson and Verhagen, 2011, Taylor and Witkowski, 2010) have mostly focused on one particular type of event, such as LAN events or gaming cafés. In contrast, this research project focuses on, and has studied, attendees and practices at a number of different events and types of event.

The findings from my research suggest that LAN events (such as *Insomnia: iSeries*) and more tournament-based events (such as *Smash* and *MBA* events) tend to consist of a higher proportion of male attendance, than seen at video game related conventions (such as *MCM Comic Con*), exhibitions (*Play Expo*), and video game related orchestral concerts (such as *Distant Worlds* and *Symphony Legends*), which tend to have a ‘more balanced’ ratio of males and females. Taylor and Witkowski’s (2010) study on LAN events (*Dreamhack*) suggest that there was an increasing presence of female gamers; however, my research observations suggest that women still appear significantly under-represented at LAN events. For example, there were only 5 female *Hearthstone* players (including the researcher) whom competed in the 128-person tournament at *Insomnia Gaming Events*. Video game events that featured a variety of interests (including anime, manga, and sci-fi) tended to have a ‘more balanced’ ratio of male and female attendance. This suggests that a specific pattern of representation may not be consistent across all video game events. Hence, the findings suggest that those who attend video game events include a range of individuals, such as, students, young professionals, mothers, fathers, uncles, and children, either for their first time, or multiple times. This suggests that there may not be one type of video gamer attending video game events; similar to MacCallum-Stewart’s (2014) argument that the portrayal average gamer as 35, lower middle class, white, and of either gender, may not be an accurate portrayal of all gamers. Therefore, rather than focusing on the demographics of those who attend, it becomes more worthwhile to examine the motives for attending video game events.

This leads onto the second question: what motivates video gamers to participate in video game events? Previous studies have often focused on motivations for playing video games, rather than those who participate in video game related practices within video game events. For instance, motives to play video games have often been linked to enjoyment and entertainment (Griffiths and Hunt, 1998), to escape away from the ‘routine’ everyday life (Philips et al., 1995), to pass time and ‘avoid boredom’ (Bernett et al., 1997), to win or

surpass others through competition (Barnett et al., 1997), and to prove control over their game character and its context (Grodal, 2000). However, these motives for playing video games are not directly concerned with gaming as a social activity and ignore the social context of playing *with* video games (Newman, 2008). Drawing on the four motives identified by Jansz and Martens (2005), as well as original data gathered from this research, I propose a new typology of video game event attendees: the ‘socialiser’, the ‘participator’, and the ‘competitor’.

Firstly, the ‘socialiser’ usually consists of individuals that primarily come together for social purposes, besides playing video games themselves. For the socialisers, it meant something to be there and to be with like-minded people. The findings suggest that ‘being there’ and ‘together’ provides a welcoming atmosphere with considerations to a worthwhile leisure lifestyle shared amongst gamers (Jonsoon and Verhagen, 2011). Video game events provide an unique opportunity for video gamers, who are usually separated by distance, to come together – in particular, to ‘hang around, meet friends, just be’ (Bloustein, 2003, p.166) as much and as often as possible. This suggests that coming together at video game events can create new kinds of opportunities to develop identities, connections, and communication. Hence, the findings suggest that video game event attendees were often quite social and regularly kept in contact with other members of certain communities, where non-explicit requirements involved forms of inclusion and exclusion to participate in various video game related practices – such as age, gender, and ‘adequate’ social skills.

Secondly, the ‘participator’ refers to individuals that attend video game events for participation purposes. For instance, common forms of participation (besides gaming itself) included exploring the exhibition hall, purchasing merchandise, attending signing sessions and workshops, cosplay, and community practices. However, it is important to highlight that some forms of participation were more community-based than others (such as traditional and ritual community practices). For example, the *Insomnia* (i-Series) community often consist of BYOC gamers whom participated in other community practices of their own (besides gaming itself); this included playing *Mafia/Werewolves*, card games, drinking games, ‘Hide and Sleep’, seeking LAN treasure, and many more. Hence, amongst the examined forms of participation (in chapter 5), the findings suggest that community practices (such as, within the cosplay and LAN communities) often reunited groups of individuals together to strengthen their bonds within a temporal space.

Therefore, the motive for attending video game events often consist of certain video game practices, as well as community practices, which provided a sense of belonging. This suggests that participating at video game events tells us something more than just what games people play.

Thirdly, the ‘competitor’ refers to individuals who attend video game events for competitive purposes, such as competing in video game tournaments and competitions. However, I argue that competitive gaming involves more than players simply competing against each other and coming out on top, rather it involves a significant amount of preparation, practice and interaction with other players to compete in eSport tournaments. Using Shaffir and Stebbin’s (1991) four stages of how field experiences may be coordinated, I also consider the process of becoming a competitive gamer in four stages: entering the game scene, learning how to play one’s role within the game community, maintaining and surviving the several kinds of relations that emerge within the gaming community, and learning the game scene. For instance, the findings suggest that amongst the participants that competed in gaming tournaments, it was important to be considered a ‘good player’ or at least a ‘competent player’; living up to community norms helps develop certain amounts of social and cultural capital (Taylor, 2003). Therefore, drawing on Garfield’s (2000) metagame model, I use examples from Hearthstone tournaments to provide an analysis of: what players bring to a game, what a player takes away from a game, what happens between games, and what happens during a game other than the game itself? This suggests that competitive gaming consist of more than the motive to win, it also consist of the social-aspect of competitive gaming that takes away from the video game screen.

The purpose for identifying the three types of video game attendee types (socialiser, participator, and competitor) is to categories the various reasons for attendance, in relation to their different forms of social encounters within video game communities. The continuum of socialness (socialiser), activeness (participator) and competitiveness (competitor) suggests that there can be varying levels of commitment amongst those who participate in video game related practices – which leads us to the second objective, where commitments can differ amongst those who regularly (or irregularly) attend video game events.

The second objective of this research aims to explore how common interests of video gamers enhance and support the social interaction between gamers when attending video game events. It is important to highlight that several video game events only occur at certain times throughout the year, sometimes two or three times a year. Therefore, those who attended less frequently were often deprived from the 'benefits' of being part of a video game community. For example, most of the infrequent attendees, were there to attend and take part in video game related practices that were less 'community-based', such as visiting the exhibition hall, purchasing merchandise, and game demonstrations. As Mario (Interviewee: Play Expo) states: '...it's the same stuff every year (MCM Comic Con), so I don't really see a point going again'.

In comparison, those who attended regularly and participated in more 'community-based' practices often felt the benefits of being part of a video game community; whether it was support provided amongst community members, inclusiveness of certain video game related practices, or sharing similar tastes and values. For instance, attending video game events often involves a certain level of commitment, dedication, and finance; therefore, those who contributed often received benefits in forms of recognition and status; such as building a specific reputation of a 'regular attender'. Similar to Hodkinson's (2002) discussion of 'subcultures' and their participants' varying levels of commitment, those who were consistent in their adherence to community tastes and norms tended to receive more social rewards, in comparison to those who 'flirted' at the boundaries. For example, Mr Game and Watch (Interviewee: Smash Events) stated that after attending several Smash events, he was able to organise travel with other Smash players, which was considered a 'more fun and cheaper option', in comparison to travelling alone. Those who attend regularly often organise themselves into groups, and these are often based around a particular game or genre of gaming (Mäyrä, 2008). Hence, despite common interests amongst video gamers, levels of support, inclusion, and social interaction, can differ greatly amongst those who attend video game events regularly and those who do not.

The third objective of this research was to analyse the identity of video gamers, and in particular, how individuals identify themselves and each other and what being a gamer entails? In relation to identity, Hodkinson (2002) refers to subcultures as providing a strong sense of 'us' and 'them'. This refers to the perception that individuals are involved in a distinct cultural grouping with shared identities. For instance, the findings suggest that BYOC gamers often participated in various practices that have become a ritual or tradition.

For example, common practices included attending opening ceremonies, obtaining ‘The Box’, participating in the pub quiz, beer towers and boat races, searching for ‘LAN treasure’, and surviving ‘LAN Death’. These rituals often promote a sense of community, as well as a sense of belonging and identity; ‘You have to do it, it’s LAN tradition’ (BYOC gamer – field-notes). Hence, there are often boundaries drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’, where resisting the dominant practices of the group can be a relatively hard thing to do (Bauman, 1990).

In relation to the second half of the objective question, ‘what being a gamer entails?’, the findings suggest gaming communities often involve various forms of social interaction, where groups negotiate norms and learn rules of social comportment, which reproduce codes of behaviour and establish standards of conduct (Wright et al., 2002). Video gamers often have to undergo a process of living up to community norms through acknowledgement and acceptance to develop a certain level of social capital. Similar to aspects of ‘ordinary’ life, people often find places where they can ‘fit in’. Crawford (2004, p.55) writes:

Once inside these communities, an individual’s ability to progress is often dependent on their ability to ‘fit in’ [to] the existing social norms of the group. Those who do not fit may find themselves marginalised or even excluded altogether

This suggests that it is often important to be considered a ‘good player’ by other gamers. For instance, as my own experience highlights, Hearthstone players who compete in tournaments and do ‘extremely well’ are often taken more seriously and admired. However, when community members struggle to ‘fit in’, they often find themselves marginalised. For example, players who grief, steal, offend, and manipulate each other often get ‘called out’ by other members of the community. In particular cases there have been gamers in the Smash UK scene that have been banned from attending future video game tournaments and video game events.

Hence, play practices involve an understanding of how communities are formed and maintained (Pearce and Artemisia, 2009). For instance, becoming a competitive Hearthstone player requires more than just playing Hearthstone; it involves various stages of career progression and socialisation to become a recognised ‘Hearthstone player’

In researching and addressing these three key objects then, this thesis provides new and original research and important contributions to knowledge. First, this thesis explores the social significance of video gaming and its culture away from the video game screen, specifically at various video game events. This is, to date, a significantly under-researched aspect of video game culture and practice. Research in this area is limited, and that which does exist, has focused almost exclusively on a particular event, or type of event, and most notably LAN events and gaming cafés. In contrast, this research has involved over three years of extensive participant observations, and twenty interviews and ten group interviews, with participants at over thirty events of various types, including video game conventions, video game exhibitions, LAN events, video game-related musical events and social gatherings organised across various locations.

This research therefore supports and adds empirical weight to Esther MaCallum-Stewart's argument that there is not one particular 'type' of gamer. In particular, this research highlights the differing profiles of attendees at different types of events. Moreover, the research highlights (and categorises) three different key types of video game event attendees: the 'socialiser', the 'participator', and the 'competitor'. This model then, is a significant contribution to knowledge, which future research can employ, test, or seek to develop further.

Second, a unique aspect of this research is the various levels of involvement and roles that the researcher has undertaken as part of this research. Previous research on gaming events has often been undertaken by researchers who have sought, or been forced to, maintain a distance as a non-participant observer. For example, Taylor (2012) highlights her 'otherness' as an older female researcher, observing the (primarily) young male culture of competitive gaming. In contrast, the researcher has played, and been involved, in a number of active roles during this research, providing a range of insights and perspectives. For instance, this has involved competing as a Hearthstone player in competitions, as well as various other roles, such as working in the kitchen, transporting gaming equipment, and becoming a tournament organiser of Smash events. This has provided unique insights into the various social norms, practices, mechanisms of group inclusion and exclusion, and elements of career progression of various communities and roles.

Thirdly, this research considers the embodied experience of video gamers through the five senses; sight, sound, smell, taste and touch (feel). The research data suggest patterns of

embodied experiences that take place at video game events – where embodiment refers to the act of embodying or the state of being embodied. The shifting focus away from what occurs on-screen provides recognition that the video gamer is a person, with a physical and corporal existence, and that play is an embodied experience (Crawford, 2012) - where practices of play can extend beyond the video game screen. For example, the findings suggest patterns in junk food, energy drinks and alcohol to be consumed amongst video gamers during video game events. However, focusing solely on the consumption of food amongst video gamers often ensure that considerations of popular culture remains firmly focused on the stereotypical anti-social gamer, and we learn little about the cultural and social significance through the consumption of food – including the patterns in food facilities, food sharing and commensality amongst video gamers, which could be considered to be a shared ritual practice amongst video game communities. This suggests that participating at video game events tells us something more than just what games people play. Therefore, this has been considered to provide a useful data analysis tool to understand the embodied experience outside ‘ordinary’ everyday life, which is unique to this research.

Finally, this research contributes to our understanding of the importance of activities at game events other than playing games, and may not necessarily be directly gaming related. Today, video game events consist of a wide range of activities, such as watching the latest video game demonstrations, participating in competitions, attending workshops and signing sessions, purchasing merchandise, networking, spectatorship, cosplay, and much more. Using a similar approach to Hodkinson (2002), this research has focused on specific locations and times where these cultures take on greater significance, in order to understand how technologies are consumed, experienced, and located within these exceptional moments away from the video game screen. The findings suggest that various forms of social and cultural practices take place within video game events, besides gaming itself, significantly contribute to the construction of video game communities. This suggests a shift in the nature of consumption and development of video games, where video games are increasingly being consumed in various ways.

Over the course of this research I have travelled a lot around the UK. I have attended numerous video game events, spoke to and befriended many different people, and participated in a wide variety of activities, many of the first time, such as cosplaying, and some quite successfully, such as competitively playing Hearthstone. On my travels I have

learnt a lot, some of which I have set out in the pages of thesis, and it is my hope that what I have shared here will help future travellers on their journeys through gaming, and its various communities.

Appendix A - Terminology

This section briefly outlines particular terms in this subject to provide some context.

Anime: This refers to Japanese hand-drawn or computer animation.

Amateur Gamer: This refers to a person who engages in gaming for pleasure rather than for financial benefit or professional reasons; such as a pursuit on an unpaid basis; non-professional [See Professional Gamer for comparison].

BYOC: Short for ‘Bring Your Own Computer’ – This refers to gamers bringing and using their own personal computing devices/gaming equipment to a video game event to perform some or part of their roles. In particular, at iSeries a BYOC gamer will be allowed access in certain restricted areas, such as the BYOC hall – where other ticket holders (such as weekend or day visitor passes will be permitted to access).

BYOC Hall: A large room that consist of BYOC gamers with their own personal computing devices/gaming equipment set up in their allocated seats. This room is often restricted to gamers with BYOC gamer passes and Press passes only – where other ticket holders (such as weekend or day visitor passes will be permitted to access).

‘Cancer Deck’: This term is often referred to Hearthstone decks, mostly ‘face decks’ that run aggressive cards dealing direct damage to your opponent’s health (also referred as your opponent’s characters ‘face’). Players often find ‘cancer decks’ frustrating to play against, due to its ‘cheap’ requirement to build and high reward for ‘supposedly’ minimal effort and skill to play; ‘Me go face, SMORc’ (See SMORc).

‘Cancerous Community’: This often refers to a ‘bad’ community, where members often throw hatred at each other, complain, and fight.

Caster: This refers to a person who commentates or creates audio-visual recordings on game playing; either a game they are playing while placing a separate audio track or commentating live game playing on video sharing sites such as *YouTube* and *TwitchTV*.

Casual Gamer: The stereotype of a casual player is the inverted image of the hardcore player: this player has a preference for positive and pleasant fictions, has played few video games, is willing to commit little time and few resources toward playing video games, and dislikes difficult games (Juul, 2010)

Convention: This refers to a large gathering of people who share a common interest, where they meet face-to-face.

Comic Books: This refers to a publication that consists of comic art in the form of sequential juxtaposed panels that represent individual scenes.

Communitas: This refers, ‘...to the meeting point, or interface between individuals in a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities. It is a brief moment of deep human connection, a spontaneous event, a flash of unity’ (Hockett 2004:198)

Competitive Gamer: This refers to a gamer who completes for financial or professional reasons. However, a competitive gamer is different to a ‘sponsored gamer’

(see sponsored gamer), where a competitive gamer is not sponsored in any form, but may be seeking for sponsorship.

Cosplay: This refers to the contraction of the words ‘costume play’. Cosplay is considered a performance art in which participants called cosplayers wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific character; either from video games, anime, manga, comic books, live-action films and television series – such as Final Fantasy cosplayers.

Dead Time: Time in which someone or something is inactive or unable to act productively

Exhibition: This refers to an organised presentation and display of a section of items.

Fan: A fan, or fanatic, refers to a person who is enthusiastically devoted to something or somebody, such a video game. Collectively, the fans of a particular object or person constitute its fan-base or fandom, where they may show their enthusiasm in a variety of ways.

Free Swag: This refers to ‘free stuff’ that is obtainable at video game events. Usually game companies and sponsors offer ‘freebies’ to the general public to attract attention or for promotional purposes. These ‘freebies’ are often distributed in the form of throwing items to a crowd; from t-shirts, jumpers, lanyards and wristbands.

Gamers: This is a broad category meaning anyone who plays video games (MacCallum-Stewart, 2014). Gamers using other methods of gameplay are described as such when relevant – for example, tabletop games, boardgamers and trading collectable card (TCG) gamers (such as Magic of Gathering).

Hard-Core Gamer: There is an identifiable stereotype of a hardcore player who has a preference for science fiction, zombies, and fantasy fictions, has played a large number of video games, will invest large amounts of time and resources toward playing video games, and enjoys difficult games (Juul 2010)

Hearthstone: ‘Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft’ is an online collectable card game developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment. It is ‘free-to-play’ with optional purchases to acquire additional cards and access adventures more easily.

Noob: Contrary to the belief of many, a noob/n00b and a newbie/newb are not the same thing. Newbs are those who are new to some task and are very beginner at it, possibly a little overconfident about it, but they are willing to learn and fix their errors to move out of that stage. n00bs, on the other hand, know little and have no will to learn any more.

Manga: This refers to comics created in Japan, or be creators in the Japanese language. For example, the manga series ‘Attack on Titan’ is set in a world where humanity lives in the surrounding cities surrounded by enormous walls; a defers against the Titans, gigantic humanoids that eat humans seemingly without reason. Recently, this manga series was produced into an anime series and a video game.

Merchandise Stall: This refers to a presentation in retail outlets, where goods are bought and sold.

Minecraft Kid: This refers to children and teenagers that mainly attended to Insomnia events (iSeries) for Minecraft workshops, demonstrations, and signing sessions. This term was identified amongst BYOC gamers, which often stereotyped them for being hyperactive children from free energy drink samples and overcrowding the exhibition halls.

Online Communities: This refers to communities often primarily communicated via the internet, computer, or gaming device. For instance, video game studies have often focused on MMO's and RPG's that are online community based.

Offline Communities: This refers to communities that meet face-to-face and interact in meaningful ways. This often reflects a more 'traditional' based community that meet on a regular basis.

Professional Gamer: A gamer who is engaged in a specified activity as one's main paid occupation rather than as an amateur [See Amateur Gamer].

Rekt: When someone gets completely destroyed.

Salty: The feeling of bitterness, pissed or upset from losing.

Semi-Professional Gamer: A gamer who is engaged in a specified activity as one's partial paid occupation

Smashboards: Home of the Smash Community is a Smash Brothers community website, operated by selected community members (mods/moderator). Link: <http://smashboards.com/>

SMOrc: SMOrc or Spaces Marine Orc refers to the behaviour of playing without thinking. This is also a popular Twitch emotion of an Orc with an angry face.

Streamer: This refers people with their own stream channel and produces game content. A gamer can be both, a streamer and a caster - such as running their own tournament, while streaming and casting the event on video sharing sites, such as *Youtube* and *TwitchTV*.

Sponsored Players: A player that has been offered support by an organisation, or activity in exchange for money, encouragement, or other help.

Twitch: Twitch or 'TwitchTV' is a social video platform and community for gamers, where community members gather to watch and talk about video games.

Twitch Chat: A space for the Twitch audience to chat and 'spam' the channel streams.

Video Games: This refers to all types of electronic gaming played on game consoles, arcade machines, computers, mobile phones and other gaming hardware (Blackshaw and Crawford, 2009).

Video Game Event: An event related to video games held at an accessible venue that consists of various attractions to appeal to the general public.

Video Game Event Attendees. This refers to gamers who attend video game events. These are no different to the general 'gamers', however these are who have committed their time, tuition and socialisation to attend and meet face-to-face with other gamers.

Volunteer: This refers to a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task.

Workshops: This refers to a presentation focusing on a particular topic, which offer attendees multiple opportunities for intensive learning experiences through group discussions, hand-on projects, and/or lesson creation.

Appendix B - Questionnaire Methodology

This section presents additional information on the questionnaire discussed in the research methodology (in chapter 4) of this thesis. Presented here is a consideration of the questions asked from the pilot study questionnaire, the pilot study coding of opened/closed ended questions, the research questionnaire using 'Typeform' that was not included in the findings, as well as copies of the consent forms, research questionnaire, and a section on issues I had where I could not use the research questionnaire for this research.

Pilot Questionnaire

This section discusses the questions asked, in turn, from the pilot study questionnaire employed within this thesis.

The researcher conducted the pilot questionnaires by asking questions and marking down the answers the participants provided verbally.

Pilot Questionnaire - Questions

Question 1 was concerned with the participants' age. For ethical approval, the participants in this research had to be over the age of 18 years old to participate in this research.

Question 2 asked for the participants' gender. This question attempted to examine the ratio of male and females attending video game events.

Question 3 asked for the participants' geographical location to determine their level of 'commitment' to travel to various video game events.

Question 4 was concerned with participants' marital status. This question attempted to understand the lifestyle of those who attended video game events.

Question 5 asked for the participants' current occupation. This question attempted to identify a pattern between social class and video game events.

Question 6 follows up from the previous question (Question 5) and asked for the participants' yearly income. This question consist of a small card presented to the

participant to select a choice from the following groups of yearly income; including '£20,000 or less', '£20,001- £30,000', '£30,001 - £40,000', '£40,001 - £50,000', '£50,001 - £60,000', 'Over £60,001', 'I'm unemployed', 'I'm a student', and 'I prefer not to answer'. This question was influenced from the Great British class calculator to provide information on the modern British class system. Although the pilot study was not generalizable, it attempted to provide insights of those who attended video game events from specific yearly income groups, in relation to costs (such as tickets, travel and accommodation) to attend various video game events.

Question 7 asked the participants for their source of information to attend video game events; in particular, how did they hear about it? This question attempted to provide an understanding of the strength of advertisement through the social media; such as 'word of mouth', radio, billboards and much more.

Question 8 was concerned with the participants' companionship to attend video game events. This question attempted to identify a relationship amongst those who attend video game events alone or with family/friends.

Question 9 asked for the participants' motive for attending video game events. Unlike motives to play video games, this question attempted to identify motives for attending video game events.

Question 10 follows up from the previous question (Question 9) and asked for the participants' participation in certain activities within video game events. This included playing video games, meeting new people, cosplay, attending workshops, purchasing merchandise and others.

Question 11 follows up from the previous question (Question 10) and asked if the participant had particular intentions to purchase specific merchandise. This question attempted to identify patterns of consumption within video game events.

Question 12 asked for the participants' attendance to other video game events. This question attempted to provide an understanding towards patterns of movement to/from/between video game events. This question was also useful to determine the researchers' list of video game events to examine for this thesis.

Question 13 asked for the participants' scaled response to their love of video games. Amongst the video game events examined in the pilot study (MCM Comic Con, Eurogamer, Play Expo, Insomnia50 and Edmas 2), several events were not entirely based on video games. Therefore, this question attempted to provide a ratio of those who attended video game events with higher levels of passion towards video games against other interests; such as anime, manga, sci-fi and much more. This question also attempted to examine the passion towards specific video games, in relation to the motive to attend certain video game events – such as playing on the latest game demonstrations or attending a series of events to participate in video game tournaments. This question was later removed in the research questionnaire as the majority of the participants' scores were above 8.

Question 14 asked for the participants' scaled response to the number of online gamers they had met face-to-face and continued communication on a regular basis. This question attempted to provide an understanding towards the relationship between online and offline socialisation amongst video gamers. However, this question often confused the participants, especially to those who did play online games, and was later removed in the research questionnaire.

Question 15 asked for the participants' interest to take part in a follow-up interview or group interview - if the participant agreed, an email was provided.

Pilot Questionnaire Coding

Presented here is the coding framework employed in the analysis of the pilot questionnaire undertaken in this thesis and the difficulties encountered during this process.

The main analysis of the pilot questionnaire was conducted using the computer package *SPSS 20.0 for Windows* that required the information given by respondents to be coded into numerical form, giving each response a specific value.

Close-ended Questions for the Pilot Questionnaire

For the majority of the questions, which were close-ended, this was fairly straightforward. Questions in which respondents were required to tick only one box (numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,

6, 7, 8, 9 and 99) were coded simply by creating one field within *SPSS* and giving each possible response a value. For example, question 6 was given the field name *income* and each response given a value of 1-9 and 99 depending on the answer ('1' for '£20,000 or less', ranging to '7' for 'Over £60,001', '8' for 'I'm unemployed', '9' for 'I'm a student', and '99' for 'I prefer not to answer').

Closed-ended questions for which respondents could give multiple answers (question 10) were given a separate field for each answer, with a binary value given to indicate where or not they had ticked that particular box. This allowed for every possible combination, or amount, of boxes to be ticked for each of these questions.

Open-ended Questions for the Pilot Questionnaire

If open-ended questions were to be analysed using *SPSS* it was required that responses were given numerical values.

Once the pilot questionnaires were collected from the video game events examined, I constructed a coding frame for questions 3, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12 based upon the responses given. The categories for each of these are given below:

Question 3:

(1) Manchester; (2) Liverpool; Lancaster; (3) Leeds; (4) Birmingham; (5) Bradford; (6) York; (7) Reading; (8) York; (9) Cardiff; (10) Hull; (11) Bristol; (12) London; (13) Southampton.

Question 7:

(1) Word of mouth - Friends; (2) Word of mouth – Family; (3) Word of mouth – Colleagues; (4) Facebook; (5) Events page; (6) Radio; (7) Billboard.

Question 8:

(1) Friends; (2) Family; (3) Partner; (4) Colleague.

Question 9:

(1) Play video games; (2) Socialise/meet people/'hang out'; (3) Competition; (4) Cosplay; (5) Signing session; (6) 'Check it out' – for first time; (7) Other.

Question 11:

(1) No/ nothing in particular; (2) Maybe – ‘depends’; (3) Yes – specific items.

Question 12 (part 1: ‘yes and no’):

(1) Yes; (2) No.

Question 12 (part 2: ‘list of events’):

(1) Eurogamer Expo; (2) MCM Comic Con; (3) Insomnia Gaming Festival; (4) Play Expo; (5) Final Fantasy Orchestral; (6) Zelda Orchestral; (7) Video Games Live; (8) Smash events; (9) MBA events; (10) Doki Doki; (11) Gamescon; (12) Dreamhack; (13) Pax; (14) Evo; (15) Other.

Difficulties Encountered during Coding and Analysis of the Pilot Questionnaire

In Question 3 the respondents were asked for their geographical location to determine their level of ‘commitment’ to travel to video game events. However, the question, ‘which city and country did you come from?’ became confusing to participants from other countries. This question was later changed to ‘where have you travelled from?’

For question 6 the respondents were asked for their yearly income. After conducting the several pilot questionnaires, I noticed that the question was asking for a specific figure; therefore, a small piece of card was provided to the respondent to select a choice from the following groups of yearly income; including ‘£20,000 or less’, ‘£20,001- £30,000’, ‘£30,001 - £40,000’, ‘£40,001 - £50,000’, ‘£50,001 - £60,000’, ‘Over £60,001’, ‘I’m unemployed’, ‘I’m a student’, and ‘I prefer not to answer’.

Question 13 was later removed for the research questionnaire, as the majority of the responses were quite similar – scores were above 8.

Question 14 was also later removed for the research questionnaires, as the question did not apply to every respondent – only the ones that played online games.

University of Salford
School of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences

My research aims to explore video games and video gamer cultures away from the video gaming screen. The main focus is to provide an understanding from participant's perspectives on gaming events and video game practices away from the gaming screen.

The data gathered will solely be used for this research project. Only the researcher will have access to the data generated in the study. All personal information will be stored on one computer in a private study area and locked with a password for data protection. All identifiable information (names, address and geographical location) will be kept confidential during the process of the research and anonymous in the report

Contract for further information Email: y.y.law1@edu.salford.ac.uk

Pilot Questionnaire

If you are happy to participate please complete the consent form below:

I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service

I confirm that I am over 18 years old

Participant's signature:

Researcher's signature:

1) How old are you?

2) What is your gender?

3) Which city and country did you come from? E.g. Manchester, UK

4) What is your marital status?

Single

In a relationship

Engaged

Married

Divorced

Widowed

Other

I'd prefer not to answer

5) What is your current occupation?

Full-time employment

Part-time employment

Self-employed

Unemployed

I'd prefer not to answer

Full-time student with employment

Full-time student without employment

Part-time student with employment

Part-time student without employment

6) What is your yearly income?

7) How did you hear about this event?

8) Who do you attend to these events with?

9) What is your main reason for attending today?

10) Have you considered doing any of the following when attending these events?

Play video games

Meet new people

Cosplay

Attend workshops

Purchase merchandise

Other

11) Is there anything you intent to purchase specifically from this event?

12) Do you attend to other gaming events? Which ones?

13) On a scale of 1/10 how much do you love video games?

14) On a scale of 1-10, how many online gamers have you met up face-to-face, of which you still continue communicating on a regular basis?

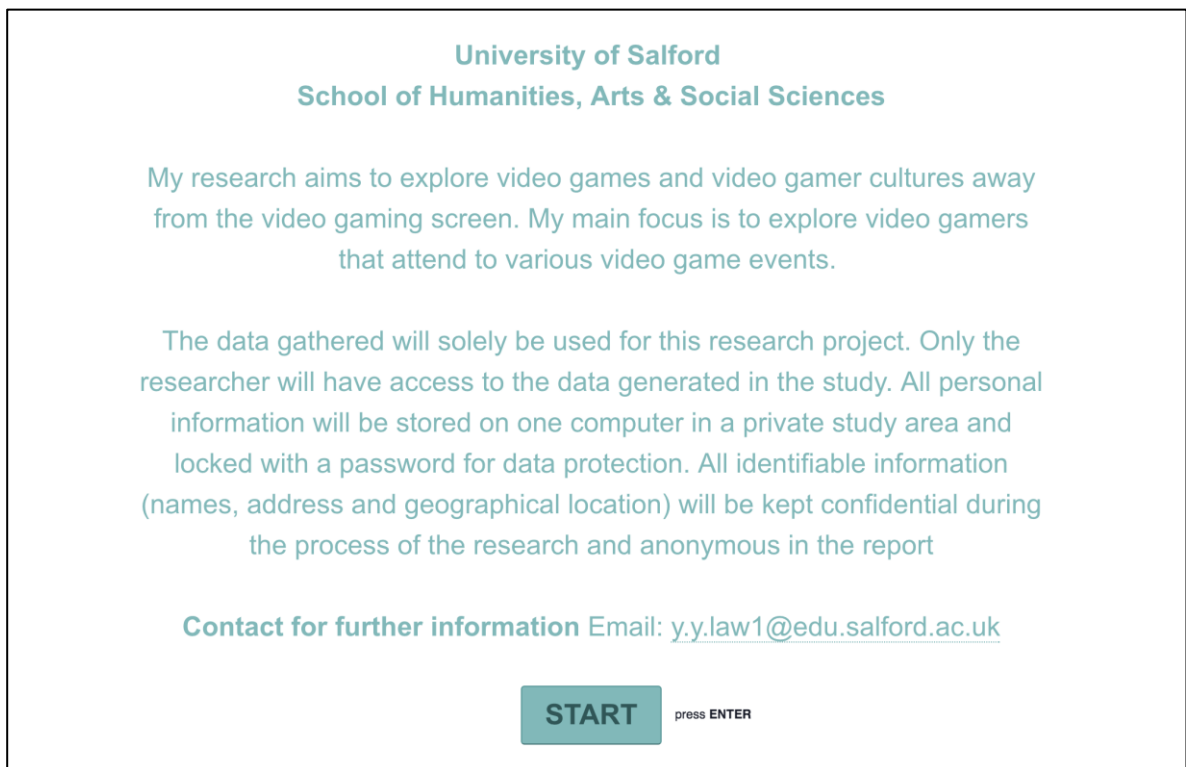
15) Finally, would you be interested in taking part in a follow-up interview or group interview? If yes, please can you provide your email address below.

Research Questionnaire

This section discusses the questions asked, in turn, from the research questionnaire employed within this thesis.

The researcher conducted the research questionnaire using *Typeform* – an application that helps produce and manage online questionnaires. The online questionnaires were collected through convenient sampling, where they were posted on various video game event forums and Facebook pages, between the period of a month before and after the dates of certain the video game events examined for this research.

Research Questionnaire - Questions



The image shows a screenshot of a Typeform questionnaire's information section. At the top, it identifies the 'University of Salford' and the 'School of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences'. The text explains that the research aims to explore video games and gamer cultures away from the gaming screen, with a focus on gamers at various events. It also states that the data gathered will be used solely for the research project, with personal information stored securely and kept confidential. A contact email, y.y.law1@edu.salford.ac.uk, is provided for further information. At the bottom, there is a teal 'START' button with the instruction 'press ENTER' next to it.

Figure B.1: The information section of the *Typeform* questionnaires.

The start of the *typeform* online questionnaire provides an information sheet about the research (see Figure B.1).

1 → **If you are happy to participate please complete the consent form below:**

I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service

I confirm that I am over 18 years old*

Y Yes

N No

Figure B.2: Question 1 - The consent form section of the *Typeform* questionnaires

For question 1, once the respondent decided to take part in the *typeform* online questionnaire a consent form is provided to confirm that they had read the information sheet, understood that their participation is voluntary with the right to withdraw without reason, and that they are over 18 years old (see Figure B.2).

N No

2 → **How old are you?***

3 → **What gender are you?***

Type or select an option

Figure B.3: Question 2 – How old are you?

Question 2 asked for the respondents' age. This was an open question coded into age groups; '18-24 years old', '25-29 years old', '30-34 years old', '35-39 years old', and '40 years old and above' (see Figure B.3).

3 → **What gender are you?***

Type or select an option ▼

- Male
- Female
- I prefer not to answer

Figure B.4: Question 3 – What gender are you?

Question 3 asked for the respondents’ gender. The options included ‘male’, ‘female’, and ‘I prefer not to answer’ – an additional option of ‘Other’ was added at a later date (see Figure B.4). This question attempted to examine the ratio of male and females attending video game events.

Type or select an option ▼

4 → **Where have you travelled from?**
E.g. Manchester, UK

5 → **What is your current occupation?***

Type or select an option ▼

Figure B.5: Question 4 – Where have you travelled from?

Question 4 asked for the respondents’ geographical location they had travelled from to determine their level of ‘commitment’ to travel to various video game events. This was an open-ended question for the researcher to code into groups consisting of the following; ‘North-West’, ‘West Midlands’, ‘East Midlands’, ‘North-East’, Wales’, ‘London’, ‘South West’, ‘South East Coast’ and ‘Scotland’ (see Figure B.5).

5 → **What is your current occupation?***

Type or select an option

- Full-time employment
- Part-time employment
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Full-time student with employment
- Full-time student without employment
- Part-time student with employment
- Part-time student without employment

Figure B.6: Question 5 – What is your current occupation?

Question 5 asked for the respondents' current occupation. Options included 'full-time employment', 'Part-time employment', 'Self-employed', 'Unemployed', 'Full-time student with employment', 'Full-time student without employment', 'Part-time student with employment', 'Part-time student without employment', 'Other', and 'I'd prefer not to answer' (see Figure B.6). This question attempted to identify a pattern between social class and video game events.

6 → **What is your marital status?***

Type or select an option

- Single
- In a relationship
- Engaged
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Other
- I'd prefer not to answer

Figure B.7: Question 6 – What is your marital status?

Question 6 asked for the respondents' marital status. Options included 'single', 'in a relationship', 'engaged', 'married', 'divorced', 'widowed', 'other', and 'I'd prefer not to answer' (see Figure B.7). This question attempted to understand the lifestyle of those who attended video game events.

7 → **What is your yearly income?***

Type or select an option

I'm a student

I'm unemployed

£20,000 or less

£20,001 - £30,000

£30,001 - £40,000

£40,001 - £50,000

£50,001 - £60,000

Over £60,001

Figure B.8: Question 7 – What is your yearly income?

Question 7 asked for the respondents' yearly income. Options included '£20,000 or less', '£20,001- £30,000', '£30,001 - £40,000', '£40,001 - £50,000', '£50,001 - £60,000', 'Over £60,001', 'I'm unemployed', 'I'm a student', and 'I prefer not to answer' (see Figure B.8).

8 → **How did you hear about this event?***

Type or select an option

Family

Friends

Internet

Radio

Billboards

Other

Figure B.9: Question 8 – How did you hear about this event?

Question 8 asked for the respondents' source of information to attend video game events; in particular, how did they hear about it? Options included 'Family', 'Friends', 'Internet', 'Radio', 'Billboards', and 'Other' (see Figure B.9). This question attempted to provide an understanding of the strength of advertisement through the social media; such as 'word of mouth', radio, billboards and much more.

9 → **Who do you attend to these video game events with?**

To add a paragraph, press **SHIFT + ENTER**




Figure B.10: Question 9 - Who do you attend to these video game events with?

Question 9 was concerned with the respondents' companionship to attend video game events. This was an open-ended question for the researcher to code into groups later (see Figure B.10).

10 → **What is your main reason for attending video game events?**

To add a paragraph, press **SHIFT + ENTER**



Figure B.11: Question 10 – What is your main reason for attending video game events?

Question 10 asked for the respondents' motive for attending video game events. This was an open-ended question for the researcher to code into groups later (see Figure B.11).

11 → **Have you considered doing any of the following when attending gaming events?***

Choose as many as you like

<input type="checkbox"/> A Play video games	<input type="checkbox"/> B Attend workshops
<input type="checkbox"/> C Meet new people	<input type="checkbox"/> D Purchase merchandise
<input type="checkbox"/> E Cosplay	<input type="checkbox"/> F Other

Figure B.12: Question 11 – Have you considered doing any of the following when attending gaming events?

Question 11 asked for the respondents' participation in certain activities within video game events (see Figure B.12). This was a question that allowed multiple ticks; including playing video games, meeting new people, cosplay, attending workshops, purchasing merchandise and others.

A screenshot of a survey question. The question text is "12 → Is there anything you intend to purchase specifically from this event?". Below the question, there is a vertical line indicating the start of an open-ended response area.

Figure B.13: Question 12 – Is there anything you intend to purchase specifically from this event?

Question 12 asked if the respondent had particular intentions to purchase specific merchandise. This was an open-ended question for the researcher to code into groups later (see Figure B.13). This question attempted to identify patterns of consumption within video game events.

A screenshot of a survey question. The question text is "13 → Do you attend to other gaming events?*" followed by two radio button options: "Y Yes" and "N No".

Figure B.14: Question 13 – Do you attend to other gaming events?

Question 13 asked if the respondent had attended to other gaming events. Unfortunately, *typeform* did not offer ‘jumping questions’ while it was in beta, where different follow-up questions would be asked if the respondent selected ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Therefore, the following question (question 14) was a longer question, which attempted to cover for both responses (see Figure B.14).

14 → **Have you attended or intent to attend to other gaming events?
(If yes, please state which ones)**

If you have not attended to other gaming events (besides this one), why?

To add a paragraph, press SHIFT + ENTER

Ⓒ

Figure B.15: Question 14 – Follow up question (from question 13)

Question 14 asked if the respondent had attended to intent to attend to other gaming events, and if they had not attended to other gaming events, why? (see Figure B.15). This question was useful to determine the researchers' list of video game events to examine for this thesis.

15 → **Finally, would you be interested in taking part in a follow-up
interview or group interview?**

If yes, please can you provide your email address below^{*}

|

Figure B.16: Question 15 – Follow-up interview or follow-up interview

Finally, question 15 asked if the respondent would like to participate in a follow-up interview or group interview (see Figure B.16). If the respondent would like to participate, they were asked to provide an email address to be contacted at a later date.

Other Questions included in the Questionnaire

The research questionnaire consists of additional questions that were added then removed, because the responses to these questions were inconsistent – almost half the respondents left these questions blank. These questions were moved to the research interviews and group interviews, where these questions could be elaborated.

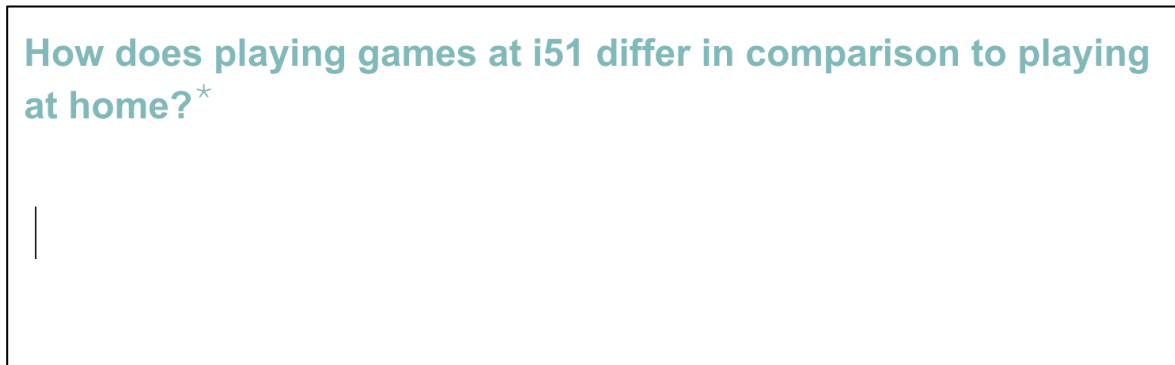


Figure B.17: Additional Question 1 – How does playing games at video game events differ in comparison to playing at home?

Additional question 1 considered the difference between playing video games at video game events, and to playing video games at home (see Figure B.17). This question attempted to consider the embodied experience at video game events, in comparison to the embodied experience from playing at home.

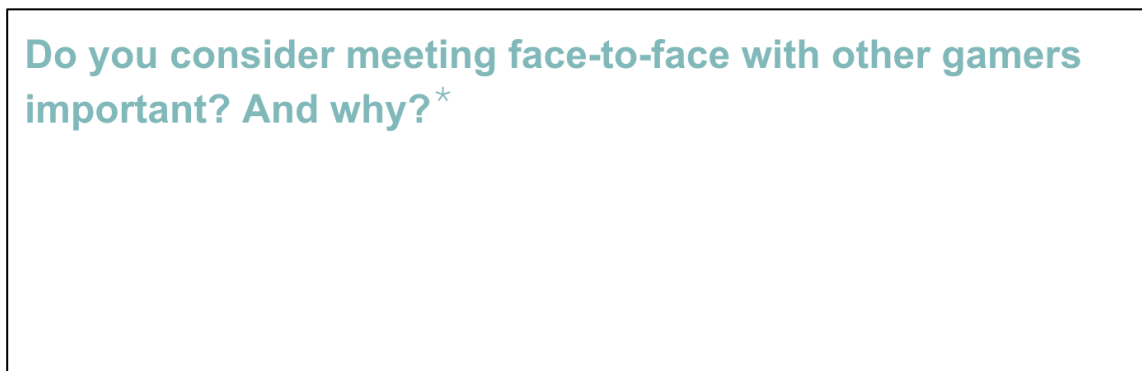


Figure B.18: Additional Question 2 – Do you consider meeting face-to-face with other gamers important? And why?

Additional question 2 considered the importance of meeting face-to-face with other gamers at video game events (see Figure B.18). This question attempted to consider the importance of meeting other gamers face-to-face, in comparison to those who meet online.

Please write a short description on your experience at i51:

- what have you done so far?
- what have you enjoyed the most?

To add a paragraph, press **SHIFT + ENTER**

Figure B.19: Additional Question 3: Please write a short description of your experience at certain video game events

Additional question 3 asked the respondent to provide a short description on their experience at certain video game events (see Figure B.19). This included prompting questions; what have you done so far? And what have you enjoyed the most?

What does attending to iSeries mean to you?

- is it something more than just playing in front of a computer screen all weekend?
- how does it enhance your bond with other gamers?
- how does it enhance your gaming experience?

To add a paragraph, press **SHIFT + ENTER**

Figure B.20: Additional Question 4: what does attending certain video game events mean to you?

Additional question 4 considers the meanings attached to certain video game events (see Figure B.20). This included prompting questions; is it something more than just playing in front of a computer screen all weekend? How does it enhance your bond with other gamers? and how does it enhance your gaming experience?

Difficulties Encountered during Coding and Analysis of the Research Questionnaire

Question 3 asked for the respondents' gender. The options included 'male', 'female', and 'I prefer not to answer'. However, upon conducting the research questionnaire, I received a comment from a respondent to consider Facebook's 50 gender options – an additional option of 'Other' was added.

Although *typeform* was a useful tool that analyses the data collected (such as displaying respondents separately and counting the number of responses), an additional analysis using *SPSS* was considered necessary for the open-ended questions that required re-grouping (see Figure B.21).

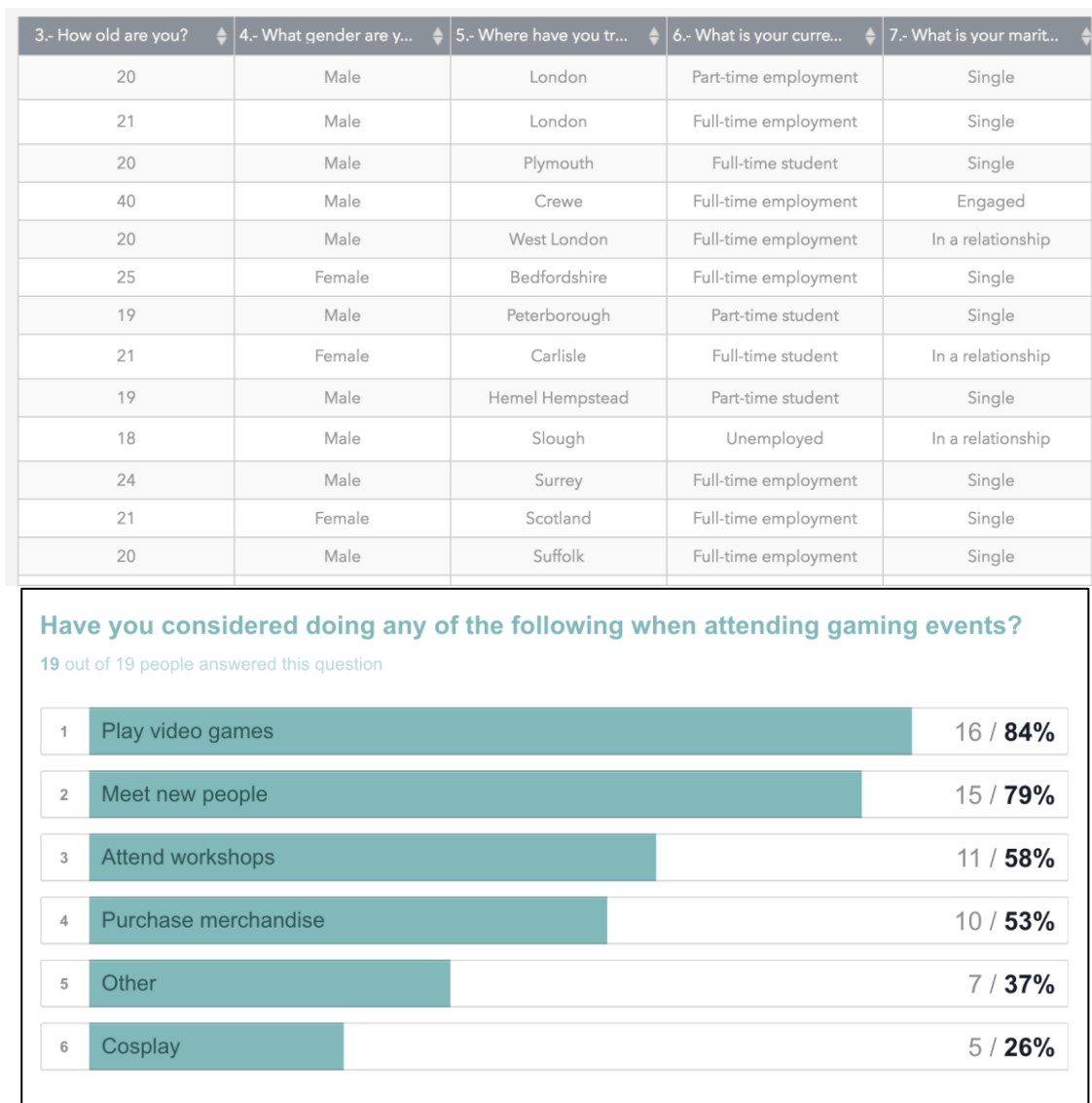


Figure B.21: An example of a 'Typeform' result and general report, from one of the research questionnaires

However, due to low response rates and differing figures obtained from the online questionnaires, the online questionnaires responses were disregarded. Overall, a total of 80 online questionnaire responses were obtained from the 15 different video game events from January 2014 to July 2014. The initial goal of the online questionnaires was to obtain between 20–40 online questionnaires from each video game event. The online questionnaire responses ranged from obtaining no responses and between six to twenty-one online questionnaire responses from the list of video game events. Hence, the research questionnaire was only used as a mechanism for obtaining interviewees for the follow-up interview and group interviews.

Appendix C - Interview Methodology

This section presents additional information on the interviews discussed in the research methodology (in chapter 4) of this thesis. Presented here is an example of the letters sent to potential interviewees and group interviewees, followed by a list of individuals interviewed as part of this research, with some basic demographic information on these. Also, presented here is a consideration of the questions asked from the interviews and group interviews, and the coding framework used in conjunction with the computer programme *NVivo for Windows* to analyse the interview and group interview data.

Example of letter sent to potential interviewees

Dear,

You may recall that you recently completed an online questionnaire and expressed a willingness to participate in further research, in relation to video games and video game events. In connection with this I am writing to you to ask if you would be willing to participate in a short interview.

You have been selected as part of a small group of individuals who will be interviewed concerning with various video game related practices and video game events. You will be contacted by myself in the next few weeks asking you to participate in a short interview, and to arrange a suitable time for this at your convenience.

The interview itself will take only an hour or so of your time, and can be conducted at a time and location suitable to you. The questions are simple and straightforward and related to issues such as, why you first started attending video game events and what motivated you to participate in various video game related practices.

If you do not wish to be contacted, or do not wish to participate any further with this research, please email me at y.y.law1@edu.salford.ac.uk.

If you have any queries concerning this research, I can be contacted at the above email address. If you have any concerns relating to the authenticity of this research, or my own position within this, please feel free to contact the University of Salford (0161 295 5000).

Thank you for your continued support, and I hope to speak to you soon.

Ying-Ying Law,

University of Salford.

Interviewees and Group Interviewees:

The table below presents a list of the thirty participants interviewed. The table includes information on respondent collected; such as their gender, age, residence, event collected from, date of interview and location of the interview (see Table C.1. and Table C.1)

Table C.1. Interview Participants						
Name	Age	Gender	Residence	Event collected from	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Chell	26	Female	London	EuroGamer Expo (Sept 2013)	30/03/14	EGX Rezzed – in a quiet area
Sonic	27	Male	London	EuroGamer Expo (Sept 2014)	26/09/14	EuroGamer Expo – while queuing for two hours
Scott Pilgrim	28	Male	London	EuroGamer (Sept 2014)	25/10/14	MCM Comic Con – in the food area
Pikachu	23	Male	London	MCM Comic Con (London – May 2014)	24/05/14	MCM Comic Con – outside on the grass
Levi Acherman	24	Female	Leeds	MCM Comic Con (Manchester – July 2014)	19/07/14	Local Café – after the event
Master Chief	25	Male	Liverpool	MCM Comic Con (London – Oct 2014)	26/10/14	MCM Comic Con – in the food area
Rexxar	18	Male	Manchester	Insomnia53	23/11/14	Insomnia53 - BYOC Hall

Teemo the Swift Scout	22	Male	Liverpool	Insomnia55	28/10/15	Insomnia55 – BYOC Hall
Annie the Dark Child	22	Female	London	Insomnia55	31/10/15	Insomnia55 – BYOC Hall
Princess Leia Organa	22	Female	Manchester	Play Expo Manchester (Oct 2013)	3/05/14	Play Expo Blackpool – in a quiet area
Daenerys Targaryen	27	Female	Manchester	Play Expo Manchester (Oct 2014)	4/11/14	University of Salford – in a quiet room
Pac-Man	29	Male	Liverpool	Play Expo Manchester (Oct 2014)	11/10/14	Play Expo – in a quiet room after the event
Rinoa Heartilly	24	Female	London	A New World: Intimate Music from Final Fantasy (Feb 2014)	30/05/14	Final Symphony: A New World – before the show
Squall Leonhart	25	Male	Liverpool	A New World: London Encore Performance	1/11/14	Distant Worlds – before the show
Sephiroth	30	Male	London	Distant Worlds (Nov 2014)	1/11/14	Distant Worlds – after the show
Ness	22	Male	Manchester	Edentines Day (Mar 2014)	28/02/14	Edentines Day – quiet area
Mr. Game and Watch	22	Male	Bristol	Cabin Fever 1 (April 2014)	27/04/14	Cabin Fever 1 – quiet room in organisers house –

						after the event
Captain Falcon	26	Male	London	Heir to the Throne (August 2014)	25/09/14	Eurogamer Expo – after the event
Mokujin	27	Male	Manchester	Warriors Return 3	22/06/14	Warriors Return 3 – after the event
Jin Kazama	28	Male	Manchester	Warriors Return 3	23/06/14	Local café

Table C.2. Group Interview Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Residence	Event collected from	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Kirby	26	Male	London	EuroGamer Expo (Sept 2014)	28/09/14	EuroGamer Expo – in a quiet area
Meta Knight	25	Male	London			
King Dedede	22	Female	London			
Adeleine	23	Female	London			
Bandana	24	Female	London			
Waddle Dee						
Batman	27	Male	London	MCM London Comic Con (May 2014)	24/05/14	MCM London Comic Con – in the food area
Robin	23	Male	London			
Blinky	21	Female	Manchester	MCM Manchester Comic Con (July 2014)	27/07/14	Manchester – Local Café
Pinky	21	Female	Manchester			
Inky	22	Male	Manchester			
Clyde	22	Male	Manchester			
Bulbasaur	24	Male	Manchester	Insomnia53	27/11/14	Manchester - Local Pub
Charmander	24	Male	Manchester			
Squirtle	20	Male	Manchester			
Rengar the Pridestalker	28	Male	Manchester	Insomnia54	3/04/15	Insomnia54-BYOC Hall
Kah'Zix the Voidreaver	27	Female	Manchester			
Mario	28	Male	Manchester	Play Expo Manchester	11/10/14	Play Expo Manchester

Luigi	22	Male	Manchester	(Oct 14)		– Trafford Centre Food Court
Tidus Yuna	25 24	Male Female	London London	Distant Worlds (Nov 14)	1/11/14	Distant Worlds – before show
Parappa the Rapper Sunny Funny Katy Kat PJ Berri	26 25 27 22	Male Male Male Male	Birmingham Birmingham Birmingham Birmingham	Edentines Day	28/02/14	Edentines Day – in a quiet room
Bowser Boom Boom Pom Pom	23 22 24	Male Male Male	Manchester Birmingham Birmingham	Manchester Monthly Regionals 2 (May 14)	10/05/14	Manchester Monthly Regionals – in a quiet area
Fox Sheik Princess Peach	25 24 24	Male Female Female	London London London	Cabin Fever 1 (April 14)	31/05/14	Cabin Fever 1 – after the event

Amongst the respondents collected for the interviews and group interviews, it is important to highlight that there were respondents who refused to participate; such as those who could not be contacted, those who decided not to attend certain video game events, those who were busy (still playing in a tournament), those who ‘cut’ the interview short (due to other activities), those who could not be interviewed because they were intoxicated (drunk) those who could not be interviewed because they were ill (hung-over/LAN death), and those who declined with no reason give.

University of Salford
School of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences

My research aims to explore video games and video gamer cultures away from the video gaming screen. The main focus is to provide an understanding from participant's perspectives on gaming events and video game practices away from the gaming screen.

The data gathered will solely be used for this research project. Only the researcher will have access to the data generated in the study. All personal information will be stored on one computer in a private study area and locked with a password for data protection. All identifiable information (names, address and geographical location) will be kept confidential during the process of the research and anonymous in the report

Contract for further information Email: y.y.law1@edu.salford.ac.uk

Research Interview – Consent Form

If you are happy to participate please complete the consent form below:

I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service

I confirm that I am over 18 years old

Participant's signature:

Researcher's signature:

Interview and Group Interview Questions

1: Demographics

- Age?
- Gender?
- City and Country?
- Current Occupation?
- Marital Status?

2: Attraction of video games?

- What types of video games do you play?
- How often do you play video games?
- Who do you usually play video games with?
- Where do you usually play video games?
- How does playing video games at video game events differ to playing video games at home?
- How does video gaming feature in people's lives, social identities and networks?

3: Attraction of video game events?

- How did you hear about this event?
- What is your main reason for attending today? Why?
- Who do you go to gaming events with? Why?
- What do you do at gaming events? Why?
 - Game Demonstration?
 - Purchase Merchandise?
 - Hanging out with others?
 - Community practice?
 - Cosplay?
- Do you attend to any other events? Why?
 - How does this compare to other events?

4: Attraction of video game communities?

- What conversations do you have that are game-related? What do you talk about?
- How does meeting face-to-face with others at these events facilitate your gaming experience?
- Do you feel that you belong to a gaming community? Why?
- As a community member, what is your role?
 - How committed are you?
- Do you feel there is some form of social status between gamers?
 - Casual/Hard-Core Gamers?
 - Professional Gamers?
- Do you think social skills are important? Why?
- Can you give any examples of negative experiences or conflict within gaming communities?

5: Media use?

- Do you follow video games through the media?
 - Such as Internet, magazines, radio, TV?
 - How frequently do you use/buy these?
- Is it important to obtain the latest video game information? Why?
- Where do you obtain information about video gaming events?

6. Competitive gaming

- Do you have a favourite player/team?
 - Why is this player your favourite?
 - Why is this team your favourite?
- Do you compete in gaming tournaments?
 - If yes, what? why? And how?
- Is it all about winning?
 - Or learning? What do you learn?
 - Other motives for competing?
- Is it important to become a 'good player'?
 - Why?
- Is it important to meet other players face-to-face?
 - Why?
 - How does this differ to meeting players online?

7. Consumption patterns:

- What video game related merchandise do you buy from video game events?
- Do you ever wear or display this outside of video game events?
 - When and where?

8. Importance of video game events:

- How important is it for you to attend certain video game events? Does it differ across different types of events? Or video games?
- How much planning do you go through to attend certain video game events?
- How committed are you to attend video game events?
 - Do you book days off work?
 - Do you book hotel/travel in advance? How advance?
 - Do you volunteer?
- How important is it that your friends/family attend? Would you go if they weren't going?
- How often do you attend certain events repeatedly? Which events have you stopped attending to repeatedly? And why?
- What do you think about the people who attend particular video game events? Similarity? Difference? Who attends? Why?

9. Other Questions

- How do common interests for gamers enhance, facilitate and support social interaction and contacts between regular and occasional players?
- Examples of video gaming in facilitating the spectacular and the mundane?
- Other interests?

Coding Framework

1. Demographics

- 1.1. Age
- 1.2. Gender
- 1.3. Locality
- 1.4. Employment
- 1.5. Income
- 1.6. Others

2. First time

- 2.1. First impressions?
- 2.2. Why they first attended?
- 2.3. Preconceptions

3. Multiple times

- 3.1. Second/third/etc... expectations?
- 3.2. Good changes
- 3.3. Bad changes

4. Reason for attending video game events

4.1. Socialisation

- 4.1.1. Friendly atmosphere
 - Friendship
 - Peer pressure
- 4.1.2. Like-minded people
 - Similar interests
 - Hang-out
 - Conversation
 - Drink (alcohol) - get drunk together
- 4.1.3. Relaxation
- 4.1.4. Social Networking
 - Career opportunities

4.2. Participation

- 4.2.1. Play
 - Latest demos
 - Practice games – for tournament purposes
 - Play games together (besides gaming in front of a screen)
- 4.2.2. Consumption
 - Exhibition Hall
 - Merchandise
 - Food
- 4.2.3. Fandom
 - Fan knowledge – sharing information
 - Fan collections
 - Signing sessions
 - Workshops
- 4.2.4. Cosplay
 - Content creating
 - Building techniques
 - Cosplay Competition
- 4.2.5. Tradition/Ritual Practices

- Event activities
 - Community activities
- 4.3. Competition
- 4.3.1. Attitudes to winning - strategy
 - 4.3.2. Learning to be competitive – e.g. sponsored player
 - 4.3.3. Interaction with other competitive players
 - 4.3.4. Good tournaments
 - 4.3.5. Bad tournaments
 - 4.3.6. Spectatorship
 - Live matches and live streams
 - Commentators
 - 4.3.7. Lack of female presence
- 5. Importance of video games in live (routines surrounding video games)**
- 6. Career of video gamers**
- 6.1. Change in behaviour – ‘learning’ to be a ‘good player’
 - 6.2. Where they learning (e.g. behaviour and rules) from?
 - 6.3. Who they have taught (e.g. behaviour and rules).
 - 6.4. Leaving the game scene
- 7. Patterns of Video Game Communities**
- Levels of commitment
 - Maintenance of communities – good and bad communities
 - Inclusiveness
 - Exclusiveness
- 8. Identity**
- Sense of belonging
 - ‘Us’ and ‘them’
- 9. Embodiment – Five senses**
- 9.1. Sight
 - Visual experience
 - Spectatorship
 - 9.2. Sound
 - Voices – conversation/singing
 - Music - specific sounds – for example, controllers
 - 9.3. Smell
 - Human sweat
 - Warm machines
 - 9.4. Taste
 - Sharing Food – junk food – form of escape
 - Drinking – energy drinks and alcohol
 - Cultural Markers – acceptance and non-acceptance
 - 9.5. Touch (Feel)
 - 9.5.1. Physical presence
 - Touch – physical/comfort
 - Atmosphere – cultural
 - Intimacy – memories

References

- 1000Games. (2011). *2001 UK Gaming Stats [Infographic]*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.1000games.co/2011-uk-gaming-stats-infographic>
- Aarseth, E. (2001). Computer Game Studies, Year One. *The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html#top>
- Adam, A. (2005). *Gender, Ethics and Information Technology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Agar, M. A. (1996). *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Alberts, G., & Oldenziel, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Hacking Europe: From Computer Cultures to Demoscenes*. London: Springer.
- Altier, S. (2014). *Fan Conventions, Behind the Mask!* Eventbrite. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <https://www.eventbrite.com/blog/ds00-fan-conventions-behind-the-mask/>
- Altman, H. (2005). *Celebrity Culture*. CQ Press. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre2005031800>
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Angrosino, M. V. (2007). *Doing ethnographic and observational research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Arsenault, D., & Perron, B. (2009). In the Frame of the Magic Cycle: The Circle(s) of Gameplay. In B. Perron & M. Wolf (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader 2* (pp. 109-132). London: Routledge.
- Ashley, b., Hollows, J., Hones, S., & Taylor, B. (2004). *Food and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Atkinson, P., Delamont, S., & Housley, W. (2007). *Contours of Culture: Complex Ethnography and the Ethnography of Complexity*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.
- Auld, C., & Cuskelly, G. (2001). Behavioral Characteristics of Volunteers: Implications for Community Sport and Recreation Organizations. *Parks and Leisure*, 4(2), 29–37.
- Baldwin, E., Longhurst, B., McMracken, S., Ogborn, M. & Smith, G. (Eds.). (2004). *Introducing Cultural Studies*. Essex, Pearson Education.
- Banesh-Liu, P. R. (2007). "Anime Cosplay in America: A Fantastic Regalia." *Ornament*, 31(1), 44-49.

- Barnard, M. (2002). *Fashion as Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Barnett, M. A., Vitaglione, G. D., Harper, K. K. G., Quackenbusch, S. W., Steadman, L. A., & Valdez, B. S. (1997). Late adolescents' experiences with and attitudes toward videogames. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 27, 1316-1334.
- Bartle, R. (2006). Virtual Worldliness. In J. Balkin & B.S.Noveck (Eds.), *The State of Play: Law, Games and Virtual Worlds* (pp. 31-54). New York: New York University Press.
- Bateson, G. (1976). A Theory of Play and Fantasy. In J. S. Bruner, A. Jolly & K. Sylva (Eds.), *Play: Its Role in Development and Evolution* (pp.119-129). New York: Penguin Books.
- Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bauman, Z. (1990). *Thinking Sociologically*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Bauman, Z. (1995). *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Bauman, Z. (1997). *Postmodernity and its Discontents*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z. (2001). *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. Cambridge: Policy Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2003). *City of Hears, City of Hopes*. London: Goldsmith College, University of London.
- Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. London: Free Press.
- Bell, D., & Valentine, G. (1997). *Consuming Geographies: We are where we eat*. London: Routledge.
- Bell, C. M. (1997). *Ritual: Perspectives and dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, J. (1993). *Doing your research project*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Bertozi, E. (2007). "You Play Like a Girl!" *Cross Gender Competition and the Uneven Playing Field*. University of Wisconsin. Whitewater. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://road.uww.edu/road/bertozze/BertozziPlayGirl.pdf>
- Bevir, M., & R. Rhodes. (1999). Studying British Government: Reconstructing the Reseach Agenda. *British Journal of Politics and International Studies*. 1, 215-239.

- Bevir, M., & Rhodes, R.A.W. (2002). *Interpretive Theory: Theory and Methods in Political Science*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0bk3k2nq#page-1>
- Bevir, M., & Rhodes, R. A. W. (2010). *The State as Cultural Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beyman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Blackshaw, T. (2010). *Key Concepts in Community Studies*. London: Sage Publications.
- Blackshaw, T., & Crawford, G. (2009). *The Sage Dictionary of Leisure Studies*. London: Sage Publications.
- Blaikie, N. (2000). *Designing Social Research: The Logical of Anticipation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Blanc, X. (1999). *Managerial Problems in Combining Sports Projects With Volunteerism*. Paper presented at the Volunteers, Global Society, and the Olympic Movement Conference, Lausanne, November 24–26.
- Bloch, M. E. F. (1998). *How We Think They Think: Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory, and Literacy*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.
- Bloustein, G. (2003). *Girl Making: A Cross-Cultural Ethnography on the Processes of Growing up Female*. New York and Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interaction*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Boellstorff, T. (2008). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C., and Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Brewer, J.D. (2000) *Ethnography*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bricas, N. (2013). *Cooking, Sharing: Sociology Enables to Better Understand Foodstyles*. The NuriJournal. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from

<http://nutrijournal.danone.com/en/articles/stories/cooking-sharing-sociology-enables-to-better-understand-foodstyles/>

British Sociological Association. (2002). *Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association* [online]. Durham. The British Sociological Association. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm>

Bruner, J. (1983). 'The Functions of Play', address to the Pre-school Playgroups Association Conference in Llandudno. December, in Contact.

Bryce, J., & Rutter, J. (2001). *In the Game - In the Flow: Presence in Public Computer Gaming*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://jasonrutter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Bryce-Rutter-2001-In-the-Game-In-the-Flow.pdf>

Bryce, J. & Rutter, J. (2003). The Gendering of Computer Gaming and Space. In I. Ones (Eds.), *Leisure Cultures: Investigation in Sport, Media and Technology, Lecture Studies Association* (pp. 3-22). Eastbourne: Leisure Studies Association.

Bryce, J., & Rutter, J. (2006). An Introduction to Understanding Digital Games. In J. Rutter & J. Bryce (Eds.), *Understanding Digital Games* (pp.1-17). London: Sage Publications.

Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burn, A. & Carr, D. (2006). 'Motivations and Online Gaming'. In D. Carr, D. Buckingham, A. Burn & G. Schott (Eds.), *Computer Games: Text, Narrative and Play* (pp.103-118). Cambridge, Polity.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Caillois, R. (1962) [2001]. *Man, Play and Games* (trans. M. Barash). London: Thames & Hudson.

Carter, M., Gibbs, M., & Harrop, M. (2012). *Metagames, Paragames and Orthogames: A New Vocabulary*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://people.eng.unimelb.edu.au/mharrop/pdf/metagames.pdf>

Cassel, J. & Jenkins, H. (2000). Chess for Girls? Feminism and Computer Games. In J. Cassel & H. Jenkins (Eds.), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: gender and Computer Games* (pp.2-45). Cambridge: MA: MIT Press.

Castells, M. (2000). *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture. Volume 1: The Rise of the Network Society*. Boston: Blackwell.

Castronova, E. (2005). *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Chambers, B. (2012). *The All-Too-Familiar Harassment Against Feminist Frequency, and What The Gaming Community Can Do About It*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.themarysue.com/the-all-too-familiar-harassment-against-feminist-frequency-and-what-the-gaming-community-can-do-about-it/>
- Charles, N., & Keer, M. (1988). *Women, Food and Families: Power, Status, Love, Anger*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Chatfield, T. (2009). Videogames Now Outperform Hollywood Movies. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2009/sep/27/videogames-hollywood>
- Chee, F. (2006). The Games We Play Online and Offline: Making Wang-tta in Korea. *The International Journal of Media and Culture*. 4 (3), 225-239.
- Clark, A. & Emmel, N. (2010). *Using Walking Interviews*. ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/1323/1/13-toolkit-walking-interviews.pdf>
- Clarke, J., & Critcher, C. (1995). *The Devil Makes Work: Leisure in Capitalist Britain*. London: Macmillan.
- Cobban, K. (2016). *What Makes a Game an eSport?* Game Skinny. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.gameskinny.com/9snqp/what-makes-a-game-an-esport>
- Cohen, A. (1955). *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Game*. London: Macmillan.
- Cohen, A. (1985). *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Tavistock.
- Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.
- Collins, K. (2013). *Playing with Sound: A Theory of Interacting with Sound and Music in Video Games*. Cambridge: MA: MIT Press.
- Consalvo, M. (2007). *Cheating*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Cooper-Chen, A. M. (2010). *Cartoon Cultures: The Globalization of Japanese Popular Media*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc
- Crawford, C. (1982). *The Art of Computer Game Design*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~stewart/cs583/ACGD_ArtComputerGameDesign_ChrisCrawford_1982.pdf
- Crawford, G. (2004). *Consuming Sport: Sport, Fans and Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Crawford, G. (2005). Digital Gaming, Sport and Gender. *Leisure Studies*. 24 (3), 259-270.

Crawford, G. (2005). Sensible Soccer: Sport Fandom and the Rise of Digital Gaming. In A. Magee, A. Bairner & A. Tomlinson (Eds.), *The Bountiful Game? Football, Identities and Finance* (pp. 249-266). London: Meyer.

Crawford, G. (2009). 'Forget about the Magic Circle' (or towards a Sociology of Video Games), keynote presentation to the Under the Mask 2 Conference, University of Bedfordshire, UK, 5th June 2009. Online. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://usir.salford.ac.uk/19350/3/Garry_Crawford-1.pdf

Crawford, G. (2012). *Video Gamers*. London: Routledge.

Crawford, G., & Gosling, V. (2005). *Toys for boys? Women's Marginalisation and Participation as Digital Gamers*. Sociological Research Online. 10 (1). Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/1/crawford.html>

Crawford, G. & Gosling, V. K. (2008). 'Freak Scene? Narrative, Audience and Scene', (Player) Conference Proceedings, Copenhagen: IT University of Copenhagen, 26-29 August 2008, Copenhagen: IT University of Copenhagen, pp. 113-143.

Crawford, G., Gosling, V. K. & Light, B. (2011). *Online Gaming in Context: The Social and Cultural Significance of Online Games*. Oxon: Routledge.

Crawford, G. & Rutter, J. (2006). Cultural Studies and Digital Games. In J. Rutter & J. Bryce (2006). *Understanding Digital Games* (pp.148-165). London: Sage Publications.

Crawford, G., & Rutter, J. (2007). Playing the Game: Performance in Digital Game Audiences. In J. Gray, C. Sandvoss & C. L. Harrington (Eds.), *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (pp.271-284). New York: New York University Press.

Cronin, J. M., & McCarthy, M. B. (2011). Fast Food and Fast Games: An Ethnographic Exploration of Food Consumption Complexity Among the Videogames Subculture. *British Good Journal*, 113(6), 720-743.

De Garis, L. (2000). Be a Buddy to Your Buddy. In J. McKay, M. Messner & D. Sabo (Eds.), *Masculinities, Gender Relations and Sport* (pp. 87-107). London: Sage Publications.

de Kort, Y. A. W., Ijsselstein, W. A., & Gajadhat, B. J. (2007). *People, places, and play: A research framework for digital game experience in a social-spatial context*. Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference in Situated Play. Retrieved from <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07311.21038.pdf>

Delanty, G. (2003). *Community*. London: Routledge.

DeVault, M. (1991). *Feeding the Family: The Social Organisation of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dibbell, J. (2003). *The Unreal Estate Boom*. Wired 11.01, January, 2003. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.01/gaming.html>

Dillon, R. (2011). Pong Goes Home. In R. Dillon. *The Golden Age of Video Games: The Birth of a Multibillion Dollar Industry* (pp.21-24). Boca Raton: A K Peters/CRC Press.

Dovey, J., & Kennedy, H. W. (2006). *Games Culture: Computer Games as New Media*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Ducheneaut, N. & Moore, R. (2005). More than just 'XP': Learning Social Skills in Massively Multiplayer Online Games. *Interactive Technology & Smart Education*. 2(2), 89-100.

Durkheim, E. (1965). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by Joseph W. Swain. New York: The Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1995). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E. Fields. New York: The Free Press.

Edge, N. (2013). Evolution of the Gaming Experience: Live Video Streaming an the Emergence of a New Web Community. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communication*. 4(2), 33-39.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, S., Smith, J. H., & Tosca, S. P. (2008). *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Elstad, B. (1996). Volunteer Perception of Learning and Satisfaction in a Mega-Event: The Case of the XVII Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer. *Festival Management and Event Tourism*, 4, 75-86.

Entertainment Software Association [ESA]. (2015). *2015 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data: Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry*. Retrieved 14th February, 2016 from <http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ESA-Essential-Facts-2015.pdf>

Erickson, T. (1997). Social interaction on the Net: Virtual Community as Participatory Genre. Proceedings Of The Thirtieth Hawaii International Conference Digital On System Sciences, Wailea, HI , USA

Eskelinen, M. (2001). 'The Game Situation', *Game Studies*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/>

Eskelinen, M. (2012). *Cybertext Poetics: International Texts in Critical Media Aesthetics*. Volume #2. London: Continuum International Publishing.

Eskelinen, M. & Tronstad, R. (2003). Video Games as Configurative Performances. In: *The Video Game Theory Reader* (pp. 195-220). London: Routledge.

- Espen, A. (2007). *I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and The Implied Player*. Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference on Situated Play. Retrieved from <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07313.03489.pdf>
- Eventbrite. (2014). *Fandom Conventions: Behind the Mask: How You Can Tap Into The New Faces of Fandom to Throw an Event of Heroic Proportions*. Britepaper. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from https://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/britepapers/Britepaper_Fandoms_Survey.pdf
- Farrell, J., Johnston, M., & Twynam, G. (1998). Volunteer Motivation, Satisfaction, and Management at an Elite Sporting Competition. *Journal of Sport Management*, 12, 288-300.
- Faulkner, W. (2000). The Power and the Pleasure? A Research Agenda for 'Making Gender Stick'. *Science, Technology & Human Values*. 25(1), 87-119.
- Feminist Frequency (2012). *Feminist Frequency: Conversations with Pop Culture*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <https://feministfrequency.com/>
- FIFA World Cup. (2007). *Germany 2006 in Numbers*. FIFA. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/marketingtv/news/newsid=518083.htm>
- Fine, G.A. (1983). *Share Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fine, G. A. (1996). Justifying Work: Occupational Rhetorics as Resources in Kitchen Restaurants. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. (41)1, 90-115.
- Fiske, J. (1992). The Cultural Economy of Fandom. In L.A. Lewis (Eds.), *The Adoring Audience* (pp. 30-49). London: Routledge.
- Flanagan, M. (2009). *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. MIT Press: Cambridge.
- Freedman, P. (2007). *Food: The History of Taste*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Freud, S. (1918). *Totem and Taboo*. New York: Vintage.
- Freud, S. (1933). [1959]. *Femininity*. In Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XXII. Translated by J. Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Gainer, B. (1995). Rituals and Relationships: Interpersonal Influence on Shared Consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 32(3), 253-260.
- Garfield, R. (2000). 'Metagames'. In J. Dietz (Eds.), *Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Essays on Roleplaying* (pp.16-21). Charleston: Jolly Roger Games.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture. In: C. Geertz. *The interpretation of cultures*. (pp.3-30). New York: Basic Books.

- Giannoulakis, C., Wang, C-H., & Gray, D. (2008). Measuring Volunteer Motivation in Mega-Sporting Events. *Event Management*, 11, 191-200.
- Giddings, S. (2003). Circuits: A Video Essay on Virtual and Actual Play. In M. Copier & J. Raessens (Eds.), *Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference [CD ROM]*. Utrecht, The Netherlands: Faculty of Arts, Utrecht University Press.
- Glaser, G. B. (Eds.). (1968). *Organizational Careers*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. London. Aldine Publishing Co.
- Goffman, E. (1968). *Asylums*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Goffman, E. (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Gold, R. (1958). Roles in Sociological Field Observation. *Social Forces*, 36, 217-213.
- Gordon, S. (2007). *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters*. [Film]. New York: Picturehouse.
- Gottschalk, S. (1995). Videology: Video-Games as Postmodern Sites/Sights of Ideological Reproduction. *Symbolic Interaction*, 18(1), 1-18.
- Gray, A. (1992). *Video Playtime: The Gendering of a Leisure Technology*. London: Routledge.
- Green, E. (2001). Technology, Leisure and Everyday Practices. In E. Green & A. Adam (Eds.), *Virtual Gender: Technology, Consumption and Identity* (pp.173-88). London: Routledge.
- Griffiths, M.D., & Hunt, N. (1998). Dependence on computer games by adolescents. *Psychological Reports*, 82, 475-480.
- Grimes, S. M. (2003). "You Shoot Like a Girl!": *The Female Protagonist in Action-Adventure Video Games*. Simon Fraser University. School of Communication. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.digra.org/dl/db/05150.01496>
- Grodal, T. (2000). Video games and the pleasures of control. In D. Zillmann, & P. Vorderer (Eds.), *Media entertainment. The psychology of its appeal* (pp. 197-212). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Groos, K. (1898). *The Play of Animals*. New York: Appleton.
- Gurian, E.H. (2006). *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian*. London and New York: Routledge
- Hall, G. S. (1906). *Youth: Its Education, Regimen and Hygiene*. New York: Appleton.

- Hall, I., and Hall, D. (2004). *Evolution and Social Research: Introducing Small-Scale Practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hand, M., & Moore K. (2006). Community, Identity and Digital Games. In J. Rutter and J. Bryce (Eds.), *Understanding Digital Games* (pp. 166-182). London: Sage Publications.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson P. (1995). *What's Wrong With Ethnography: Methodological Explorations*. London: Routledge.
- Hardyment, C. (1995). *Slice of Life: The British Way of Eating Since 1945*. London: BBC.
- Harris, C. (1998). Introduction Theorising Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity. In C. Harris, & A. Alexander (Eds.), *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (pp. 3-8), New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- Harris, K. (2000). *Roots?: The Relationship Between the Global and the Local Within the Extreme Metal Scene*. *Popular Music*, 19(1), 13-30. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://research.gold.ac.uk/2195/7/Harris_2000.pdf
- Hart, R. (1979). *Children's Experience of Place*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Hass, P. (2012). *SOE Fan Faire is no More, Long Live SOE LIVE*. Cinemablend. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.cinemablend.com/games/SOE-Fan-Faire-More-Long-Live-SOE-LIVE-40841.html>
- Hass, P. (2014). *How Many Hearthstone Players Reach Legend?* Cinemablend. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.cinemablend.com/games/How-Many-Hearthstone-Players-Reach-Legend-67398.html>
- Hauck-Lawson, A. (2004). Introduction. *Food Culture & Society*, 7(1), 24-25.
- Haywood, L., Kew, F., Bramham, P in collaboration with Sprink, J., Capenerhurst, J., and Henry, I. (1989). *Understanding Leisure*. London: Hutchinson.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.
- Hein, G.E. (1998). *Learning in the Museum*. London and New York: Routledge
- Herron, R., & Sutton-Smith, B. (1971). *Child's Play*. New York: John Wiley.
- Hey, V. (1984). *Pubs and Patriarchy*. London: Travistock.
- Hills, M. (2002). *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Hills, M. (2006). Not Just Another Powerless Elite?: When Media Fans Become Subcultural Celebrities. In S. Holmes and S. Redmond (Eds.), *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture* (pp. 101-118). London: Routledge.

- Hillery, G. A. (1955). Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement. *Rural Sociology*, 20(2), 111-123.
- Hindman, B. (2011). *Free For All: Smedley Helps us Understand Free to Play*. Engadget UK. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.engadget.com/2011/09/28/free-for-all-smedley-helps-us-understand-free-to-play/>
- Hindman, H. (2015, September). *Tokyo Game Show 2015 2nd Highest Attended Ever; TGS 2016 Dates Announced*. PSLS. Retrieved from <http://www.playstationlifestyle.net/2015/09/20/tokyo-game-show-2016-dates-tgs-2015-attendance/#/slide/1>
- Hockett, J. T. (2004). *Reckoning Ritual and Counterculture in the Burning Man community: Communication, Ethnography, and the Self in Reflective Modernism*. Department of Philosophy: University of New Mexico.
- Hodkinson, P. (2002). *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture*. Oxford: Berg.
- Homan, R. (1991). *The Ethics of Social Research*. New York: Longman.
- Hughes, F. (2003). Spontaneous Play in the 21st Century. In O. Saracho & B. Spodek (Eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives on Play in Early Childhood Education* (pp.21-40). Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.
- Huizinga, J. (1949) [1938]. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture*. London: Routledge.
- International Olympic Committee. (2006). *Marketing Report: Torino 2006*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/FR/fr_report_1142.pdf
- Ito, M., Baumer, S., Bittanti, M., boyd, d., Cody, R., Herr-Stephenson, B., Horst, H. A., Lange, P.G., Mahendran, D., Martinez, K. Z., Pascoe, C. J., Perkel, D., Robinson, L., Sims, C., & Tripp, L. (2010). *Hanging Out, Messing Around, And Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Jackson, P. (2004). *Inside Clubbing: Sensual Experiments in the Art of Being Human*. Oxford: Berg.
- Jansz, J., & Martens, L. (2005). Gaming at a LAN Event: The Social Context of Playing Videogames. *New Media & Society*, 7(3), 333-355.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (1998). 'Complete Freedom of Movement': Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces'. In J. Cassell & H. Jenkins (Eds.), *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer* (pp.262-297). Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press.

- Jenkins, H. (2004). Game Design as Narrative Architecture. In N. Wardrip-Fruin & P. Harrigan (Eds.), *First Person: New Media as Story Performance and Game* (pp.118-130). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jensen, J. (1992). Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization. In L. Lewis (Eds.), *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (pp.9-29). London: Routledge.
- Johnson, S. (2006). *Everything bad is good for you: How today's popular culture is actually making us smarter*. London: Riverhead Books.
- Jones, S. G. (1995). *Cybersociety: Computer-mediated Communication and Community*. London: Sage Publications.
- Jonsson, F., & Verhagen, H. (2011). *Sensing Game Play: Exploring Computer Game Play in a Game Café and a Mass LAN Party*. In Computer Games (CGAMES), 2011 16th International Conference on 27-30 July 2011, 134-141. IEEE.
- Jörissen, B. (2004). Virtual Reality on The Stage: Performing Community at a LAN Party. In P. Hernwall, (Ed.), *Envision: The New Media Age And Everyday Life* (pp. 23-40). Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Juul, J. (2005). *Half-Life: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Juul, J. (2010). *Casual Revolution*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Kahner, J., Middaugh, E., & Evans, C. (2009). The Civic Potential of Video Games. London: The MIT Press. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://dmlcentral.net/wp-content/uploads/files/Civic_Potential_of_Games.pdf
- Kalekin-Fisherman, D., & Low, K. E. Y. (Eds.). (2010). *Everyday Life in Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Kaminer, W., Izquierdo, C., & Bradbury, T. (2013). *The Difference Between a Happy Marriage and Miserable One: Chores*. The Atlantic. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/03/the-difference-between-a-happy-marriage-and-miserable-one-chores/273615/>
- Kane, M. (2008). *Game Boys: Professional Videogaming's Rise From The Basement to The Big Time*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- Kerner, S., Chou, C., & Warmind, M. (2015). *Commensality: From Everyday Food to Feast*. London: Bloomsbury.

- Kinder, M. (1991). Contextualizing Video Game Violence: From Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 1 to Mortal Kombat 2. In P.M. Greenfield & R.C. Cocking (Eds.), *Interacting with Video* (pp.25-38). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Kirkpatrick, G. (2011). *Aesthetic Theory of the Video Game*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Klastrup, L., & Tosca, S. (2011). When Fans Become Players: LOTRO in a Transmedical World Perspective. In T. Krzywinska, E. MacCallum-Stewart & J. Parsler (Eds.), *Ring Bearers: The Lord of the Rings Online as Intertextual Narrative* (pp.46-69). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Klepek, P. (2015). *Smash Community in Shock Over Sudden End to Popular Mod, Project M*. Kotaku. Retrieved 1 May 2016, from <http://kotaku.com/smash-community-in-shock-over-sudden-end-to-popular-mod-1745742674>
- Kolo, C & Baur, T. (2004). 'Living a Virtual Life: Social Dynamics of Online Gaming', *Game Studies*, 4(1). Retrieved 1 May 2016, from <http://www.gamestudies.org/0401/kolo/>
- Kozinets, R. (2010). *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. London: Sage Publications.
- Krotoshi, A. (2004). *Chicks and Joysticks: an Exploration of Women and Gaming*. ELSPA White Paper. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://www.elspa.com/assets/files/c/chicksandjoysticksanexplorationofwomenandgaming_176.pdf
- Kücklich, J. (2005). *Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry*. *The Fibreculture Journal*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precariou-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/>
- Lamerichs, N. (2010). *All Dressed Up: Conceptualizing 'Cosplaying' as a Fan Practice*. Paper Presented to the Under the Mask 3 Conference. University of Bedfordshire, UK, 2 June.
- Largey, G. P., & Watson, D. R. (2006 [1972]). The Sociology of Odours. *American Journal of Sociology*, 77(6), 1021-1034.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1984). Thoughts on the Relations Between Emotion and Cognition. In P. Ekman & K.R. Scherer (Eds.), *Approaches to Emotion* (pp. 247–258). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Le Bon, G. (1985). *The Crowd: A study of the Popular Mind*. Dunwoody, GA: Norman S. Berg.

- Lentz, K. (1982). 'Mastery Through Play', *Dimensions*, April, pp. 68-71.
- Lévy, P. (1997). *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*. Cambridge: Perseus.
- Lieberman, D. A. (2006). What Can We Learn From Playing Interactive Games? In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Playing Video Games: Motives, Responses and Consequences* (pp. 379-397). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Lin, H. (2005). *Gendered Gaming Experience in Social Space: From Home to Internet Café*. Proceedings of the DiGRA 2005 Conference on Changing Views: Worlds in Play. Retrieved from <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/06278.26054.pdf>
- Low, K. (2005). Ruminations on Smell as a Socio-Cultural Phenomenon. *Current Sociology*, 53(3), 397-417.
- Lupton, D. (1996). *Food, the Body and the Self*. London: Sage Publications.
- Maffesoli, M. (1996). *The Time of the Tribes: The decline of Individualism in Mass society*. London: Sage Publications.
- Malpas, S. (2005). *The Postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- Márquez, I. (2014). Playing New Music with Old Games: The Chiptune Subculture. *Game*, 3(2014), 67-79.
- Marsh, D. & Furlong, P. (2002) A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science. In D. Marsh & G. Stoker (Eds.), *Theory and methods in political science* (pp.17-41). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Martin, L. (2013). 'The Last of Us' Grosses More Than 'Man of Steel' in Opening Weekend. Digital Spy. Retrieved 1 May 2016, from <http://www.digitalspy.com/gaming/weekly-charts/news/a490590/the-last-of-us-grosses-more-than-man-of-steel-in-opening-weekend/>
- Martins, N., Williams, D., Ratan, R., & Harrison, K. (2009). A Content Analysis of Female Body Imagery in Video Games. *Sex Roles*, 61(11-12), 824-836.
- Mason, J. (2002). Qualitative Interviewing: Asking, Listening, Interpreting. In T. May (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in Action* (pp.225-241). London: Sage Publications.
- May, C. (2002). *The Information Society: A Sceptical View*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Mäyrä, F. (2008). *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*. London: Sage Publications.
- McCaffrey, J. (2012). *Burning Man: Transforming Community Through Countercultural Ritual Process*. Centre for Sensory Studies. Retrieved 1 May 2016,

from <http://centreforsensorystudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/OP-McCaffrey-Burning-Man-10-12-12-FINAL.pdf>

MacCallum-Stewart, E. (2011). The Place of Role-Playing in Massively Multi-player Online Role-Playing Games. In T. Krzywinska, E. MacCallum-Stewart & J. Parsler (Eds.), *Ring Bearers: The Lord of the Rings Online as Intertextual Narrative* (pp.70-92). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

MacCallum-Stewart, E. (2014). *Online Games, Social Narratives*. London: Routledge.

McCall, G. J., & Simmons, J. L. (Eds.). (1969). *Issues in Participant Observation*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

McGonagall, J. (2003). *A Real Little Game: The Performance of Belief in Pervasive Play*. Paper presented at the Level Up: Conference of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA). Utrecht, the Netherlands.

McMahon, L. (1992). *The Handbook of Play Therapy*. London: Routledge.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individuals Needs in Contemporary Society*. London: Hutchinson Radius.

Mintel Marketing Intelligence. (1999). *Eating Out Review*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://reports.mintel.com/display/79357/>

Molesworth, M. (2009). Adults' Consumption of Videogames as Imaginative Escape From Routine. In A. L. McGill & S. Shavitt (Eds.), *Advances in Consumer Research Volume 36* (pp.378-383). Duluth, MN: Association for Consumer Research.

Morgan, D. L. (1998). *Planning Focus Groups*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Morley, D. (1986). *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. London: Routledge.

Mou, Y., & Peng, W. (2009). *Gender and Racial Stereotypes in Popular Video Games*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <https://www.msu.edu/~pengwei/Mou%20Peng.pdf>

Murcott, A. (1995). "It's a Pleasure to Cook for Him": Food, Mealtimes and Gender in Some South Wales Households. In S. Jackson & S. Moores (Eds.), *The Politics of Domestic Consumption*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Murray, J. (1997). *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York: The Free Press.

- Myers, D. (2009). The Video Game Aesthetic: Play as Form. In B. Perron & M. J. P. Wolf (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader 2* (pp.45-64). London: Routledge.
- Nardi, B. A., Ly, S., & Harris, J. (2007). *Learning Conversations in World of Warcraft*, Proceedings of the 40th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 3-9 January 2007, Waikoloa, Big Island, HI, pp. 79-98.
- Neiburger, E. (2007). Gamers – In *The Library! The Why, What, and How of Videogame Tournaments for All Ages*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Newman, J. (2004). *Videogames*. London: Routledge.
- Newman, J. (2008). *Playing with Video Games*. London: Routledge.
- Newman, J., & Simon, I. (2004). *Difficult Questions about Video Games*. Nottingham: Suppose Partners.
- Nigel, G. (2001). *Researching Social Life* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Nunneley, S. (2016). *Hearthstone: Whispers of the Old Gods out today as registered players top 50M*. VG24/7. Retrieved 14th February, 2016, from <https://www.vg247.com/2016/04/26/hearthstone-50-million-players-whispers-of-the-old-gods/>
- Ok, H. (2011). New Media Practices in Korea. *International Journal of Communication* . 5(2011), 320-348.
- Okabe, D. (2012). Cosplay, Learning, and Cultural Practice. In M. Ito, D. Okabe, & I. Tsuji (Eds.), *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World* (pp. 225-248). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Oosting, W., Ijsselsteijn, W. A., & de Kort, Y. A. W. (2008). *Parental perceptions and mediation of children's digital game play at home: A qualitative study*. Eindhoven University of Technology. Retrieved from <http://carmster.com/families/workshop/uploads/Main/Oosting2.pdf>
- Oxford Dictionaries: Language Matters. (2016). *Video Game*. Retrieved 14th February, 2016, from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/video-game>
- Pargman, D., & Jakobsson, P. (2008). Do You Believe in Magic? Computer Games in Everyday Life. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* , 11(2), 225-243.
- Pearce, C. (2006). Productive Play: Games Culture from the Bottom Up. *Games & Culture*, 1(1), 17-24.
- Pearce, C. & Artemesia. (2009). *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds*. England: The MIT Press.
- Penley, C. (1997). *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*. London: Verso.

- Pentz, M. A., Spruijt-Metz, D., Chou, P. C., & Riggs, N. R. (2011). High Calorie, Low Nutrient Food/Beverage Intake and Video Gaming in Children as Potential Signals for Addictive Behaviour. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 8(1), 4406-4424.
- Phillips, C. A., Rolls, S., Rouse, A., & Griffiths, M. D. (1995). Home Video Game Playing in Schoolchildren: A Study of Incidence and Patterns of Play. *Journal of Adolescence*, 18(6), 687–691.
- Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Pink, S. (2001). *Visual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Poole, S. (2000). *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames*. London: Fourth Estate.
- Powdermaker, H. (1962). *Copper Town; Changing Africa: The Human Situation on the Rhodesian Copperbelt*. New York: Harper.
- Reddit. (2015). *Stop the Cancer!* Reddit: Hearthstone. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from https://www.reddit.com/r/hearthstone/comments/35oxin/stop_the_cancer/
- Rheingold, H. (1993). *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Richardson, D. & Robinson, V. (2008). *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies* (3rd ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Roberts, C. (2003). *Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines*. Social Research Association. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.thesra.org.uk/documents/pdfs/ethics03.pdf>>
- Rojek, C. (2000). *Leisure and Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Rojek, C. (2005). *Leisure Theory: Principles and Practices*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rosaldo, R. (1989). *Culture and truth: The remaking of social analysis*. Boston: Beacon.
- Rutter, J. & Bryce, J. (2006). *Understanding Digital Games*. London: Sage Publications.
- Salen, K., & Zimmerman, E. (2004). *Rules of Play – Game Design Fundamentals*. London: The MIT Press.
- Sandvoss, C. (2005). *Fans*. Cambridge: Polity.

Sardar, Z. (2000). Alt.civilizations.faq: Cyberspace as the Darker Side of the West. In D. Bell & B. Kennedy (Eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader* (pp.732-752). London: Routledge.

Sarkeesian, A. (2009). *Feminist Frequency: Conversations with Pop Culture*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.feministfrequency.com/>

Schott, G. R. & Horrel, K. R. (2000). Girl Gamers and their Relationship with the Gaming Culture. *Convergence*. 6(4), 36-53.

Schicke, R. (1986). *Intimate Strangers: The Cult of Celebrity*. New York: Fromm.

Schultz, J. (2014). *These Famous Athletes Rely on Sleep for Peak Performance*. Huffpost. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/13/these-famous-athletes-rely-on-sleep_n_5659345.html

Serematakis, C. N. (1994). *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Shaffir, W. B., & Stebbins, R. A. (Eds.). (1991). *Experiencing Fieldworld: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Sharpe, S. (1994). *Just Like a Girl: How Girls Learn to be Women*. London: Penguin.

Short, D. (2012). Teaching Scientific Concepts using a Virtual World - Minecraft. *Teaching Science*, 58(3), 55-58.

Siegel, S. (1956). *Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioural Sciences*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Sihvonen, T. (2011). *Players Unleashed! Modding The Sims and the Culture of Gaming*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Simmel, G. (1997 [1907]). Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings. In D. Frisby & M. Featherstone (Eds.), London: Sage.

Smashboards. (2016). Kandano's controller mods (consistent shielded drops, hybrid gate & more) (list with details and prices). Smashboards Forums. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://smashboards.com/threads/kadanos-controller-mods-consistent-shield-drops-hybrid-gate-more-list-with-details-and-prices.421137/>

Spencer, H. 1896 (1855). *Principles of Psychology*. New York: Appleton.

Stebbins, R. A. (1982). Serious leisure: A conceptual statement. *Pacific Sociological Review*, 25, 251-272.

Stebbins, R. A. (1997). Casual leisure: A conceptual statement. *Leisure Studies*, 16(1), 17-25.

Stenros, J. (2012). *In Defence of a Magic Circle: The Social and Mental boundaries of Play*. Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference on Local and Global – Games in Culture and Society. Retrieved from <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/in-defence-of-a-magic-circle-the-social-and-mental-boundaries-of-play/>

Stephenson, W. (1967). *The Play Theory of Mass Communication*. London: The University of Chicago Press.

Sternheimer, K. (2012). *Collective Memories*. Everyday Sociology Blog. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.everydaysociologyblog.com/2012/04/collective-memories.html>

Storage Hunters. (2011). *Storage Hunters: Volume 1*. USA: TruTV.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sudnow, D. (1983). *Pilgrim in the Microworld*. New York: Warner Books.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sutton-Smith, B. (2006). Play and Ambiguity. In K. Salen & E. Zimmerman (Eds.), *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology* (pp. 296-312). Cambridge: MIT Press.

Swalwell, M. (2003). Multi-player Computer Gaming: “Better than Playing (PC Games) With Yourself”. *An Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies Community*, 3(4). Retrieved from <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/034/swalwell.htm>

Synnott, A. (1993). *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society*. London: Routledge.

Taylor, T. L. (2003). Multiple Pleasures: Women and Online Gaming. *Convergence* 9(1), 21-46.

Taylor, T. L. (2006). *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Raising the Stakes*. England: The MIT Press.

Taylor, T. L. & Witkowski, E. (2010). *This Is How We Play It: What a Mega-LAN Can Teach Us About Games*. IT University of Copenhagen. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://tltaylor.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/TaylorWitkowski-ThisIsHowWePlayIt.pdf>

- Todd, D. (2012). You Are What You Buy: Postmodern Consumerism And The Construction of Self. *University of Hawai'i at Hilo · Hawai'i Community College HOHONU 2012*. 10, 48-50.
- Tomstad, R. (2010). 'The Productive Paradox of Critical Play'. *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 10(1). Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://gamestudies.org/1001/articles/tronstad>
- Turkle, S. (2005). *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit (20th Anniversary Edition)*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ukie. (2014). *The Games Industry in Numbers*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://www.ukie.org.uk/research#Who_plays/
- Urban Dictionary. (2016). *Lan Death*. Urban Dictionary. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Lan%20Death>
- Valentine, E. (2004). *Manhandling Joysticks & Pushing Buttons: Gender and Computer Games*. University of Kent. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from http://www.eda.kent.ac.uk/material/pdf_docs/Liz_Valentine%27s_thesis.pdf
- Vandewater, A., Shim, M., & Caplovitz, G. (2004). *Linking Obesity and Activity Level with Children's Television and Video Game Use*. *Journal of Adolescence*, 27(2004), 71-85.
- Vannini, D., Waskul, D., & Gottschalk, S. (2012). *The Senses in Self, Society and Culture: A Sociology of the Senses*. London: Routledge.
- Van Gennep, A. (1908). *Les Rites de passage*, Paris, trans. M. Vizedom & G. Caffee as *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Video Game Addiction. (2016). *Video Game Addiction*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.video-game-addiction.org/>
- Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Basil Oxford: Blackwell.
- Walcott, H. (1995). *The Art of Fieldwork*. London: Sage Publications.
- Walkerdine, V. (2007). *Children, Gender, Video Games: Towards a Relational Approach to Multimedia*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wann, d. L., Melnick, M. J., Russell, G. W., & Pease, D. G. (2001). *Sport Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators*. New York: Routledge.
- Webb, E. J., Campbell, D. T., Schwartz, R. D., & Sechrest, L. (1966). *Unobtrusive Measures: Non-Reactive Research in the Social Sciences*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Weber, M. (1947). *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, Edited with an Introduction by Talcott Parsons. New York: Collier-Macmillan Limited.

- Werner, O., Schoepfle, G. & Mark, G. (1987). *Systematic Fieldwork, Vol. 1*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Whitehead, T. (2002). *What is Ethnography?: Methodological, Ontological, and Epistemological Attributes*. Cultural Ecology of Health and Change. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.cusag.umd.edu/documents/WorkingPapers/EpiOntAttrib.pdf>
- Whitehead, T. (2005). Basic classical ethnographic research methods: Secondary data analysis, fieldwork, observation/participant observation, and informal and semi-structured interviewing. *Ethnographically Informed Community and Cultural Assessment Research Systems (EICCARS) Working Paper Series*. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://www.cusag.umd.edu/documents/WorkingPapers/ClassicalEthnoMethods.pdf>
- Whyte, W. F. (1981) *Street Corner Society, Third edition*. Chicago ILL: University of Chicago Press .
- ‘Will Gets a Girlfriend’ (2008). The Inbetweeners. In *The Inbetweeners: Series 1* [DVD]. London: Channel 4.
- Wilson, J. (2000). Volunteering. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 26: 215-240. Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from <http://geser.net/gesleh/wilson.pdf>
- Wolcott, H. F. (1995). *The art of fieldwork*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Woodward, K. (2000). Questions of Identity (2nd ed.). In K. Woodward (Eds.), *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation* (pp. 5-42). London: Routledge.
- Wright, T., Boria, E. & Bridenbach, P. (2002) ‘Creative Player Actions in FPS Online Video Games’. *Game Studies*, 2(2), Retrieved 1 May, 2016, from www.gamestudies.org/0202/wright
- Wrigley, N., & Lowe, M. S. (Eds). (1996). *Retailing, Consumption and Capital: Towards a New Retail Geography*. Essex: Longman.
- Yee, N. (2006). The Demographics, Motivations, and Derived Experiences of Users of Massively Multi-User Graphical Environments. *Presence*, 15(3), 309 – 329.

Ludography

Animal Crossing: New Leaf (Nintendo, 2013).

Atari 2600 (Atari, 1978).

Call of Duty (Activision, 2003).

Call of Duty: Ghosts (Activision, 2013).

Championship Manager (Domark, 1992).

Cooking Mama 3: Shop and Chop (505 Games, 2009).

Counter-Strike (Sierra Studios, 2000).

DC Universe Online (Daybreak Game Company, 2011)

Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball (Tecmo, 2003).

Donkey Kong (Nintendo, 1981).

DotA 2 (Valve Corporation, 2013).

Dragon Ball Z: Battle of Z (Namco Bandai Games, 2014).

Dragon's Crown (Atlus, 2013).

EverQuest (Sony Online Entertainment, 1999).

Free Realms (Sony Online Entertainment, 2009).

Fez (Trapdoor, 2012).

Final Fantasy X (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2002).

Football Manager 2016 (Sega, 2015).

Grand Theft Auto V (Rockstar Games, 2013).

Jojo's Bizarre Adventure: All Star Battle (Namco Bandai Games, 2014).

Metroid (Nintendo, 1986).

Minecraft (Mojang, 2011).

My Pet Dolphin (505 Games, 2007).

Nintendogs (Nintendo, 2005).

Nintendo DS (Nintendo, 2004).

Nintendo Wii (Nintendo, 2006).

PlanetSide (Sony Online Entertainment, 2003).

Playboy: The Mansion (ARUSH Entertainment, 2005).

Play Station 3 (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2007).

Pokémon X and Pokémon Y (The Pokémon Company, 2013).

Pong (Atari, 1975).

Project M (Project M Development Team, 2011).

Quake (GT Interactive, 1996).

Remember Me (Capcom, 2013).

Saint Seiya: Brave Soldiers (Namco Bandai Games, 2013).

Saturn Bomberman (Hudson Soft, 1997).

Sega Genesis/Mega Drive (Sega, 1990).

Star Wars Galaxies (LucasArts, 2003).

Super Mario Land (Nintendo, 1989).

Super Smash Bros [Smash 64]. (Nintendo, 1999).

Super Smash Bros. Melee. (Nintendo, 2001).

Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Nintendo, 2008).

Super Smash Bros. for Nintendo 3DS and Wii U [Smash 4]. (Nintendo, 2014).

Tales/Tales of Series (Bandai Namco Entertainment, 1995)

There (Makena Technologies, 2003).

The Sims (Electronic Arts, 2000).

Uru: Ages Beyond Mist (Ubisoft, 2003).

Ultima Online (Electronic Arts, 1997).

World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2005).

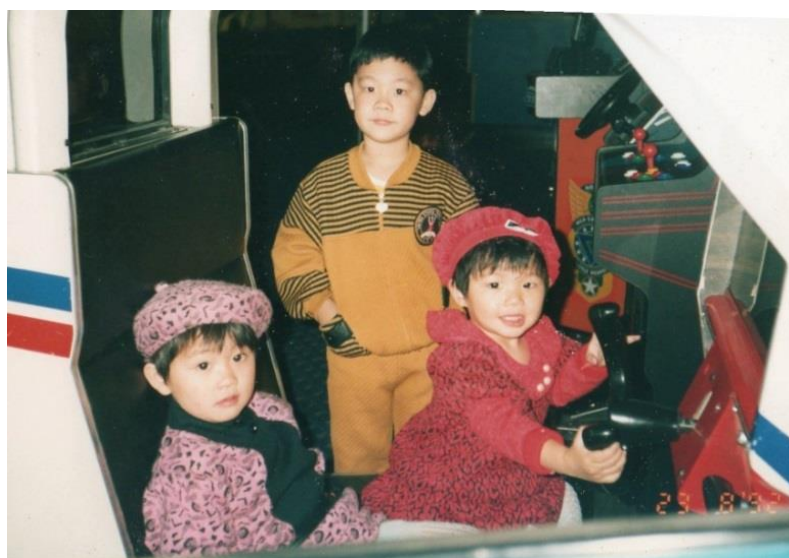
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011 (THQ, 2010).

Epilogue

My Experience with Video Games: Gaining ‘EXP’

When I was little, I lived in a one-bedroom flat above a Chinese Takeaway, where the living room was converted into a bedroom for my sisters and me – I have two younger sisters: Yuen-Man (born in 1990) and Po-Yee (born in 1994). Back then, my parents worked long shifts consisting of lunch (11am-2pm) and dinner (4pm-12pm). During working hours, my parents would take turns to check on us and keep us entertained with cartoons, films, and mostly video games. Even though we had the biggest bedroom, the game consoles that my Dad bought were set-up in my parent’s bedroom – so we spent a lot of time playing video games there.

My love for video games definitely grew from the influence of my Dad. My Dad has always loved playing video games. Besides playing video games at home, when I was little, my Dad would often take me to video game arcades, so he could play Street Fighter, while I ran around the store. Nowadays my Dad often tells me that he is too old to play video games that require high levels of dexterity, time-precision, or large amounts of English text. Nevertheless, my Dad’s interest in video games has still continued in other spaces; from sharing his knowledge on the latest video game consoles and playing free-to-play computer games; such as Candy Crush with the occasional ‘help’ messages – I still remember panicky ringing home when I only received the word ‘help’ from my Dad on my Facebook messenger.



Photograph 1: A photograph of the researcher in an arcade [23/08/92]

Besides my influence of video games from my Dad, I spent many hours playing on the Play Station 1 with my sister Yuen-Man (in red) and my cousin Daniel (in orange) – I am the one in pink (see Photograph 1). I have always loved playing video games, but I mainly played video games at home, rather than in up public spaces (such as arcades); at most I ran around the arcade ‘pretending to play’ on the arcade machines – similar to what my sister Yuen-Man is doing in the photograph.

When I got older (around 12 years old), my cousin Daniel became very interested in playing Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) and I would often go to arcades with him to ‘shadow’ the ‘player 2’ dance pad - where one credit is inserted for ‘player 1’ to play, while ‘player 2’ mimics the dance steps from player 1’s screen. I would sometimes practice playing DDR at home with a plastic dance mat my Dad bought me - however, it had the tendency to slide across the carpet and when I jumped I would shake the whole room – I often got told off for playing DDR upstairs, because my parents would hear banging noises from downstairs in the Chinese Takeaway – so I switched to playing with a controller instead (Play Station 1 and Play Station 2 – for the later DDR game releases). My cousin Daniel gradually got better from practicing on his metal dance mat his Dad bought him, and regularly going to arcades with his friends. Meanwhile, I was discouraged to go to arcades, because of my age (I was between 12 years old) and my cousin Daniel’s friends were ‘mostly guys’ – so I stuck to playing DDR within the private domains in my parents’ bedroom with a controller. I eventually became discouraged to play DDR in arcades, because my ‘performance’ appeared to be an ‘embarrassment’ among the crowds when I played next to my cousin Daniel and it also stopped ‘better’ players challenging him in ‘vs. mode’ – so I mainly watched. At this point, as a young girl gamer, it became to appear that playing video games in public spaces was ‘restricted’ and my role within these spaces was to observe or provide support – in my case, carry my cousin Daniel’s belongings and wait for an opportunity to play when the crowd dispersed. My role as a spectator within public gaming spaces continued when I met my partner Anthony (I was around 15 years old); he also enjoyed playing Dance Dance Revolution and I would often observe him play while carrying his belongings, rather than vice-versa.

However, my passion for Dance Dance Revolution never faded, and as of April 2015, I purchased a Dancing Stage Euromix arcade machine, where I can play and maintain my own machine in my cousin Daniel’s garage, and next to his Pump it Up arcade machine – until I purchase my own house with a garage (see Photograph 2).



Photograph 2: A photograph of the researchers DDR machine

With my video game experience, I have played a lot of hand-held games; from my Gameboy Light (which my Dad bought me), Nintendo DS Lite (which my Dad also bought me) and my Nintendo 3DS (which my partner Anthony bought me); I found these gaming devices easier to access and literally ‘pick up and play’. I have only played a handful of console games and PC games. I rarely played online, because I’ve received sexist remarks from other gamers such as ‘go back into the kitchen’ or ‘make me a sandwich’ or harassment to obtain information on my physical feature, especially when I played Diablo II. Therefore, I’d often play Diablo II in ‘single player’ and occasionally watched my Dad play Emperor Battle for Dune. In 2008, I started playing Final Fantasy XI (FFXI) for a few years with my partner Anthony and a few friends to form a ‘linkshell’ (guild), which required an eight-pound monthly subscription fee – I stopped playing FFXI when exams were coming up, but we all agreed to revisit the game during summer holidays – however, I never went back when I started my Master’s degree. In 2012, Diablo III came out, so I attempted to play with a group of friends. However, after a week from release when I logged back on, the rest of my friends had already reached max level (level 60), while I was still on level 12 – they apparently played every evening after work till 4am. Nowadays, I often do not find the time to play video games. Despite playing various games, my gameplay experience is often referred to be ‘inconsistent’ or ‘undedicated’ – I often pick up a game and drop them very quickly without completing them, then move onto the next.

In relation to my research interest in video games, during my undergraduate course at the University of Salford, I attended a lecture on the study of video games by Prof. Garry Crawford (one of my current supervisors); I was fascinated how you could apply sociology with video games and the amount of research out there; so I became interested in studying video games – I could not play video games as much, but at least I could read about them and work on something I am interested in! I continued my interest to study video games with Dr Victoria Gosling (one of my current supervisors) for my extended essay in my third year undergraduate course. This assessment explored the extent to which video games represented patriarchal stereotypes; where I considered the representation of video games among male and female gamers through the literature on video games. For my Masters dissertation, I explored video games in public gaming spaces in relation to gender with Dr Graeme Kirkpatrick. I studied video gamers who attended Gamerbase Manchester, a local gaming centre located downstairs of HMV in Manchester City Centre. My research interest in video games derives from my previous work with video game studies and my own video game experiences. Rather than playing the game itself, I prefer the social-aspect of video games; such as meeting face-to-face with other gamers at various locations to pursue an interest in video games through various activities – it is the social-aspect of video games that drives the focus of my research.

However, upon a conversation about my PhD research with my partner Anthony, these words were said to be three years ago:

You know nothing about video games or video gamers, you can't just read about them... you have to immerse yourself, and be part of their culture... the books you read may make valid points, but have they actually experienced being part of that video game community themselves?

These words inspired me to reconsider my position as a researcher and as a gamer. Anthony has always told me that I lacked dedication, ambition and the attitude to improve in any video game – he did not consider me as a gamer who had been through the same hardship as others. For that reason, I began to query, ‘how can I research something that I am not part of?’ Therefore, throughout my research, I worked hard to immerse myself in various video game-related practices, from various forms of participation (community-involvement), conversations (game-language), and information (game-knowledge) to gain an insight of video gamers within video game communities. For instance, from February 2014, I started playing Hearthstone, and continued to play and take part in numerous tournaments, both

online and offline. I attended Insomnia Gaming Festivals and came Top 8 at i53 and i55 – in 2015, I was considered one of the top female Hearthstone players in the UK. Hopefully, my efforts in immersing myself into the culture of video gamers, dedication through attending over thirty events for this research, participating in various activities from cosplay, volunteering, getting certain items signed, building a video game collection, competing in tournaments, and attempting to understand LAN culture through ‘roughing it’ by purposely sleeping at my desk says otherwise.