THE CASE OF COMPETITIVE VIDEO GAMING AND ITS FANDOM: MEDIA OBJECTS, FAN PRACTICES, AND FAN IDENTITIES

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

Of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Elizabeth Marie Howell Newbury

December 2017

THE CASE OF COMPETITIVE VIDEO GAMING AND ITS FANDOM: MEDIA OBJECTS, FAN PRACTICES, AND FAN IDENTITIES

MEDIA OBJECTS, FAN PRACTICES, AND FAN IDENTITIES: THE CASE OF COMPETITIVE VIDEO GAMING AND ITS FANDOM

Elizabeth Marie Howell Newbury

Cornell University 2017

This project focuses on exploring the growing spectacle of esports fandom: those who are followers of competitive video gaming. As esports bridges across fan practices exhibited in popular communication, sociology of sports, leisure studies and video game studies, so too does this research project. Going from the media object, to fan communal practices, to individual fan practices, this research draws on a range of theories from framing, sports geography, and fan identity to better understand this emerging media form. The nexus of all of these theories is to combine understanding fan practices with a grounded theory approach.

The central argument of this research is that, by elucidating these practices, scholars can better understand not only the emerging practices of fans but how they reflect core identities of the fans. Fans shape not only through our practices of fandom what it means as a communal activity, but how central the identity is to their own everyday lives. A backbone of fan identity is how gender is reflected back through the practice of being a fan. No matter the medium of the fan object itself, video games or other, a central component to our understanding of being a fan is how fan practices reflect gender stereotypes – and esports is no exception.

To examine these arguments, I executed three studies using multiple methods. I used textual analysis, field observation, and personal interviews to analyze fans from a multitude of perspectives. Bringing these different methods together in the end, I reflect on our understanding of what it means to be a fan of not just esports but more broadly of entertainment mediums like sports. The theoretical implications suggest a need to update the scholarship's understanding of

sport and fandom. The practical applications are that, in this media rich world, we must better understand what fans do in everyday life.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 8

Background 10

Spectating Through Livestreams 12

Sport and Geek Cultures, Masculinities 15

Conceptual Framework 17

Pop Culture Framework 18

Sports Culture Framework 21

Game Studies 24

Gender Studies 25

Significance of the Study 27

Games Studies 27

Audience Studies 29

Organization for the Dissertation 30

Introduction 37

Literature Review 40

Media, Sport, and Perceived Norms 41

Esports Broadcasts and Their Reflection of Fandom 43

Framing in Sports. 44

Framing Representations: Gender 47

Method 51

Sample 51

Analysis Procedure 53

Findings 54

Livestreaming Technology: Interaction through Chat 55

All the Trappings of Sport. 57

Framing Analysis 60

Framing masculinity: Emotional displays. 64

Framing Beyond the Player: Interrogating esports Fans as Players, Spectators 67

Selling esports: Esports Audiences as Fans, Consumers, Players 69

Conclusion 73

Chapter 3: Not Just a Good Seat at the Bar: Esports Gatherings Beyond the LAN 77

Abstract 77

Introduction 78

Literature Review 80

esports at LANs and Beyond 80

Sports Bars: Social Context for Sport 82

Method 86

Findings 87

Choice of Space 88

Key Practices: Room to Play, Watch, Socialize and Learn 96

Performing Sport? 100

Conclusion 100

Chapter 4: Modelling Fandom: Esports Fans by Involvement and Investment 104

Abstract 104

Introduction 105

A Model for Fan Practice: Investment and Involvement 107

Bridging to Sport Fans Studies 110

The Case of Esports 112

Method 115

Esports Fans: Emerging from Gamers, Layered with Sport 116

Fan Practice: Playing, Watching and Beyond 120

Playing 120

Investment in Domestic Spaces 126

Influence of the Social on Fan Practice 132

Conclusion 137

Chapter 5: Conclusion 141

The Media Object: Framing Esports Fans, Framing Masculinities 141

A Hybrid of Cultures. 142

Merging Masculinities. 143

Perceiving the Audience: Players, Spectators and Consumers. 143

Suggestions for Further Study 145

Negotiating Multiple Space Usages. 147

Suggestions for Further Study 150

Involvement and Investment as a Model for Esports Fandom 152

Bridging Between Pop Culture Studies and Sports Fan Studies. 152

Examining the Everyday Practices of Fans 155

Directions for Future Research 157

Final Thoughts 162

The Negotiation of Consumer Agency 164

Role of Gender for Esports Fandom 166

In Sum. 167

References 169

Acknowledgements

A dissertation may be credit to one individual, but it takes a community to create. This dissertation would not have been possible, first, without the continual support and guidance of my committee: Lee Humphreys, Tarleton Gillespie, Poppy McLeod, and T. L. Taylor. Never failing in their faith in me, they guided me to be more precise and rigorous in my scholarship. I am constantly in awe at their insights and inspiration in my work, and as I grow in my own research, hope that one day I can return the favor to the next generation of scholars.

Every all-star team needs a dedicated coach, and Lee has definitely been that for me – always pushing me to be more while reinforcing my own ideas. I still remember when I came to Cornell as a visiting student and encountered her enthusiastic energy and quixotic passion in scholarship. She manages to be both humbling and inspiring all at the same time, and as a mentor, she has been the grounding rock that has never wavered in her support. I hope one day I can be a mentor to the next generation of scholars in the same way she has been to me.

This process has reinforced friendships outside of academia, too. To Leah, Shion, Jill, Carrie, Caitlin, Jen, Mike G., Jess, Katie, Liz A., David, and Carol: thank you for always being there. You are all such bright lights in a stormy sea. Special thanks to everyone who ever spent the time marking up my writing with red ink, helped with data collection, and kept me going. I owe you!

To my parents, Janice and George, for getting me down this road. Mom, thanks for buying Gameboys for everybody (not just my brothers). Thank you for never questioning my capability, but having utter faith that I can do whatever I put my mind to. Dad, thank you for

infusing me with a love of computer technologies. I am proud to be the first Newbury to get this level of degree.

To my three brothers, Thomas, George, and Daniel: I probably wouldn't be so committed to this topic if we weren't so competitive. So thanks for our LAN parties. (And thanks Dad for setting up those LAN parties before people on our block had Internet).

To my Granny: even when you did not entirely understand what I was doing, your support meant the world to me. Thank you for being so proud of me.

To my dear Bridget, this is what all those long winters were for.

Last, but never least, I want to thank my boys: Mike and Sidney. There is neither space nor time to fully account for all you have done for me. Mike, thanks for being my dedicated proof reader, my sounding board, and my cheerleader. I truly would not have gotten here without you, and I pinch myself every day that I got so lucky. Sidney, thanks for being my fuzzy sounding board. You're a great listener and sidekick.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The year is 2010, and I am over at a friend's house in Boston. From the ground floor, I can hear my friend, Chris, presumably playing *Starcraft II* (for the swarm!) upstairs. Under the sound of turrets and lasers, I also hear someone else's voice. I thought we were alone in the house?

I go to investigate, and from the moment I step into the room I know something is off. His hands aren't on the mouse or keyboard. Is he playing with his mind? The stranger's voice is more distinct, and in the corner of his monitor I see a little screen with someone's face.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

"Watching Evil Genius' practice stream."

"Who?"

"The team, EG. Esports."

"What is 'esports'?"

He draws his attention away from the screen, and puzzles over me for a moment before giving a quick explanation: people playing video games competitively, for money, in big tournaments around the world. “You haven’t heard of it? It’s the national sport of South Korea,” He says, pulling up a news article with that headline.

"Okay, so let me ask this a different way," I say, acting like someone had just told me the moon was made of cheese, "Why are you watching someone else play when *you* could be playing?"

Fast forward to today, and those are some of the questions this research begins to tackle. Why would someone be a fan of esports? What draws fans of esports, which research suggests are already active players of the game, to watch someone else play? Perhaps even more critically, what is it that is unique about esports fans?

As the name suggests, esports, or electronic sports, is an activity where video games and sports come together in a form of professionalized competitive video game play (Jenny, Manning, Keiper & Olrich, 2016; Jin, 2010; N. Taylor, Jensen & de Castell, 2009; Taylor, 2012). Although the extent to which esports may be analogous to our traditional conceptions of *sport* is still being debated (Jenny et al., 2016; Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010; Wagner, 2006), the industry of esports is taking cues from sports in how to organize competitive play. Professional video game

players are drafted onto sponsored teams; coaches are paid to train the players; staff orchestrates marketing the team; leagues have formed around organized competitions with prize pools in the 1s (or tens of millions, see Stubbs, 2017). It is a burgeoning industry, one that has exploded in the last few years (Casselman, 2015).

While several key social actors in esports are vital to its growth, for the most part, research has focused on professional players (or professional gamers, pro-gamers). These are the players who compete at the highest level of play, and are separated from "other" gamers through skill of play and dedication to preparing for competition (Borowy & Jin, 2013; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2012, 2013). In places like South Korea, pro-gamers are treated for all intents and purposes like professional athletes, with a pro-gamer's day regimented by a strict, rigorous training schedule. For some pro-gamers, gaming has transcended from a leisure activity to an occupation (Taylor, 2012), where gaming has become a job where they must showcase extreme dedication to a game to set them apart from the ranks at competitions and become stars of the esports community (Witkowski, 2012, 2013). Dedication separates the wheat from the chaff: being a 'hard-core' (extremely dedicated) player is central to esports, reflected in the narratives of players and the media surrounding esports (Elmezeny & Wimmer, 2015). The distinction between pro-gamers and amateurs is also a key element of how esports is positioning itself as a legitimate sport. In sociological definitions of sport, differing levels of skill are vital to those definitions in separating what is merely a leisure activity from what is sport (Jenny et al., 2016).

Focusing on the pro-gamer ignores another vital component to what may legitimize esports as a sport, and that is what sports scholarship might call a 'broad following' (Jenny et al., 2016; Suits, 2007). In terms of understanding key social roles in sports, sports consist of professional athletes performing for an audience of spectators; without an audience to perform

to, an activity cannot be considered a true sport (Guttmann, 1986, 2004). Esports *spectators* are not directly playing the game at that moment, but are instead following the game as it is being played (Cheung & Huang, 2011, p. 764). esports would not be comparable to a sport without a growing number of people (like my friend Chris) dedicating time out of their day to watch other people playing video games – when they could be playing the game themselves. By focusing on those who are in front of the screen, we miss the social actors who are essential to the development of esports as an industry. The importance of the shifting the focus to the esports audience can be seen in existing examinations of the surrounding practices in esports: namely, the broadcasting culture and the gender norms surrounding esports competitions.

Spectating Through Livestreams

In esports, people will come to spectate either in-person at competitions and tournaments (c.f. N. Taylor, 2011; N. Taylor et al., 2009; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010; Witkowski, 2013) or online through livestreaming (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne, 2014; Kaytoue, Silva, Cerf, Meira Jr, & Raïssi, 2012; Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011; Pellicone, 2016**;** Postigo, 2016; Sell, 2015; Zolides, 2015). Arguably, the expansion of broadband and online streaming video, or livestreams, has been instrumental to the growth of esports spectatorship (Jin, 2010; Taylor, 2012), allowing easier access to esports competition broadcasts for a global audience.

Key to livestreaming are the technological features of the medium that encourage spectatorship, such as live video with a capacity to pause, a spectator perspective in the game itself (with most amateur streams also including video footage of the player alongside gameplay), a chat room to facilitate audience participation, and microfinancing of the streams

through subscriptions, commercials in the stream, and donation buttons. For example, initial examinations of the livestream producers has highlighted the value of the chat function in cultivating an audience – interacting with the audience is a key part of a livestream performance (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2014). Part of the incentive of watching streams, researchers have argued, is that livestreaming video games commodifies the players' play and experience for the benefit of viewers (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Hamilton et al., 2014; Pellicone, 2016; Postigo, 2016; Sell, 2015). Through reflecting on the production of livestreams, research highlights the ways livestreams are adapted from a playing experience to one that facilitates spectatorship. The rules of the competition might be adapted to be made more entertaining for spectators, as opposed to players (Carter & Gibbs, 2013), or those producing the stream may adapt a persona that resonates with their viewership (Kaytoue et al., 2012). Similarly, those who produce livestreams must make the medium accessible and entertaining for the online audience (Sell, 2015; Taylor, 2012), as success is measured in number of individual viewers.

One adaption esports has made to facilitate spectatorship is overlaying commentary on to broadcasts and competitions (Sell, 2015; Taylor, 2012). A competition might be narrated by select professional commentators called casters, and early studies have suggested that this commentary is following the path of professional sports commentary through the narrative style (Sell, 2015). Specific channels might be made to facilitate learning about the game or competition (Georgen, Duncan & Cook, 2015). Channels like this provide commentary to teach new players about the game, breaking down strategies to further their viewers' own learning about the game. Key here is to highlight that providing narration in this way facilitates both watching the game, as well as later playing the game. In this way, being a player to the game informs the spectatorship experience and vice versa.

Although some research has suggested spectating in esports is different than sports, as the audience are players of the game first, there is a disconnect in the research when it comes to understanding the motivations of *why* people watch esports (e.g. Georgen et al., 2015; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Hein & Engerman, 2016). This research, however, has frequently relied on surveying esports audiences using instruments developed for sports consumers, which do not account for the participatory relationship audiences may have with the broadcast. Within the parameters of sports consumer indexes, these surveys have shown that esports audiences are motivated to watch in order to learn about the game and to facilitate escapism. In sports, information gathering and learning tends to focus on developing a more holistic understanding of a history of the sport, for example, to learn statistics about the teams or history of players (Gantz, 1981).

There is nuance missing from these esports audience motivation surveys that fails to address a key identity of esports fans: they are gamers. Taylor (2012) highlights that esports fans are players first, that is to say, they come to esports as a result of playing the game, watching esports broadcasts not just for entertainment (although there is that, too) but also out of a desire to learn more about the game and take it back to their own play-practice. If esports fans are watching in part because they see themselves as *players* and not consumers, sports consumer indexes lose the unique element of play that seems to otherwise inform esports fans' viewing experience. The fact that fans are watching as a form of information gathering may be different than sports spectatorship. In Taylor's line of reasoning, my friend Chris may be a spectator in the one moment, but by spectating he is learning so that, the next time he plays, he knows more about the game to benefit his own play. If he is following more of a sports fan model, he may be

watching to learn about the players, teams and league in a way that is more disconnected from his own play experience.

This reflects a duality of roles for the esports fan, that of being both a player and a spectator, that has been separated in sports (Whannel, 2009; Vamplew, 1988). Traditional sports fans are increasingly understood as those who watch others play, not participants of the sport itself (Guttman, 1986; Whannel, 2009). This suggests that careful investigation is necessary to determine the extent to which esports fans are embodying sport or how much the industry is attempting to steer them towards a sport spectator role and less of a player participant role. If the esports industry is following in the trajectory of modern sports (e.g. Vamplew, 1988), esports fans may be pushed more into a sports fan role of spectatorship, prioritizing this role over that of an active player. On the other hand, fans may be navigating the boundary between two different entertainment cultures to construct a new form of audience identity.

Sport and Geek Cultures, Masculinities

A common thread in esports research is how esports rests at the intersection of two different entertainment cultures: video games and sports (N. Taylor et. al., 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2013). Esports is an activity that is based on playing video games, hence it extends from a long history of video game competitions (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Taylor, 2012). At the same time, esports is attempting to legitimize itself as a sport, meaning that it is overlaying video game competitions with sports infrastructure – the professional sports teams, managers, and even the visualizations associated with sports competitions (Taylor, 2012). These two cultures coming together generate tensions in what the norms of esports should be, as specific behavior may be culturally sanctioned in one context but not the other (e.g. aggression, see Witkowski, 2013).

These tensions between two cultures coming together in one space has been emphasized through conflicting gender norms in esports (N. Taylor et al., 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2013). One the one hand, pro-gamers are tied to geek masculinity (Kendall, 1999a, 1999b, 2011; Massanari, 2015; Salter & Blodgett, 2012), characterized in part by showing technical mastery over technology, as well a breadth of knowledge about the game itself. On the other hand, the professional scene is also rich with sports masculinity, characterized in part by physical power, a dedication to competition, and aggression (McKay, Messner & Sabo, 2000; Messner, 1992; Messner, Dunbar & Hunt, 2000; Whannel, 2005). These two types of masculinity have historically been at odds with one another (c.f. Kendall, 1999b; Taylor, 2012), in part because geek masculinity is likely a less dominant masculinity to sports masculinity: geeks are often considered frail, feminine and not physically adept (Kendall, 1999b). In esports, the tensions of these two cultures has led to professional players within the field struggle to negotiate between the demands of masculine norms (Witkowski, 2013), particularly around aspects of appropriate behavior during competition. Conflicting perceptions of language, aggression, and what competition should look like manifest in the performances of players. In many ways, professional players work to legitimize themselves beyond the gamer stereotype, attempting to distance themselves from the stereotype of being a 'basement dwelling nerd' (Elmezeny, & Wimmer, 2015) to one of a legitimate athlete. This research has illuminated that esports is embodying norms of both cultures when it comes to play and competition as it attempts to negotiate its own identity.

Yet there is also common footing between these two masculinities, primarily through the subjugation of female participation. Both sports and video game culture are male dominated spaces (N. Taylor et al., 2009; Taylor, 2012), with an extended history of gender stereotypes,

particularly regarding hegemonic masculinity (Witkowski, 2013) and the marginalization of women (N. Taylor et al., 2009; Zolides, 2015). Women in esports encounter barriers to participation revolving around stereotypes that lead to them primarily taking supporting roles, such as the sidelines cheerleader who does not play but supports those who do through, among other things, spectating (N. Taylor et. al., 2009), or branding themselves by their femininity in livestreams (Zolides, 2015). Connell (1995) suggests that one way to ensure masculine domination of a space is to create an "othering" of non-masculine gender expressions. This is particularly key when there is a struggle to define what dominate masculinity will look like in a space, such as when conflicting masculine norms may be present.

Esports fans may be negotiating the roles of being a player and spectator, geek gender identities or sport gender identities, as a result of the different yet cohabitating cultures: sports and geek. Layered with these roles are different lenses for gender norms, particularly around masculinity. Research into esports has reflected upon the extent to which these gender tensions are occurring in the practice of the competitive esports scene (e.g. N. Taylor et al, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2013), but how those gender norms are reflected in other elements of esports culture has yet to be examined and is critical to address. Sports research reveals the inequality of gender representations in media broadcasts (Billings & Eastman, 2002; Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2000, 2001) as well as the ways in which sports fans congregate at social gatherings (Eastman & Land, 1997). Therefore, more work needs to occur around understanding the ways in which differing forms of masculinity are being negotiated in esports, and how these norms are translated to the broader base of esports fandom.

Conceptual Framework

The primary problem to be interrogated in this dissertation is the relative role and means of participation that audiences take in esports. To do this, esports fans are the focus of this study. Fans emerge from a more generalized audience, often represent those with the strongest attachment to the object of fandom – whether that is a TV show, a game, or a sport (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Gray, 2003). Fans often can reflect norms both of the broader community of fans as well as the culture surrounding the object of fandom (Jenkins, 1992).

While fans are present across genres, research into fans has become sequestered into distinct bodies in academia depending on the media object, exemplified by popular culture fan studies and sports fan studies (Ford, 2014; Schimmel, Harrington, & Bielby, 2007). These two literatures are divided not just by academic fields, but by different fandom practices reflecting a siloing of fandom studies. As esports is derived from video game culture (a popular entertainment medium) and sports culture, this study utilizes a theoretical framework of fandom, which bridges these approaches developed in pop culture and sports fan studies.

Pop Culture Framework

Engagement with the media object reflects what it means to be a fan, and could be characterized broadly using three elements that have been emphasized in popular culture approaches to fandom: a strong attachment to the media text, participation in communities around the media text, and production and consumption around the text (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Busse & Gray, 2011; Coppa, 2006; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005). Fandom goes beyond mere consumption to having a strong, positive relationship with the object of fandom. Attachment to the media text is a key element of being a fan, as well as the type of attachment – fans are set apart from nonfans by having a strong, positive attachment to the media object (Gray, 2003).

Communal practices have been a nexus of query for scholarship into fandom, centered around shared activities such as coming together to produce fan videos (Coppa, 2006), going to conventions or creating fan fiction (Jenkins, 1992), or gathering at book stores for shared readings (Radway, 1984). In pop culture approaches, directly participating in communal activities is the foundation to understanding fandom, as ties to the broader fandom community are vital to an individual strengthening their own fan identity (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). Therefore, one element to understanding fandom is to understand the fan community and its practices.

At the same time, this research is informed by those who are cautious about the centrality of direct participation in a broader fan community to evolution of an individual fan's identity as a fan. Some scholarship has illustrated that fans can be individual practitioners (Ford, 2014), while others have underscored that the community can be imagined or not based on direct engagement with other fans but through the perception that a nebulous fan community exists (Busse & Gray, 2011). This is a key argument to bear in mind for esports, as many fans may conceive the community based on seeing – but not directly engaging with – other esports fans. Incorporating these arguments will not only build on pop culture fan studies research by exploring the centrality of direct participation, but also allow for this research to explore other ways of communal participation.

The final element of pop culture fan studies are the practices of production and consumption. In order to become a fan, one must consume the media object (Hills, 2002); an analysis of the media object is often incorporated into an understanding of the fandom (e.g. Ang, 1985; Jenkins, 1992; Radway, 1984) given that norms are embedded and reflected in fandom from the object being consumed. Whether this is reading a book, watching a movie or television

program, or, arguably, playing a video game, the fan must first engage with the object that their fandom will blossom from. In fact, fans are often marked as being dedicated consumers, re-reading the text for deeper meaning (Jenkins, 1992, 2006; Hills, 2002; Radway, 1984). Without this form of direct engagement with the media text, fans cannot be fans (Gray, 2003).

Historically, being labeled as a *consumer* has been problematized by fan studies research (e.g. Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). A consumer denotes a lack of agency and passivity that, scholars have argued, does not capture the whole of being a fan (Jenkins, 1992). Fans are active audiences (Jenkins, 1992), consuming the media object but also engaging with that media object in ways which impact their day-to-day lives (Ford, 2014). To demonstrate this agency, pop culture fan studies have fixated on the production of fan objects, such as fan fiction, fan videos, or other forms of tangible fan artifacts as central to participating in a fandom (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Coppa, 2006, 2014; Jenkins, 1992).

There are two key problems with this interpretation of fan studies: first, that fandom is built around the production of works; second, that consumption and being a consumer is problematic to fandom. Missing from this approach is a firm understanding of what it looks like for those who, although self-identifying fans, do not produce work (Busse & Gray, 2011; Ford, 2014). Fan production is not the be-all-and-end-all of fan practice, but may instead be marked by other forms of commitment to the fandom and reinterpretation of the object of fandom.

Methodologically, what is missing from many scholarly works investigating pop culture fans is an understanding of the diversity of ways fans and fandom can be represented. Ford (2014) for example demonstrates that a wrestling fan may be marked by a commitment to watching, even replicating, wrestling media. This lens affords us the opportunity to interrogate esports fans who – stemming from video game culture and sports culture – may not produce

works, but nonetheless identify as a fan. By expanding the concept of fan identity being built on a diversity of practices beyond production of fan texts, this framework calls into question what fan practices in esports might translate to instead.

Another fundamental issue that this paper will interrogate is the idea of consumption. Unlike many scholars in pop culture fan studies, Hills (2002)'s argues that fan culture is naturally part of consumer culture. Without consuming – watching, reading, rereading, listening to – the object of fandom, there cannot be a fandom. Consuming the media object is the first step in a fandom process (Sandvoss, 2005), which can lead to other forms of engagement that tie a fan to a broader community of fans and reinforce fan identity. Fans are set apart from the rest of the audience by being deep consumers of a media text. Taking this a step further, Fiske (1992) demonstrates that the strength of fan identity can be reflected through the acquisition of goods and consumer products from their fandom. It is through this consumption that fans, in part, go beyond audiences to instead demonstrate a deep investment in their fandom. In revisiting this role of consumption in fandom through the case of esports, one premise of this dissertation is treat consumption as a necessary part to understanding fan identity.

Sports Culture Framework

This study is informed significantly by sociology of sports approaches to fans, particularly scholarship that examines the mediated experience of sports spectatorship, fan practices, and the role of spectatorship in relation to consumptive practices. Drawing from sociology of sport literature, this research is centered in the analysis of mediasport (Wenner, 1989, 1998). Mediasport is a term that describes the contemporary sport phenomenon, where sport is broadcast to a globalized audience. This broadcasting changes the experience of sport, turning it into a mediated event that is dependent on the framing of media producers (Entman,

1993; Goffman, 1974). Existing research has focused on understanding what frames are employed when describing the actions of athletes in sports commentary (Billings & Eastman, 2002; Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2001), and indicated that specific characteristics are consistently used to explain athletic performance and the athletes themselves. These characteristics reflect what *is* sport and what *is not* part of sport, reflecting the dominance of particular traits over others particularly when it comes to gender performance (e.g. Messner, 1992). As sports audiences consume these broadcasts, they are learning what it means to be sport through these narratives.

In sociology of sports literature, one vital role fans take on is the role of the spectator. Spectating is a key component to the growth of sports, and a core practice of the way we understand sports fans (Giulianotti, 2002). The separation of spectating from an active participant of sports (player) is key to understanding modern sports, which has long separated the act of playing the game from those who are watching others play (Whannel, 2009; Vamplew, 1988) – in definitions of sports fans, being a player is not core to the means of exploration (e.g. Giulianotti, 2002). These fans are defined by the ways in which they support sports (Giulianotti, 2002).

Sports fans are not passive vehicles for mediated sport experience; they also embody rich practice and complex motivations as part of their fandom (Aden, Borchers, Buxbaum, Cronn-Mills, Davis, Dollar, Mitchell, & Ruggerio, 2009; Dixon, 2013a, 2013b, 2016; Eastman & Land, 1997). In communal practices surrounding the mediasport, such as attendances at a sports bar, research has highlighted the ways in which the bar has become a ritualized space that facilitates the deepening of social connections (Aden et al., 2009) and co-construction of knowledge (Eastman & Land, 1997). Direct participation in the fan community, such as attending games or

in-person venues (Giulianotti, 2002), is a core way of not just understanding who is a fan and who is not, but also in understanding how fans bring meaning to their own lives.

As part of the exploration of roles and means of participation of esports fans, this research will interrogate the idea of fans as consumers. Fans as being acquainted to consumers has been both seen as a key practice of fans (Hills, 2002) as well as one that deflates their authenticity and agency over their fandom (Giulianotti, 2002; Jenkins, 1992). It is one lens that may serve to understand esports and the ways in which esports is legitimizing itself as a sport. The modern sports fan is seen as not just an emotional support for a team but someone whose financial support is necessary to keep the sport going. Sports fan practices are analyzed through how, why, and where they consume sports, whether that be online (Dixon, 2016), at home (Eastman & Riggs, 1994) or in a public space like a sports bar (Eastman & Land, 1997; Giulianotti, 2002). It is through the demonstration of an affiliation to a particular team, sport, or locality that sports fandom has primarily been understood –in part, due to the way media broadcasts of sports have facilitated that relationship (Vamplew, 1988). Sports fandom is marked by the consumption of the media text, and then the incorporation of that identity into the daily life of an individual. Ford (2014) illustrates how, as a wrestling fan, it was the combination of watching of professional wrestling and then trying to incorporate the skills he saw that exemplified his fandom. This indicates that, at least for some sports fans, motivations cannot be restricted to learning about sport or supporting sports (e.g. Gantz, 1981) but may be more about other forms of engagement to the media text.

Consumption, particularly through the financial means of purchasing items around the activity, is one way to reflect upon the roles of spectator and player in esports. For example, 5.7 million people watched the last game of *DotA's* annual The International 6 tournament online

(TrackDotA, 2016) and the prize pool was over $20 million (Blum, 2017). Yet what sets this apart from sports is that fans were primarily responsible for crowdsourcing the prize pool. Further, it was crowdsourced by purchases that directly impacted their own playing experience, such as purchasing in-game items. This is partially why, in media surrounding this event, fans were identified often interchangeably as players or users, too (e.g. Stubbs, 2017). This sort of investment, tied to both play and watching, suggests that a further investigation of esports fans relationships with being a player, spectator, and consumer is necessary to fully understanding the esports experience.

Game Studies

As esports is derived in part from gaming culture, this study uses frameworks developed in game studies research. In addition to esports scholarship, this research explores the frameworks of gamer identity (Shaw, 2011, 2012, 2013; Tocci, 2007), particularly around concepts of dedication (e.g. Shaw, 2013) and consumption (e.g. Shaw, 2012; Tocci, 2007).

Dedication to the game is vital to separating esports pro-gamers, but it may also be an instrumental framework to understanding esports fans. For example, in the examination of one esports documentary, Kaytoue et al. (2012) highlight that a key narrative for participants in the community is separating the ‘hard-core’ from the ‘casual’ players. These terms are used to convey dedication to the act of playing and competition. A casual player does not commit themselves to the game to the same extent as a hard-core player does, or may not be as committed to participating in competition. This distinction between a ‘casual’ player and a ‘hard-core’ player may be part and parcel to norms embedded in gamer culture. Shaw’s work on gamer identity has illuminated that there are several key characteristics to gamer culture, one of which is devoting time to play. Someone might separate themselves from the gamer identity by arguing

that they are not playing often enough (Shaw, 2013). This may indicate that investing in the time to play the game is a key separation between gamer and non-gamer, and a norm that esports fans may rely on.

Another key component of gamer identity that this research draws on are the ties to consumption and gamer identity (Shaw, 2011, 2012, 2013; Tocci, 2007). Part of being a gamer is having the equipment to play, such as a computer with advanced components, but it is also about displaying artifacts to geek culture (e.g. Shaw, 2013; Tocci, 2007). Much as in sports, where consumption is about displaying team identity or sports affiliation, gamers will display paraphernalia that signals affiliation with geek culture (Shaw, 2011, 2013). Yet if esports fans are stepping further into the spectator role, we may see that they are adopting different forms of consumption native to sports culture – such as the display of team jerseys (Aden et al., 2009) over artifacts specific to the game and their player experience.

Gender Studies

This research is informed also by frameworks native to gender studies, particularly discourse around masculinity (Connell, 1995) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Past studies have identified that esports is the nexus of two different forms of masculine expression derived from geek and sports culture (Taylor, 2012). While both geek and sports culture are male-dominated, they have different standards of masculine expression, and are often considered opposite forms of masculine experience (Kendall, 1999b). Geek masculinity may emphasize knowledge acquisition, domination over technology, and mental acuity over physical, and can often be subjugated as ‘feminine’ in the face of other masculinities (Kendall, 2002; Taylor, 2012). Sport masculinity emphasizes aggression or physical power, focusing on competition and dominance in the face of adversity (McKay et al., 2000; Messner et al., 2000).

To understand the ways in which different masculinities may operate in the same culture space, this work explores the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and subordinate masculinities (Connell, 1995). Masculinity, in Connell's interpretation, is not monolithic but multi-faceted and can be best perceived as a hierarchy of a social identity. Some forms of masculine expression are more dominant than others. Hegemonic masculinity is often seen as the dominant form of masculinity, the form of masculinity that is typically culturally embodied as the standard way of expressing masculine expression. In sports, the hegemonic form of masculinity might be exemplified by those who express physical dominance, aggression, and heteronormative qualities (McKay et al., 2000; Messner et al., 2000). Non-dominant forms of masculinity, subordinate forms of masculinity, are not at the top of the social identity hierarchy. However, their existence is often used to clarify the definition of what is hegemonic and what is not – a case of showing that what is not included in the definition defines the subject. For example, historically, geek masculinity might be seen as a non-dominant form of masculinity due, in part, to the lack of physical power associated with that identity (Kenndall, 1999b). Subordinate forms of masculinity are often tied to feminine expressions, as femininity is the antithesis of masculinity.

Key to understanding this theoretical framework for gender identity is recognizing that identity is fluid, culturally-situated, and contextualized by the sociohistorical moment (e.g. Douglas, 1989). Further, the norms of gender identity are informed by the intersection of other forms of identity. In Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, the intersection of race and gender identity is one way to understand the ways in which a person may embody simultaneous forms of social identity that may position them in a different power dynamic depending on the social context. For example, a black woman's experience may differ from a white woman's experience in part because a black woman embodies two identities that are socially marginalized.

Intersectionality informs this research design in that to explore masculinity, it must be seen with its connection to other forms of identity, such as identities embedded in a cultural reference or nationality.

The way in which identities are layered and intersect is a core component of this research endeavor and the ways in which they are reflected in the fans is vital. In other forms of fan studies, tensions in gender identity can be seen in the media object itself (Jenkins, 1992; Wenner, 1998), the practices of communities (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Eastman & Land, 1997; Jenkins, 1992), and the experience of individual practices (Busse & Gray, 2011; Gantz, 1981; Giulianotti, 2002). Fans embody the gender norms that are tied to their fandom, and can illuminate the significance of gender identity to understanding esports.

Significance of the Study

Games Studies

Approaches to gaming audiences have typically examined those who are active players of the game, not those who may otherwise be involved in the game. Gaming audiences are defined through a dedication to play (e.g. Shaw, 2013). However, play as the central focus is just one activity associated with gaming. Even in approaches to early online gaming research, the activity of gaming can be understood through a desire to learn more about the game (Yee, 2006), or participate in the gaming culture through other mediums – e.g. conventions or forum postings (Taylor, 2009). Therefore, one critical contribution of this research is that, by examining esports fans, we will begin to understand a wider breadth of cultural practices that may be associated with gaming.

Games are typically understood through who is an active player of the game (e.g. Yee, 2006a, 2006b). This means that the gaming experience is defined as the act of play. In particular, gaming culture is often examined insular of a game – such as the long history of ethnographic studies of popular MMOs like *World of Warcraft* (e.g. Nardi, 2013) and *EverQuest* (Taylor, 2009), or analysis of motivations to play online games (e.g. Williams, Consalvo, Caplan, & Yee, 2009; Williams, Yee, & Caplan, 2008; Yee, 2006a). In these cases gaming culture is not just about who is an active player of the game, but the scope of inquiry is defined by the game itself. Yet people who play games are not confined to any one game – they are not just a *World of Warcraft* player, but may play a wide range of games that define their experience as a gamer (Shaw, 2013).

Some studies have highlighted that there is more to video games than playing. Recent work by Begy, Consalvo, Scully-Blaker, and Ganzon (2017), for example, highlights that play itself can be a tandem experience – a communicative process where one person may have their hands on the controls, while another offers input on play choices. In these cases, players may take turns playing or just enjoy the experience of watching. When I was growing up, I often did play video game, instead watching my older brothers and cousins as they worked their way through the experience. I was not the one at the control, but all members of the group would be able to offer advice as the 'player' went through the experience. Esports may be a more contemporary version of this experience, particularly with regards to streaming: instead of standing over their shoulder, you are watching online, sharing the experience and providing chat commentary to the player. Esports fandom, thus, may highlight themes from this history where playing is not the only pillar of the gaming experience, but one that has not been central to the study of game studies.

Audience Studies

A second contribution of this dissertation is to add to the growing shift in research that focuses on the everyday practices of fans, and how fan identity is not about the extremes but about the daily, even mundane, acts of being a fan (Busse & Gray, 2011; Sandvoss & Kearn, 2014). Following in the legacy of researchers like Jenkins (1992), popular fan studies have primarily focused on fans that have a deep attachment to their community and fan production -- where fandom is a way of life (Coppa, 2014). Research into sports fandom has also focused on the extremes, often seeming to favor those who are more committed than others (e.g. Giulianotti, 2002).

In particular, esports presents a unique opportunity to bridge between the popular cultural medium of video games and sports fan studies through the application of existing theories on the framing of sports broadcasts (e.g. Billings & Eastman, 2002), the social practices of sports fans in public spaces (e.g. Eastman & Land, 1997), and the individual practices of fans (e.g. Busse & Gray, 2011). Drawing on and integrating these theoretical frameworks, this dissertation is a first step to a larger research course to explore themes around fandom.

For the field of communication, understanding fans fits into larger concerns about understanding the impact of media on people. Writ large, the roots of our field have centered around understanding the influence of media on our attitudes and behaviors (Durham & Kellner, 2009). Fans have been parsed out from audiences, in part because of their rich engagement and the way they exemplify the role of media in everyday lives (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). Through an analysis of fans and esports fans in particular, an intent of this research is to contribute to our understanding of how impactful media can be, but also how we are more than

just passive receivers of information or entertainment. Instead, media is a multi-use tool we use to build interaction with others and that provides dimension to our lives.

Organization for the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three distinct studies, each focusing on a different element of the fan experience: the media object of esports, specifically from the perspective of framing in a broadcast; communal practices of esports fans as exemplified through their participation in semi-public spaces; and an exploration of individual esports fan practices. Understanding the norms that are embedded in each entity – media object, community, and individual practices – illuminates norms of both fandom and esports. This is particularly important regarding norms of the relationship between spectatorship, participation, and play. It is also necessary to present a multi-faceted view of esports to try to bridge between fan studies and sociology of sport research.

Chapter 2 focuses on understanding the media object itself in order to understand more fully what it is that fans are engaging with, and how norms embedded in the media object might be reflective of norms within the community of esports fandom. When trying to understand the sociology of fan practices, fan studies research has frequently incorporated an analysis of the media text itself (e.g. Ang, 1985; Jenkins, 1992; Radway, 1984). It is hard to make an argument about how fans are interpreting a media object without some initial scope of the media object itself.

Using qualitative frame analysis, Chapter 2 examines the case of a livestreamed broadcast from DreamHack Winter 2014 of two games, *Counter Strike: Global Initiative*

(*CS:GO*) and *Hearthstone*. I conducted textual analyses of the chat channels, caster commentary, and visual framing used for the livestream of a tournament to identify the gendered frames of esports activities and actors, including players, broadcasters, and spectators. The visual and verbal ways in which sports have been framed have highlighted gender disparity between female and male athletes (c.f. Billings & Eastman, 2002; Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2001), and to a lesser extent, differences in masculine framing (e.g. Channon & Mathews, 2015). This is critical to understanding the esports fan experience given that research has identified tensions between dominant masculinities are shaping the competitions of esports (N. Taylor et al., 2009; Harper, 2014; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2013). By identifying different frames of masculinity, I argue the intersectionality of identity shapes the frames employed in esports broadcasts, where differing forms of masculinity and nationality exist in the same space.

Understandings of audience can also be read in the framing of broadcasts (Entman, 1993, 2007; Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In particular, esports broadcasts can convey expectations that the at-home audience are spectators of esports, players of esports, or some other element entirely. I argue the duality between the role of the esports fan as a spectator or as an active participant are embedded in the broadcast and its framing. Esports commentary and visual framing also negotiate the dual identity of player and spectator in at-home audiences. While it may seem on the surface to be a spectator sport, casters also seem to expect that the audience are also active players of the game. This was evidenced by casters speaking as players to discuss specific strategic moves within the game rather than fostering an affective connection to the teams and pro-gamers. Interestingly, casters' choices seemed to differ based on the kind of the game being broadcast.

By examining a livestream tournament event, this chapter contributes to existing research in two decisive ways. First, this chapter examines the gendered norms embedded in those broadcasts, specifically considering whether these broadcasts evoke sport or geek masculinity (Kendall, 1999a, 1999b, 2011; McKay et al., 2000; Messner et al., 2000; Salter & Blodgett, 2012).Second, by examining broadcast framing, this chapter reflects how broadcasters perceive the audience and what roles the audience may be expected to take on. This is particularly critical when understanding the intersection of gaming culture and sports culture within esports, which may have different expectations of what an 'fan' should be: a sports spectator or active player of the game.

Chapter 3 transitions to communal fan practices around watching esports. A central component of a fan experience is community as a means for how fans further their link to the media object (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). A primary focus of communal esports practices has been on competition (N. Taylor et al. 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2013), namely LAN and mega LAN events, to explain the state of esports and its emerging community. This unduly puts an emphasis on play and competition, which are only part of the scope of the participant experience (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). In this chapter, I look at locations including and beyond LANs that are designed to facilitate either the playing or viewing of esports, and provide a location to understand social practices of esports fans. Gatherings at sports bars or clubs are vital to the sports fan experience (Dixon, 2013b; Eastman & Land, 1997).

The goal of Chapter 3 was to explore the confluence of fan practices, space, and the intersection of video games and sport cultures. Written for a game studies audience, this question was interrogated qualitatively through participant observation at five sites, across three different cities. It incorporates literature from sociology of sport (e.g. Aden et. al., 2009; Eastman & Land,

1997; Weed, 2007) to understand how esports may or may not be adopting the social scripts and practices embedded in the space. For example, consumptive practices seem to be a social practice that the esports community claims to want to take part in, as it is tied to a legitimate sport spectator identity (Weed, 2007, 2008). However, in those spaces, the way esports fans are adopting consumptive practices is not on par with that of sports fans (Giulianotti, 2002). For example, the adoption of practices to highlight team affiliation -- wearing team paraphernalia -- or consuming alcohol to facilitate social bonding did not seem to reflect sports practices (Aden et al., 2009). At the same time, these sites were favored by esports fans because of their embedded consumptive practices that legitimized an activity as a sport. The idea of watching esports while drinking a beer with other esports fans was a way of playing at the boundary of a sport-fan performance.

At the same time, the use of spaces reveals overlap between player and spectator roles for esports fans. The foundation of these activities was the social element these communal activities afforded. At events where spectating was the forefront of the activity, people would gather with people they played online with -- or make plans to play after the event. At events where play was central, bonding would occur during breaks in the tournament while watching others play. This causes us to consider that part of the appeal of these events is having a space that affords multiple fan practices in one: consumption, socialization, play, and spectating.

Yet another bridge between pop culture fandoms, sports fandoms and esports may reside in the individual practices of fans (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Busse & Gray, 2011; Giulianotti, 2002). Using semi-structured interviews with photo elicitation, Chapter 4 focuses on the individual, everyday practices to better understand how fandom is set on a continuum of practices (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). The mundane ways in which a fan structures their

day to incorporate their fandom into their life not only speaks to the saliency of fan identity, but also reflects their perceptions of the media object – specifically, what is normative for the culture around that object. In esports, examining these practices may reflect a prioritization of fan-as-player, fan-as-spectator, fan-as-consumer or other forms of identity.

In Chapter 4 I employed Busse and Gray (2011)'s model of defining fandom by the axis of involvement and investment. This was used to explain fan practices as being defined through their engagement with their fandom (e.g. involvement) and the depth of that engagement (e.g. investment). Busse and Gray's model was put in conversation with sociology of sport models (e.g. Giulianotti, 2002). This combination afforded latitude in understanding a wider spectrum of fan practices that could be used to explain involvement and investment, as well as captured a quality to that engagement specific to sports – namely, spectatorship as a central fan practice and a way of providing agency to consumptive practices. Together this chapter positions esports in such a way as to explore the complex ways that fan practices combine and build to a theoretical model of fandom that includes play, consumption, and knowledge acquisition.

Key to understanding these components of fandom was including photo-elicitation of personal esports spaces as part of the interviews. Space, and the embodiment of practice in those spaces, was used to highlight that most fans invested deeply in play as a part of their fan practice. Examining their personal spaces and daily practice further identified barriers to participation in fandom, such as the perception of geek identity through consumer practices (e.g. Shaw, 2013). A central force in being taken as a 'true' esports fan was dedication to purchasing computer equipment to play, with less of an emphasis on other forms of consumption that might be typical in sports (such as wearing a jersey). At the same time, while spaces might focus on play, disentangling play from other forms of practice – socialization, spectating, and consumption –

was near impossible. This chapter highlights a need to expand our definition of what it means to be a fan to include conceptions of consumption, knowledge acquisition, spectating, and play, building off our notions of fans-as-players (Taylor, 2012) to incorporate other forms of expression of esports fandom.

Chapter 5, the conclusion, brings together these studies to address our understanding of what it means to be a contemporary fan of esports. Together these studies highlight that norms of a fandom can be reflected through multiple means: media objects, community, and individual practices. Each of these modes of understanding esports fandom reveals that esports is at the intersection of multiple modes of fan practice, and that fans reflect a careful negotiation between the commonality in sports and gamer culture. Broadcasts of esports tournaments may appear like a sport, but they are still rooted in gamer culture. The frames that casters adopt in these tournaments reflect characteristics where geek and sport masculinity can find common ground, such as in demonstrating skill or knowledge that reflects mastery over the competition and game. At the same time, fans may watch a broadcast that adopts sports motifs (e.g. Sell, 2015), but broadcasters recognize that those watching are also players and tailor the narratives to that audience.

Just as the broadcasts reflect that audiences are players and spectators – a divide that has been too present in sports fan culture (Whannel, 2009) -- the fans embody both roles. Fans may go to a sports bar, but their practices are selective in those spaces, adopting the normative use of space that overlap between sports and gamer culture. These spaces were selected because they can be adapted for multi-use, with socialization, play, watching, and consumption all co-existing in some form or another. This use of space is also reflected in their personal space and daily habits, which highlight selective consumptive practices indicative gamer culture (Shaw, 2012,

2013) that has begun to incorporate spectator practice through the transformation of the use of space from one strictly for play to one for watching. Esports fans, likely like other fans, do not practice their fandom through one form of practice, but instead are selective in the way they incorporate esports into their lives.

This research also highlights the need for scholarship to not shy away from conversations about consumptive practices. Consumptive practices have been stigmatized in sports (Giulianotti, 2002) and fan studies (Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). Yet in esports, reflecting on how fans invest in material goods allows us to reflect the negotiation and prioritization of practice. By more carefully reflecting on the myriad of ways fans can invest in fandoms (Busse & Gray, 2011), we can better understand the habitualization of fandom in our everyday lives and how those choices reflect the prioritization of elements of fan practice. Through this, we can better understand why and how we ourselves become fans.

Chapter 2: The Media Object: Framing Esports Fans, Framing Masculinities

Introduction

In November 2014, a mass media event was happening with all the hype of the Olympics. But the competition did not happen on a field -- at least, not a physical one. DreamHack, a mega gaming event, features an esports, or electronic sports, tournament of competitive video game play. Esports is an activity that is constructed from two intersecting cultures: video game and sports culture (N. Taylor, Jenson, & de Castell, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2009, 2012). The esports industry has all the trappings of an emerging sport (Jin, 2010; Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2009): varying levels of professionally organized and managed players cloaked in team jerseys, large monetary prize pools, trophies, a stage, and a broadcast transmitted around the world featuring commentary from reporters and a panel of experts for a mediated audience. At the same time, it is an industry that evolved from playing video games and thus video game culture: professional gamers (pro-gamers), competing on a digital field. What is most remarkable is the number of people who watch broadcasts of esports. Worldwide, ESPN estimates there are 89 million esports fans, people who are spectating esports primarily online (Casselman, 2015). DreamHack Winter 2014 alone attracted over 22,000 in-person attendees and millions of online viewers (Lau, 2014).

The growing number of esports spectators has led researchers to examine the motivations of why people would watch other people playing video games. For the most part, research has tested esports audiences through the sports consumer lens, with initial findings suggesting that esports audiences watch for similar reasons as sports fans: learning about the game and a love of competition (Georgen, Duncan, & Cook, 2015; Hamari & Sjoblom, 2017; Hein & Engerman, 2016; Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011). Yet this commonality may be surface-level. Taylor (2012)

points out a critical difference between esports audiences and sports audiences is that esports audiences have historically been players first. The relationship that they come to the spectatorship experience with is first with the game as an active player and thus learning about the game is part of the desire to bring it back to their own play. Sports fans are primarily spectators, not active players (Whannel, 2009), there to support a team or player (c.f. Giulianotti, 2002).

The perception of fans as spectators of professional athletes is reflected in the way analysis has approached sports broadcasts, focusing on how sports commentary frames professional athletes (c.f. Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Angelini, MacArthur & Billings, 2012, 2014; Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2000, 2001; Smith & Bissell, 2014; Tuggle, 1997). Media producers often rely on common framing devices in broadcasts to convey meaning to the audience, and an analysis of frames can help indicate perceived norms of the audience (Entman, 1993, 2007; Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele, 1999). In the case of sports, it has been embedded into the medium that sports fans are spectators (Vamplew, 1988). If esports broadcasters are taking cues from sports broadcasters, the commentary of tournaments may focus on framing pro-gamers and teams. If the commentary is designed to facilitate a connection to the pro-gamer, as opposed to learning about the game, this may reflect that the broadcasters are conceptualizing esports fans as spectator audiences. To understand norms of esports audiences thus requires a closer examination of what it is that they are consuming as the central part of their spectatorship, namely, the frames of esports broadcasts.

In sports, broadcast commentary frames have been problematized as one way the sports industry perpetuates inequality, particularly through the frames of professional players. The repeated use of frames reinforces differences across demographics and serves to codify

stereotypes and inequality not just in the broadcast, but also in the broader context of sports culture (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Tuggle, 1997). The frames that broadcast commentary employ can highlight varied norms, such as different characteristics of female athletes or male athletes (e.g. Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2000, 2001), or difference by nationality (Daddario & Wigley, 2007; Desmarais & Bruce, 2010). These, in turn, impact the way audiences perceive the sport and what is normative in the sport (Greer & Jones, 2012).

Research into sports has highlighted that at events like the Olympics, there has been a difference in treatment of athletes by gender in comparable games – e.g. the way we talk about athletes in men's volleyball is different than women's volleyball. Unfortunately, this means of comparison is not suited to the esports context. In esports, the state of events as of 2014 was a severe lack of women on the professional scene due, in part, to cultural barriers around women's participation (c.f. N. Taylor et al., 2009; Taylor, 2012). This makes a *direct* comparison of the treatment of professional male gamers to professional women gamers via the broadcast more difficult, as in a professional tournament there may be no women participants. This invites research to examine gender identity in a more nuanced way, reflecting on how gender is portrayed in a seemingly homogenous environment – and how that portrayal reflects barriers and layers to gender identities.

This study in particular examines how this opens up an avenue to understand differing representations of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Whannel, 2005), which has been critical to the exploration of sport (c.f. McKay, Messner & Sabo, 2000; Messner, 1992; Messner, Dunbar & Hunt, 2000; Whannel, 2005). In esports, there are competing forms of masculinity: geek and sport (Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2009), with norms of both cultures codifying and reinforcing the

hegemony, or dominance, of particular forms of a respective masculinity. Geek masculinity is historically often subordinate to that of sport masculinity, different and held apart from the more dominant, physically powerful athleticism attributed to sport masculinity (Kendall, 1999b; Taylor, 2012). Where geek masculinity emphasizes intelligence or technical aptitude (Kendall, 1999b), sports traditionally emphasizes strength, aggression and physical power (McKay et al., 2000; Messner, 1992). If sports broadcasts can convey the perceived norms around traditional sports, esports broadcasts are an avenue to understand the way these conflicting perceptions of masculinity are playing out.

Through an analysis of esports broadcast commentary we can see if and how esports broadcasts embody norms of sport and gamer culture more broadly. In the case of esports, those norms may be complicated as esports fans may be both video game players and spectators of the broadcasts they view. Therefore, we can see how the broadcast a) invokes audience as spectator versus a player in their framing of games; b) reflects tensions in the manifestations of sport and geek masculinity. Through an analysis of the narratives used in the broadcast we can better understand the media object that fans are consuming and thus what their experience is in watching esports.

Literature Review

To understand the significance of frames used in esports broadcasting, it is necessary to explore the ways in which mediated broadcasts are tied to the medium of the broadcast, namely, the ways in which spectating audiences access esports. This will be followed by a discussion of the specific norms that are conveyed through framing devices used in sports broadcasts, particularly centering on the differences by gender and nationality. These two themes are critical to understanding esports, as, first, it is an activity where competing forms of masculinity are

being embodied Secondly, it is an international phenomenon where professional players compete in tournaments that are mega-events (Roche, 2000) that, within the context of esports, bear resemblance to major sporting events like the PGA Tour, Wimbledon or the Olympics where players from different countries might compete against one another. Combined, this will help us address the concerns of how framing used in the broadcast of esports reflects the direct perception of broadcasters of the audience and the norms of esports culture.

Media, Sport, and Perceived Norms

Mediated spectatorship has changed the face of sport, and vice versa. Broadcasting sports has shaped the rules of sports, gameplay, altered the economic infrastructure, defined the sport seasons, and overall changed sports to make them more suitable for a television broadcast (Sell, 2015; Taylor, 2012; Whannel, 2009; Vamplew, 1988). Growing up together over the decades, sports and television have shaped one another in terms of expectations of narration, broadcast aesthetics, and norms (Real, 2011). Broadcasts also rely heavily on audio aids, such as the narration and tonal shifts of the commentators (Taylor, 2012). Combined, this has led to expectations what it means to broadcast sports, and what it means to be a sports spectator.

Sport audiences have been problematized as to how spectating translates to supporting a team or player, particularly in how that spectating has been tied to a consumer experience. Giulianotti (2002) exemplifies the divided perceptions of sports fans in his taxonomy of sports audiences in his separation from “traditional” audiences versus “consumer” audiences. Audience members that align more with the traditional perception of sporting audiences will be there to support a particular team (e.g. our conception of a fan). In contrast, audiences on the consumer end of the spectrum are more engaged in peripheral, generalized acts of support primarily through their purchasing power. Yet as illustrated with the industry around esports – with ESPN

focusing on, for example, the growth in spectator rates – it may be that these roles are not so neatly divided. Wanting to grow the spectating audience is part and parcel to understanding the increasing number of people who enjoy watching esports, not just in those who are supporting esports teams but also lending their clout as a consumer to the industry.

Similarly, the desire to grow spectating audiences has changed the rules and regulations of esports games. Spectatorship has influenced what it means to be a good player (Taylor, 2012) and what is a good play, such as one that shows technical aptitude or is 'flashy' (Harper, 2010); the rules and regulations of gameplay (Taylor, 2012), as well as the visual components and information provided on the broadcast (Sell, 2015; Taylor, 2012). To facilitate spectatorship a professionalization has occurred around the role of broadcast commentary, comprised of *casters* who are often former players themselves (Taylor, 2012) and some who have over a decade of experience with the game and esports (Sell, 2015). Casters transfer their passion, expertise and long history with the game to make it more accessible for new esports fans (Taylor, 2012, p. 228).

As sports and television grew up together, esports and its currently favored medium – livestreams – are similarly evolving together. To fully understand the growth in esports spectatorship is to incorporate an understanding of technological means to access esports: livestreams (Burroughs & Rama, 2015). Livestreams are a central pillar of esports, not limited to viewing but also as a way of signally a social tie to esports (Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne, 2014; Pellicone, 2016; Sell, 2015; Seo & Jung, 2016; Taylor, 2012). Therefore, livestreams are not merely a means of accessing esports broadcasts, but are critical for learning about games and strengthening ties to esports through practice.

But despite scholarship acknowledging the critical component that livestreams play in the fan experience, little work has been done to break down the content of those streams and understand what fans are seeing. An exception, Sell (2015) illustrates the parallel histories of esports broadcasting to sports broadcasting, arguing that esports casting is in part taking its cues from sports broadcasting. Some of the elements borrowed from sports broadcasting include the way esports broadcasters dress, the tone of the broadcast, and even seem to provide comparable content in a preliminary content analysis (Sell, 2015, p. 51-52). Yet new elements, per Sell, include the connection the esports commentators have to their audience, and how those commentators evolve out of the community of esports fans. Being fans themselves changes the way commentators react to and perceive game play (Taylor, 2012). This indicates that as much as esports commentators may be taking cues from sports culture, it is not a neat duplicate.

Esports Broadcasts and Their Reflection of Fandom

While this highlights norms among the esports broadcasters themselves, it is critical to analyze the content of livestreams. It is through the content – and the mediated experience of viewing sports -- that the spectator experience is most directly impacted. In sports, the history of the mediated broadcasts have divided the act of *doing* from the act of *watching* sport (Whannel, 2009), translating to a primary perception of sports audiences being spectator-supporters of sport teams and player (e.g. Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976; Giulianotti, 2002; Raney, 2006; Wenner, 1998a; Whannel, 2009). Esports viewers historically come to esports because they are active players of the game they opt to watch (Taylor, 2012). As Taylor (2012) argues, this is different from sports fans who are not always active players of the games they are watching. Playing and watching go hand in hand as esports fans learn from the broadcasts for the purposes of their own play (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011; Seo & Jung, 2016; Taylor, 2012). Taylor (2012)’s research indicates that part of the motivation for watching an

esports broadcast is not to support a player or team, but to gain knowledge that can be applied to directly to their own gaming experience. Thus, a difference between sports audiences and esports audiences is that watching and playing are both pillars of esports participation (Seo & Jung, 2016), with watching motivated by a desire to develop skill with the game (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011), and thus the industry has created avenues for esports fans to learn from the content (Georgen et al., 2015).

As esports grows, however, we must continually question how fans are negotiating the social norms of two competing cultures, gaming and sports. If embodying more of sports culture, esports fans might behave more as spectators, there to watch the game, over players, there to learn to play. In an examination of the esports broadcast will reflect the perceptions of the media producers of what the role of an esports fan should be and how the roles of spectator and player are being negotiated.

Framing in Sports.

Sports broadcasts can convey who or what is included or excluded from the meaning of sport (Billings & Angelini, 2007). In sociological approaches to sports, a central argument is that the choices media producers put into the broadcast of large media spectacles (e.g. the Olympics, Super Bowl, PGA Tour) reflect perceived norms of the sport which may, in turn, impact audience perception of what "is" sport (c.f. Wenner, 1998a). Sports broadcasting commentary is a vehicle to reinforce the social norms of sports (Zhang, Pease, & Smith, 1998). Similarly, the way mega-LAN, international esports tournaments (such as DreamHack) are framed in broadcasts may serve to highlight the extent to which esports is reflecting common norms of what is esports.

Frames are employed by media producers to provide emphasis on elements of a broadcast, specifically by presenting content in a way that resonates with existing constructs (Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974; Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Entman (2007) defines framing as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (p. 164). Frames also impact audiences by describing or portraying an issue in a specific way, influencing how we think about a topic (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This, in turn, impacts audiences by creating reliable frames that are both familiar and that they are likely to internalize (Meân & Halone, 2010; Wenner, 1989).

Media producers often rely on the same frames consistently, the routine use of which, over time, creates dominant frames to talk about the same content (Gitlin, 1980). The power of framing comes in the repeated use by media producers to reinforce how to think about an issue (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). For example, in sports media, sports broadcasters rely on the same framing structures such as "rooting for the home team" such that the narratives are "culturally ritualized" (Desmarais & Bruce, 2010, p. 341). This translates to a familiar feel in all sports commentary, with sports broadcasters calling upon the same frames to communicate the broadcast to the audience.

The assumption of audience-as-spectators in sports broadcasts translates to the professional athlete being a nexus for framing. Sports broadcasts revolve around athletes, with framing primarily examined through word choice and the frames sports commentators employ when talking about the actions of athletes (Angelini, Billings, MacArthur, Bissell, & Smith, 2014; Angelini, et al., 2012, 2014; Billings, 2009; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Eastman & Billings 1999, 2000, 2001). If esports broadcasts also focus on

describing their professional players, this could suggest that they are modeling esports broadcasts after sports broadcasts. Using similar framing devices may suggest that, as in profession sports, the perception is that audiences are drawn to the broadcast to support a particular team or player.

Just as broadcasts can frame the norms of the sport, broadcasts also serve as a vehicle to understanding areas of inequality in sport. One way that sports broadcasts have treated athletes unequally is through the way national identity is represented. Sports broadcasts provide an avenue to both connect to a global audience, while at the same time reinforcing boundaries in national identity. For example, the Olympics can both represent a unified global audience while at the same time broadcasters treat different nationalities with unequal narratives (Rowe, McKay, & Miller, 1998). One way this can be seen is how sports media has a historically favored the 'home team.' Even when the home team is not present, nationalistic themes are used in broadcast commentary (Scott, Hill, & Zakus, 2012). National identity often comes across as an 'us' vs 'them' mode in sports media, particularly in events where two countries are competing such as the Ryder Cup in golf (Harris, 2012). During the Olympics, sports commentators can invite the audience in through inclusive pronouns, such as "We won!" to signal national cohesion (Rowe et al., 1998).

Frames used in sports may serve to both reflect and reinforce the inequality represented in society (Frey & Eitzen, 1991), and the reliance on the same frames may come at the cost of perpetuating stereotypes (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). Sports broadcasts are often complicit in reinforcing minority absences perpetuating societal norms around who should (or should not) be represented on television (Real, 2011). This has been demonstrated is through framing gender of professional athletes.

Framing Representations: Gender

Another way that sports commentary tends to treat athletes unequally is relying on different frames for athletes of different genders. This is particularly telling in comparing male and female athletes (e.g. Angelini et al., 2013; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2000, 2001), where both the visual and verbal framing are unequal – women being portrayed as emotionally or physically vulnerable, whereas male athletes are portrayed as strong and stoic (Duncan & Messner, 1998, p. 176). This results in a hierarchy of gender representation, with women falling at the bottom (Messner, Duncan & Jensen, 1993). But the significance is not just in comparing athletes across a gender dichotomy, so much as interrogating when it comes to issues around the representation of masculinity (e. g. Sabo & Jansen, 1998).

Sports media commentary plays a crucial role in audience perceptions of what gender norms are dominant in sport. It can both support gender stereotypes, as well as negate gender stereotypes – sometimes both simultaneously. For example, media coverage of Olympic male figure skaters, performers in a 'feminized' sport, reinforced frames around the athlete's athletic strength, courage, extroversion and appearance as a means of mitigate masculine norms (Angelini, MacArthur, & Billings, 2014). Sports media producers can revalidate an athlete's masculinity when it comes into question by tying the athlete to heteronormative norms – such as taking a professional wrestler with a history of making money doing gay pornography and refashioning him as a physically strong, family man (see Channon & Mathews, 2015). The impact of these choices changes the way that audiences perceive gender norms in the context of the sport. When media producers employ frames that present an athlete as a hybrid of traditionally feminine and masculine characteristics, audiences also perceive those hybrid gender

representations as being normative for the sport (Daddario & Wigley, 2007; Greer & Jones, 2012).

This becomes further complicated when sports media frames intersect multiple identifies, such as gender and nationality – where not only athletes but nations are gendered (Rowe, McKay & Miller, 1998). A study by Desmarais and Bruce (2010) look at the visual and auditory framing of a rugby match between New Zealand and France. The study found that the commentary can be used to frame athletes favorably or unfavorably by linking them to particular gendered identities: e.g. the French as frivolous, physically expressive and emotional, whereas New Zealanders were framed as being steadfast and stoic. In this context, New Zealand was the more 'masculine' country via the commentary. The broadcasters manifested these different stereotypes by focusing on expressions in the French, such as 'slight' frowns or when a player would pat another on the back. These visual moments were framed with commentary around a heightened emotional state. This case demonstrates that broadcast commentary can link national stereotypes to gender as a way to undercut the opposing team.

A weakness of these approaches is that they have tended to treat gender as a dichotomous representation, namely, male or female. This research acknowledges that masculinity and femininity are faceted identifies, a spectrum of representations positioned within a cultural context and sociohistorical moment. As Whannel (2005) argues, "Masculinity is not an eternal and static object; masculinities change over time and the boundaries of masculinity is always subject of redrawing" (p. 29). There is not a single form of masculinity in sport (or esports).

However, there may be conflict between masculine identities. For example, sports culture has historically been dominated by hegemonic masculine norms emphasizing physicality, aggression, and competition (McKay, Messner & Sabo, 2000; Messner, 1992; Messner, Dunbar

& Hunt, 2000; Whannel, 2005). Subordinate forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995) may revolve around expressions of homosexuality, which may be femininized. In sports culture, the subordination of other forms of masculinity has been of particular interest when it comes to the representation of gay athletes or athletes in feminized sports (Messner & Sabo, 1990). This conceptualization aligns with Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity as the dominant form of masculinity, partially defined by subverting other forms of masculinity. Significant to this understanding is that, in this interplay between competing masculinities, masculinities are often defined in a dichotomy to feminine characteristics (Connell, 2005).

The dominance of hegemonic forms of masculinity present in the culture of sports can also be magnified in sporting audiences, such as online forums (Kian, Clavio, Vincent & Shaw, 2011). In Kian et al. (2011)'s study of one American football forum and its participants, homosexual slurs were used liberally as an insult to other forum participants, a way to devalue their affiliation with another team. The insults were vulgar and graphic, paired with a devaluing of women as a vehicle to assist forum participants in asserting their own masculinity. Paradoxically, other studies – such as Klugman (2015) analysis of fans of Australian and US sports forum participants – have found that heterosexual sports fans might use the framework of "loving" or even "going gay" for their favorite sports stars as a way to signal the depth of their attachment to the sports star. In a culturally sanctioned manner, straight men could discuss (in a similar vulgar fashion to Kian et al.'s study) wanting to masturbate when their favorite stars did a particularly stunning athletic performance. Klugman suggests that this amplified reaction is culturally permissive in sports because dedicated fans are linked to the hypermasculinity of the professional athletes themselves, and a way of conveying their dedication and exerting territorial connection to said athlete. These findings present a paradox of masculine performances that both

embody “sports fan masculinity,” that are simultaneously two sides of the same coin: supporting and recognizing the hegemonic masculinity conveyed by the perceptions of the athletes themselves.

These ways of representing masculinity are, however, critical to understanding gaming culture which has been recently problematized due to the toxic masculinity embodied in such events as #GamerGate (c.f. Braithwaite, 2016; Chess & Shaw, 2016; Massanari, 2017). Toxic masculinity is loosely defined as a form of aggressive misogyny, and one that is increasingly gaining safe spaces online in gaming forums (Adams, Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Massanari, 2017). In gaming culture, it can be embodied by deliberate attacks against women (Braithwaite, 2016), with loaded, insulting (or even violent) online attacks (Chess & Shaw, 2016). At the same time, this sort of behavior is not uncommon in sports fans (Adams, Anderson & McCormack, 2010), particularly forum posts for sports fans (Kian et al., 2011). In sports, research has argued that it is a way of demonstrating loyalty and attachment to one team, by putting down the opposing particular team or players (Kian et al., 2011). Toxic masculinity, as a form of territorial masculinity (Klugman, 2015), is used to symbolizes the dominance or superiority of one team over another by way of the fan discourse. Initial studies in esports (e.g. , Karhulahti, 2016) have already indicated that amateur livestream producers are having to come up with strategies to negotiate “troll” behavior, which I suggest may be an artifact of a creeping toxic masculine paradigm. As esports is a nexus of both sports and video game culture, it is critical to bear in mind that toxic masculinity is a form of masculine performance that audiences may be drawn towards.

Parsing out conflicting forms of masculinity is critical to esports. Esports occupies a space that embodies both sport and geek masculinity (N. Taylor, Jenson, & de Castell, 2009;

Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2009, 2012, 2013). This intersection leads to tensions in the performance of masculinity (Witkowski, 2013), partly because sport and geek masculinity are often seen as being at odds with one another (Kendall, 1999b; Taylor, 2012). Kendall (1999b, p. 335) argues that the historic problem with geek masculinity has been that it both embodies feminized attributes (e.g. lack of physical ability or sportiness, lack of ability to romantic partners) and hypermasculine attributes (e.g. intellect, lack of social skills). Geek masculinity may emphasize knowledge acquisition, domination over technology, and mental acuity over physical (Kendall, 2002; Taylor, 2012). This in contrast to the physical dominance, toughness, bravado, and aggression dominating sport masculinity (Sabo & Jansen, 1998; Whannel, 2002). The result of these two masculinities coming into the same space is largely that players are having to negotiate which norms they embody, such as norms of politeness over aggression in competitive play (Witkowski, 2013) or trying to position themselves to emphasize the physical aptitude required to play (Harper, 2014; Witkowski, 2012).

As esports is attempting to embody sport but is derived from video game culture, careful consideration should be paid to the ways in which these competing forms of masculinity intersect in broadcast commentary. The broadcast commentary may be subverting one form of masculinity over another to manifest one hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). As in sports broadcasts, what esports broadcasters chose to adopt as the frames for commentary will consequently have an impact on the audiences' perceptions of what are the norms of esports competitions.

Method

Sample

Two games from the tournament *DreamHack Winter 2014*, which took place in Sweden, were selected for analysis. The tournament itself was selected due to its size, international nature,

and significance to the growth of esports and centrality in past studies (c.f. Taylor & Witkwoski, 2010). The games that were selected for comparative analysis were *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* (*CS:GO*) and *Hearthstone*. These games were chosen because of their differences in game style, masculinity, and their relative priority in the tournament. *CS:GO* may represent a more hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell, 1995), as it is a *CS:GO* is a war-themed, team-based first-person shooter that has a well-established and long history of being played as an esport, having been played since 1999 (Bowman, 2014). *CS:GO* received top placement on the tournament website (e.g. it was listed first) and top placement on the tournament's Twitch stream (the most popular streaming site for esports), whereas *Hearthstone* was hosted on a non-Twitch streaming service, which has since gone out of business. *Hearthstone* was a relatively new game, first created in 2014, and was a fantasy-based card game that was one v. one-person game, and may represent a geek form of masculinity due to its theme and playstyle.

The data was triangulated using distinct modes of observation. The first set of data was notes from a field observation of the tournament, taken during the live action. The second set of data came from a video recording of the verbal broadcast commentary from the last game played in the tournament, known as the Grand Final, of *CS:GO* and *Hearthstone*, which was transcribed. *CS:GO* resulted in 244 minutes of footage and *Hearthstone* resulted in 80 minutes of footage. The transcription was analyzed using a constant comparative method, wherein the text was read through, themes were coded, and then re-coded to refine the themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Finally, the footage from the Grand Finals and the tournament was reviewed again for a qualitative analysis of the chat channel (where audience members could provide their own commentary) and visual framing used during the tournament.

It is important to understand who provided the broadcast commentary that was the central focus of the analysis. There were three roles that on-air personalities took: hosts, commentators and reporters. Most on-air personalities had a history of being involved in the professional esports scene as a player or coach. For *CS:GO,* hosts introduced the games and provided between-action commentary at breaks. Reporters interviewed pro-gamers on the stage floor, and commentators narrated the game as it happened. There were no reporters for *Hearthstone* and hosts provided between-action commentary and game narration. In esports, individuals are known not only by their legal names but also by their in-game monikers, e.g. Scott Smith is also known as "SirScoots." Therefore for *CS:GO* reporters included James Duffield (UK); Auguste "Semmler" Massonnat (USA); "Anders" Blume (Denmark); as well as hosts Scott "SirScoots" Smith (USA); Duncan "Thorin" Shields (UK) and Jordan "Nothing" Gilbert (USA). Jordan "Nothing" Gilbert is also a professional player, whose team did not make it to the Grand Finals. The two teams competing were from Sweden (NIP or Ninjas in Pyjamas) and France (Laurent de la Clergerie or LDLC). For *Hearthstone,* the hosts were Dan "Frodan" Chou (USA); Nathan "ThatsAdmirable" Zamora (USA); Marcin "Gnimsh" Filipowicz (Poland). The two competitors were Thijsnl (Netherlands) and Kolento (Denmark), and Kolento won the tournament. For the entire data set, the players and casters analyzed were all male: there were no female players or casters in this match.

Analysis Procedure

A qualitative textual analysis was performed, using three modes of information: the commentary from the broadcasters (both in live analysis and through an analysis of the transcription), the visual broadcast of the game, and the textual exchanges within the chat box. The purpose was to explore how the audience was being reflected through the broadcast as falling into the paradigms of spectators or players of esports.

To more deeply explore the position of the audience within the context of these two roles, the chat box was included in the field notes and later review of the footage. One element that makes esports broadcasts unique to past research into sports broadcasts is that they are visually framed with a chat box. In addition to the central broadcast, narrated in this case by professional commentators, the viewer has the option to also follow a live chat on the right-hand side of the screen. The chat was included to better understand how the audience was also framing itself.

Figure 1 For analysis, the livestream was composed of two parts: the broadcast (left), where the game was being showcased, and chat (right) which online audiences could take part in or watch.

Findings

Analysis will begin by exploring the infrastructure of the broadcast – specifically, the audience participation through chat. As part of the mediated audience experience, this is vital to understanding the experience of the broadcast for esports fans. The analysis will then proceed to consider the frames used, beginning with how the professional players were framed through the visual effects and commentary, paying particular attention to issues around masculinity. Examining the content in this way will help elucidate the tensions between presenting esports as a sport and as an embodiment of geek culture, and what that means for the mediated audience.

Livestreaming Technology: Interaction through Chat

The chat channel is key to understanding esports audiences and livestreams, and more specifically how esports audiences may reflect the intersection of sports and gaming culture. On the one hand, the chat channel highlights the ways in which audience members could interact with the broadcast experience and reflect norms of the audience. From a visual perspective, agency was often conveyed through the use of ASCII images (images constructed by the use of characters and, typically, multiple lines of text) and built-in emojis. These emojis are often designed using actual photographs of existing esports professional players or popular streamers, but can also be objects (champagne bottles), logos (esports team logos) or anything that can be converted into a still image (numbers, dogs). Emojis can be used to convey reactions to the gameplay itself, in a way that is not typical of television broadcast but more evocative of a stadium where spectators can boo, cheer, clap, and so on to signal their own emotional state. The use of emojis seemed to be a way of celebrating the achievements of the players, particularly in *CS:GO* where the division based on team identification seemed to be strongest, e.g. fans were rooting for NiP or LDLC. Simultaneously, it was used to 'boo' the other team. Within the context of esports broadcasting, emojis and chat reflect a perceived norm that the audience will express their own emotional response to the stream. This level of visual feedback is critical to the experience, as the use of these visual markers reflects that the audience was participating as spectators or supporters of esports.

A component of the DreamHack chat was that it was moderated. Chat moderation is common on a range of Twitch streams; streamers will designate individuals to chaperone the chat. At DreamHack. the role the moderator seemed to fall roughly into three categories: a) answer questions; b) provide entertainment c) encourage excitement of online viewers (much like a cheerleader). To the first point, questions primarily about the tournament seemed to be the

focus of chat – when was the next match, or could the volume be turned down on the in-game audio, for example. To the second, moderators in *CS:GO* would do things like make jokes (teasing one another, puns) in the chat to provide entertainment. In these capacities, the moderators positioned themselves as the caretakers of the chat and were there largely to support the enjoyment of the online audience.

Yet it was the cheerleading role speaks to the idea that caster and moderators see the audience as spectators, there to support the teams that are playing. For example, to get the crowd excited for the start of the game in *CS:GO*, caster Anders might typed into chat, "IT'S ALMOST TIME" (Figure 2) which would then resonate with the chat, some of whom would respond with calls for 'hype' (indicating excitement) or overflow the chat with champagne bottles (indicating excitement, celebration). This is reminiscent of how in a sports stadium the radio announcer might encourage the crowd to get on their feet and cheer. Often, at a similar time, the casters would encourage the in-stadium audience to cheer on players in teams in *CS:GO* – such as when the players would come out for the first time, or awards were being handed out.

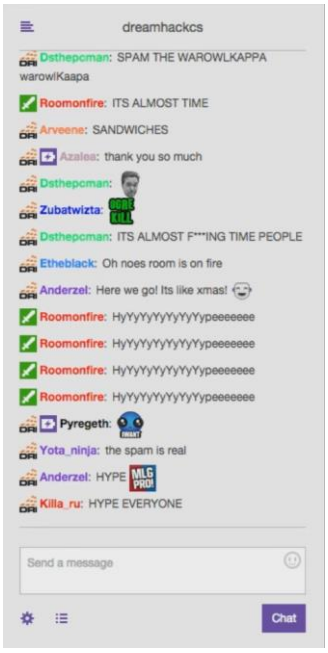
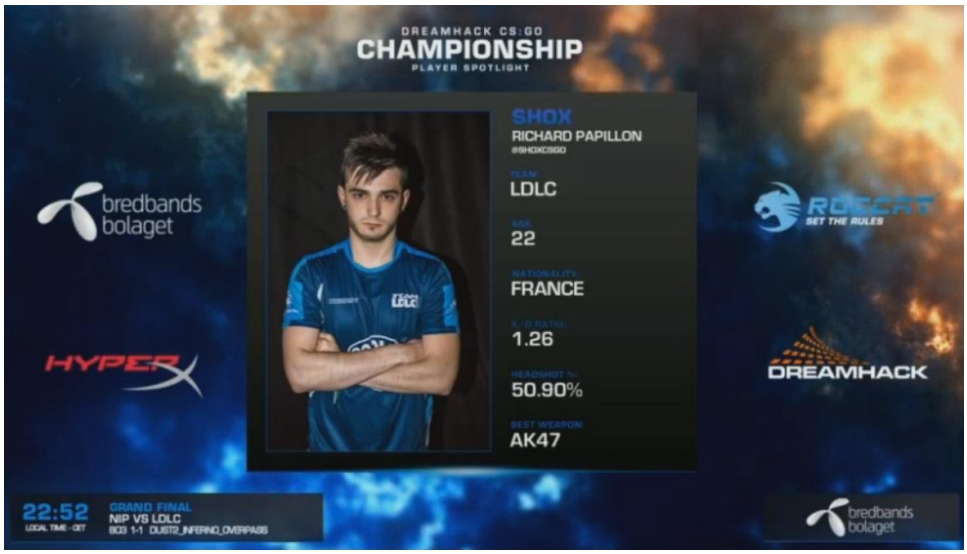


Figure 2 The chat was used by moderators (designated with the green sword) to translate pre-game energy building for the online audience in, encouraging virtual participation.

Here, the perception of the virtual audience was to tie it to the emotional state of the in-person audience and translate that excitement into a digital format as part of the benefit of the mediated experience. Encouraging the audience to cheer on teams marked a significant way that the casters were translating the broadcast to a sports-like experience, as well as positioning the audience in terms of sports fandom: there to cheer on the professional players.

All the Trappings of Sport.

Visually, games like *CS:GO* had all the trappings of sport. For the Grand Finals, the teams came out in a cloud of smoke, reminiscent of the ways basketball or football players might come out before a big game. The playing field was set with risers coming up on all sides, creating a stadium effect. They wore official jerseys like professional soccer players, and as casters used terms like "MVP" to project who the most valuable player would be in the tournament, images of the players with their biographical information (and the sponsors of the tournament) would appear (Figure 3). Some of the information was similar to that of a sport: name, age, nationality, and key in-game statistics (e.g. headshot average) were all provided. But



the information provided was also different: the player's online alias (e.g. Shox in the photo provided) was more prominent than his birth name, and players were exclusively referred to by this in-game alias.

Hearthstone players did not have this type of visual framing. At the start of the match, the casters would describe the background of the players, their favorite strategies, and preferred deck. The camera would circle the players, showing the two "facing off" across a table at their computers (Figure 4).

Figure 4 At the beginning of the match, the camera would pan to show Hearthstone *players 'facing off.'*

Graphically, they did not have the same "player scorecard" that was shown in *CS:GO* (Figure 3). Instead, the media producers elected to represent the players through a virtual face off using character icons from the game (Figure 5).

Figure 5 Graphics used in Hearthstone *often did not contain images of the players. Instead, the focus was on a stand-off between images generated by* Blizzard Entertainment*, the game developer.*

Before each match, the audience would get to see which decks were selected by each player – the line-up, if you will. This graphic showed the sponsors in the middle and the social media hashtag, and was much like the curtain being drawn up to signal the start of the match.

Hearthstone players themselves were less unified in terms of dress, with players wearing anything from the short-sleeved jerseys to branded hoodies. Some wore both, with a hoodie over the jersey, such as the winner of the tournament, Kolento. Hoodies (branded or plain) seemed very popular – and past studies into DreamHack have indicated this is customary dresscode for the mega-LAN (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). This attire visually framed the pro-gamers as navigating gamer culture and sport culture, as the hoodies that are typical "gamer wear" have been refashioned with team and sponsor logos. As a new esport launched that year, the attire reflects a continued negotiation of the pro-gamers emerging from the fans.

Figure 6 Hoodies are normative dress at DreamHack *as it is a mega-LAN event. Here, professional players could distinguish themselves with hoodies marking their team and sponsor affiliations.*

Framing Analysis

In understanding sports broadcasts and the frames used to convey sports norms, the player is the key. The question then becomes how are frames are manifesting and what does this mean for the esports audience.

Framing masculinity: Tensions in chat.

If frames can symbolize what an audience perceives as normative (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), then a closer examination of how the audience reacts to these framing devices may be critical. One way to illustrate this is through a closer examination of how the pro-gamers were introduced. In *CS:GO*, the players came out of a tunnel to the accolades of an audience packed on stadium-style seating. NiP was the first team introduced, and they came out, waving the Swedish flag. Lining up behind their consoles, Sir Scoot introduced each player in turn as the

camera did a close up on their face. As each player was introduced, accompanying information (their game handle in large font, followed by their legal name, nationality and team logo) appeared in a box near their head.

> Sir Scoot: And our first player, definitely a fan favorite, friberg!
> Next to him, f0rest. Thorin's pick, f0rest. Crazy.
> And there he is, Xizt.
> And next to him, the new guy on the block, fitting right in, Maikelele.
> I don't even know if I need to introduce him, but… GeT_RiGht!

Figure 7 f0rest, smiling, also winked and blew kisses at the audience.

While the players were introduced, the chat seemed to fall into two camps: cheering the team as whole, or critiquing the players for the parameters of personality ("Xizt is so social awkward hahaha"), physical appearance ("those eyebrows" "Xizt looks like a baby"), as well as their names (Instead of GeT_RiGht: "GET_WRONG" "GET_RAPED"). While the commentators framed the pro-gamers in terms of "fan favorite" and "the new guy on the block," the chat audience provided a layer of unfiltered commentary that reflected both support for players and open hostility. Comments on the age (relative youth), size (particularly overweight) (e.g. "How to conceal you are obese: grow a thick ass beard to hide your double chin"), introversion (social

awkwardness), appearance (eyebrows, beards, hair, relative state of cleanliness, alertness likened to drug states) (e.g. “cloud9 guy so stoned hahaha”) were all key themes in chat. What is interesting about these slurs is esports viewers relied on negative stereotypes of the gaming community and geek masculinity (Kendall, 1999b). These narratives reinforced the hegemonic masculine ideal that fans may expect of *professional* gamers: to be alert; to be fit; to be neither too old or too young; to be clean/hygienic; and to be attractive.

Chat represented a space that embodied a form of toxic masculinity and homophobia that was not a part of the official commentary but is critical to understanding how the mediated audience experiences esports. Toxic masculinity has been of concern in both gaming culture and sports culture (c.f. Adams, Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Braithwaite, 2016; Massanari, 2015), particularly as a result of incidents like #GamerGate. It is typically exemplified with anti-feminist, combative, violent and misogynistic language used as a reinforcement of a particular type of hegemonic masculinity. Social media platforms, like Reddit and Twitter, have been used as ‘safe spaces’ (Braithwaite, 2016; Massanari, 2015). By extension of gamer culture, Twitch chat may be a similar space, one where aggressively misogynistic language is appropriate.

It was not localized to one game, either; in the chat for *Hearthstone* there were equally a number of comments degrading the physical appearance of players or casters, and modifications of names to include male genitalia or lines that were specific homophobic slurs seen throughout the tournament, e.g. “Ekop wants to gobble dicks.” As exhibited above, pro-gamer names or actions would be twisted into calls for them to be sodomized, whereby chat members would also use femininity as a slur. These chants fit into the troll culture that has been illustrated in Twitch chat culture more broadly (e.g. Karhulahti, 2016).

At the same time, there was surprisingly a significant amount of homoerotic messaging as well. In particular, sexual attractiveness was also seen as a way to praise gamers, particularly in *CS:GO*. For example, when f0rest was introduced, he blew a kiss at the camera and winked. The commentator said "crazy" in response, laughing. Without the chat, this would have been a relatively innocuous moment. Meanwhile, some audience members in chat wrote, "O forest ill go gay for him" and "ME HARD FOREST." Similarly, when f0rest (or other players) performed particularly well during the game, it was not uncommon for audience members in chat to say things to the effect of being sexually aroused, wanting to "go gay" for the player, or have their children.

These alternative forms of slurs and homoerotic language in one space echo the findings in sociology of sport approaches, specifically that of Klugman (2015) and Kian et al. (2011). Regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of those members in the chat, the dual performance is a way of the audience recognizing the power of the pro-gamers. The homophobic language is a way of asserting dominance over the other player, asserting the masculinity of the individual audience member – like the way American football fans might use their language in a forum as a way of devaluing the credibility of fans supporting other teams (Kian et al., 2011). On the flip side, framing pro-gamers as sexually powerful beings with the ability to turn straight men gay reinforces their masculine dominance as much as insulting pro-gamers by evoking homophobic slurs degrades their masculinity. In both cases, it is a way of asserting that the individual fan has a strong attachment to a player, and is highlighting their support – whether that be in defending their team or supporting them through their own masculine subordination. This study highlights that both forms of asserting their "territorial masculinity" (Klugman, 2015)

over a team or player may co-exist with both ways of signaling attachment situationally acceptable.

Framing masculinity: Emotional displays.

Tensions around the hegemonic masculine norms embodied in esports were particularly telling when it came to displays of emotions. For the most part, professional players would often adopt a "poker face" – focused, devoid of tells and emotion. Particularly in preparing for the game, the camera would focus on the players, sitting in front of the computer screen, with a blank slate on their face.

Figure 8 Pre-game, the camera would pick up on the focus of the players preparing for their match in CS:GO.

Emotion was highlighted in both overt moments of emotional display – a player leaning back with a smile – and some that were more open to interpretation. For example, in *Hearthstone*, right before Kolento won a match, the commentary highlighted how he was 'smiling' because he knew he was about to win. It took viewing the clip a few times before realizing that the smile was the smallest uptick in the corner of his mouth. The casters, having more experience with the game may have been partially projecting their own read on the

situation onto the players – but also may be translating their experience with the players themselves to help interpret their emotional state for that at-home audience. The emotions emphasized were often feelings that anyone playing the game might experience: the elation of winning, the frustration of losing.

Interestingly, there were moments that reflected a negotiation or uncertainty on how to handle more blatant emotional displays. Touch was particularly problematic, in part because the cultural appropriateness of it seemed open for interpretation. At the end of the *Hearthstone* Grand Final, there was a moment where Kolento hugged his coach (at the latter's insistence) as a way of congratulating him. In chat, this hug was met with comments like "dat awkward hug" or "aww". Half of the chat seemed to find it endearing – a coach's expression of a paternal pride in his player winning. Others seemed more critical of the 'awkwardness' of the moment, perhaps connected to the presumed awkwardness of gamers in conveying socially appropriate emotion (c.f. Kendall, 1999b). Based on the mixed reaction from the audience in chat, it seems that the appropriateness of a physical expressions in esports may need to be further explored as a way of teasing out cultural norms of esports.

Difficulties in negotiating emotional expressions was not just in the audience but also in the professional commentary. Media producers are key in framing these moments for the audience, providing contextualization for what the audience is seeing. Desmarais and Bruce (2010) highlight in their study of a New Zealand and France rugby match that the French team was often tied to visual and verbal framing focusing on their overt emotional displays – including touching. This could suggest that these forms of national stereotypes are transcending sport and are embodied in other media broadcasts. Interestingly, this stereotype surrounding national identity came to play in the *CS:GO* match.

During and after winning the Grand Finals, LDLC grouped together near the trophy, hands over each other's shoulders or on sides in a circle while the players talked to one another. In a sport context, this form of contact would likely be called a 'huddle' -- a show of fraternity in sports, a way to strategize before a match or get excited. This form of coming together as a team, heads together and circled up, is not uncommon in sports. Yet as the commentator looked on, this was not the frame he drew from. Instead, James (reporter) said, "These guys are all hugging now, which is awesome. Hugging around the cup which is nice, isn't it?" Instead of drawing on the sports frame of reference and norms, the reporter re-contextualized the huddle as a hug. This was not the only time this reporter would do that in this match.

Figure 9 LDLC huddling around the trophy became a moment to consider masculine norms.

The second time came during the match, when LDLC was huddled again between a match and the referee approached them. To the audience, James (the reporter) projected what he thought the referee had said, jokingly: "If you guys hug for one more minute we're going to get the wrong impression." By 'hugging' for too long, the players were framed with homosexual

overtones – “we’re going to get the wrong idea” -- which is a common antithesis to both dominant sport masculinity and a way of disempowering geek masculinity (Kendall, 1999b; Messner, 1992). Why did the reporter jump to this frame? Echoing Desmarais and Bruce (2010), was it a result of national identity – LDLC being a French team, perhaps there is latent bias towards French players acting too emotional or feminine. This national identity may have played out more acutely as their opponents, the ‘home team,’ were from Sweden. This form of expression seemed particularly problematic within the context of a competitive video game event, with sports and gaming culture coming together. Paired with the narrow nexus of frames used to describe the pro-gamers and their actions, I suggest that esports broadcasts are still uncertain about what norms and expressions commentary can pull on and how to contextualize the experience to the audience.

Framing Beyond the Player: Interrogating Esports Fans as Players, Spectators

Most the commentary, instead of framing the player, focused on strategic choices in the game play itself. From tone to highlighting key strategic events, looking at the broadcast beyond the framing of the player is critical to understanding the way the broadcast commentary reflects the perceived role of esports fans as either sports spectators or gamers.

Taylor (2012)'s found that casters are often former players and also active fans themselves. She emphasized that a caster provides access to expertise and knowledge for the audience, while at the same time capitalizing on their own fan-enthusiasm to make the broadcast engaging and exciting. In this broadcast, it was evident that casters were key to translating the action for the audience not just in relaying information but in providing context through their own emotional reaction to the play. The rules of *CS:GO* and *Hearthstone* and what makes a successful play are not universal but very specific to the context of the game. Therefore, to make

the game more accessible, casters highlight valuable actions that pro-players are making as well as key transition in the game play itself. By highlighting elements that they found exciting, the caster commentary communicated what is a key play, drawing the audience's attention to critical moments, and then modeled what the reaction should be from a fan. What is the appropriate response to a particular card selection, or a headshot? The commentary provides scaffolding for the audience about when and how to respond to the game as a spectator.

At the same time, accessibility was relative. Even as a game player, I needed to look up what the casters were saying quite frequently. This was particularly relevant when casters were discussing strategic choices, which was a bulk of the commentary. Strategic commentary presumes an advanced level of knowledge of the game. This was particularly salient in *Hearthstone*. As *Hearthstone* was a much slower game, the commentary would often wander into hypothetical actions that the players could take that seemed to presume that the viewers would have intimate familiarity with the card options.

The perspective that the casters took during strategy discussion was particularly telling of what they expected audiences to want out of the broadcast. First, they took this as an opportunity to broadcast their own expertise with the game. Often, the perspective the casters took was either speaking for the player ("He's thinking...") or what the caster themselves would do in the situation ("If I were him, I'd do this...").

Hearthstone

ThatsAdmirable: So I think you forgo freezing trap here, forgo the extra charge potential under your bow, and next turn you have undertaker and mad scientist. Hopefully you use the bow after that to run over everything.

****

CS:GO

Sir Scoots: Do or die time. Jordan you've been in this position before, at a variety of stages, small LANS, big LANS. That just happened to your NIP. How do you kind of reset the vibe of your team to get ready?

Jordan: Try not to overanalyze it too much, realize you need to ….. you can't get ecoed, come out strong on the gun rounds. Also they are starting CT side, they need just play confident. The way you win CT side is you use your smokes well, and you stay winning your 1 v 1 battles. You don't give up, you don't passively win those fights.

Orienting the commentary to this realm of hypotheticals allowed the casters to both instruct the audience in the myriad of directions a player could take in this situation, but also ones in which the audience should take in a similar situation. Analyzing for several minutes the merit of a particular card or the best way to place a bomb is a strategic form of analysis that is less about the professional players and more about reinforcing the expertise of the casters and developing expertise in the audience as players themselves.

By providing this highly detailed level of analysis about strategy to the audience, it suggests that the assumption is that the audience is there to learn about the game first and foremost. The casters presumed that the audience was more interested in a catalog of these different strategies as opposed to some other way of filling the time between plays. This seems to support findings that the audience is motivated to watch esports to later take back to their own game (Taylor, 2012).

Selling esports: Esports Audiences as Fans, Consumers, Players.

At the same time, analysis of this broadcast highlight that there was another key role that esports audiences embodied. They were not just spectators, not just players, but also – and

perhaps more paramount – consumers. This was illustrated in the way sponsor logos were associated in every step as being a part of the experience of viewing professional esports broadcasts. Sponsors logos were not just worn on clothing but were an common component of all visual mediums used to frame professional players and the broadcast, especially in *CS:GO*. The professional players were living billboards, with sponsor logos framing the player as someone who had achieved enough credibility as an esports professional to be sponsored and earn money playing in gaming competitions.

Signally which sponsors were supporting the players, teams, and even the tournament played a key role in the visual and verbal framing of the tournament. Throughout the three days of the tournament, casters and players would verbally highlight sponsors at moments that might otherwise seem out of place. For example, when Kolento won the *Hearthstone* Grand Finals, he was asked who to thank. He said, "I want to thank my team Cloud 9. Shout out to Cloud 9 sponsors—Logitech, Airforce Reserve, Alienware, Kingwin." With all eyes on him, his acceptance speech, as it were, was a crucial plug for those sponsors for the at-home audience. It tied those sponsors with the success of the moment, translating for that at-home audience that if they would support Kolento, his team, or the *Hearthstone* esport scene, these were the companies to look to. The purpose of these advertisements was also pragmatic: to grow esports requires sponsorship, and sponsorship requires consumers. The audience, then, was tied to the growth of esports through their value as consumers.

Growing the audience was also key to *Hearthstone,* and a primary focus of the casters was to encourage followers on Twitter and other social media devices to try to get the audience and playership to expand. Throughout the tournament, there would be calls to follow the

tournament on Twitter. Connecting to social media accounts is one way to prolong the experience with the game, and grow an audience.

At the same time, the consumer role was not separated from the audience's position as a player, marking a difference from sports fans. Giulianotti (2002) argues one of the roles of contemporary sports spectatorship is the commercial support of athletes. In sports, this has generally been conceived as through the purchase of items that signal team allegiance or player allegiance – e.g. a baseball jersey with your team and player's number on it. Here, most sponsors were related to the gaming industry: computer companies, gaming peripherals, and telecommunication companies. While the framing reflected supporting these sponsors as avenue to supporting the growth and security of esports teams and tournaments, that value was situated in products that facilitated play. It further reflects who was perceived as the audience, namely, those who would be willing to watch pro-gamers are those who are gamers themselves.

Juggling the perceptions of the audience through three different roles – consumers, supporters, and players -- created unique moments and innovative ways to 'sell' esports to fans. Nowhere perhaps was the purchasing power of esports audiences made more clear than in *CS:GO.* Part of the work of the *CS:GO* casters focused on "selling" the value of the tournament or esports, but also projecting a sense that it was the fans who were vital to the growth of esports:

> Sir Scoot: I just want to break down -- we have $250,000 on the line. That has been funded by esports cases[1] being dropped within the game, that then the **esports players and fans will then buy a key** that opens them a nice skin. That money goes into a nice prize purse, you guys [the professional players] get a big chunk of it this is our fourth one of the year. Literally our first one was a year ago at this event. So we've given away a million dollars basically crowdfunded by the fans which is awesome stuff.
>
> Nothing: Awesome

[1] An in-game object that fans could find when they were playing

> Sir Scoot: The sticker stuff, added slowly increased pick-up challenge all that good stuff. You've gone, Jordan, from making 10-15 grand as a team on stickers[2] to over 100,000 dollars at tournaments.
>
> Nothing: Yeah it's awesome.
>
> Sir Scoot: How is that, for an organization?
>
> Nothing: Well it's good for Cloud9 for instance, they're able to get back the money they invest on this event right away. …it was around 120,000$ for the top 8 teams just for stickers money…. So I think it's awesome because now the structure…for everyone to make money everyone to do what we're here to do and make the event as good as it can be. I hope to continue to see Valve[3] showing love like they have.
>
> Sir Scoot: Yeah it is nice…. So it's really kind of cool again to see this sort of interaction with the fans.
>
> *Emphasis added*

In the above example, the two commentators focus on showcasing to fans the value of their roles as a consumer, a player, and an audience member. The commentary focuses on the financial clout that the audience has. By making in-game purchases, they have managed to crowdfund a lot of the prize money for tournaments (including DreamHack), which translates to making "the event as good as it can be." The reward for the crowdfunding is a better tournament, a better event to watch. In this way, there is a direct return on investment for the audience. What makes this sort of crowdfunding unique is that it was done through the game, namely, that the purchases had to be picked up within the game itself and unlocked. The consumer merchandise was directly related to the in-game experience, significantly due to the support of the game developer. At the same time, the commentary co-opts the narrative of the audience of being fans, and even demonstrates that the two are linked in the minds of the casters – players are fans, fans are players. Selling esport capitalized on the viewers being interested in playing the game as much as it was about watching the game.

[2] Another in-game object
[3] The game developer

As esports consumers, the audience was also in a position to evaluate the worth of the prizes being awarded. In *CS:GO*, the fans nominated the most valuable player (MVP) of the tournament online. This player won a Play Station 4 (PS4) for earning the fan support, provided by a Swedish telecommunication company. Fans responded, in chat, to the effect of: "What would you do with a PS4?" This evaluation was often sarcastic (based on the emojis used and context). The PS4 is not the customary way that *CS:GO* is played at tournaments, and therefore fans seemed to reject that it was a valuable piece of merchandise. This indicates that there was a tie to what merchandise is valuable to players of particular games that is culturally situated in that gaming community. It further underscores that esports audiences come to things, first, as an active player of the game and consequently a game consumer and supporter.

Conclusion

What goes into a broadcast reflects norms of the media producers, but it also reflects back norms of the broader culture that contextualizes a broadcast. In the case of esports broadcasts, the content of the broadcast illustrates that esports is straddling two cultures, sports and video game culture. This leads to conflicts in what information should be in the broadcast commentary, and also what it means to be a member of the esports audience.

In many ways, the game itself was the nexus of the broadcast. The way the broadcast itself was constructed depended on the specific game, but also represented in both cases a duality between the spectator, player and consumer roles in the audience. Commentary reflected the expectation of audiences to have access to a range of information not available while playing. The visual perspective from which audiences watch the game suggests that audiences want to experience the broadcast as a player. Perceiving the audience as a player translated to the bulk of

the commentary centered on the game itself, and facilitating learning about what made for a good game.

The visual and verbal framing of the tournament more broadly did not always fit into the paradigm of sports culture. Part of the selection of the games for analysis was, in part, due to their differences: while *CS:GO* might represent a more sport-like form of masculinity in the way it is framed, *Hearthstone* represented a more geek-like, less violent game. This was reflected in the visual framing. For example, *Hearthstone* was much more saturated with visual content native to gamer culture. The professional players wore hoodies, and the graphics accompanying the gameplay did not evoke sport as much as illustrate the game itself. In contrast, *CS:GO* paralleled the presentation style of more mainstream sports. This suggests that future research should be very aware of the type of game selected to represent "esports" and, in fact, that there may be more difference between games than unity when it comes to the visual framing and content.

There were two themes that transcended both games: the tensions in masculinities, and the tensions in the role of the audience. The broadcasts analyzed in this study were, in the official broadcast, tame when it came to representations of masculinity. While players might be referred to as 'the man,' for the most part the commentary attempted to find commonality amongst geek and sport masculinity. The primary area of negotiation came from how to handle emotion or touching. Either it was given an overemphasis (e.g. noting smiles when it was barely perceptible) or oriented towards a homophobic interpretation (e.g. we will get the wrong idea if you huddle for too long). There was a strong norm towards stoicism. This in particular highlights the importance of examining broadcast commentary, as broadcast commentary frames may provide cues for the audience in *how* to think about the issue of masculinity.

As represented in chat, the esports audiences are not monolithic in their approach to what masculinity or norms they embody around gender identity. Toxic masculinity was present in both games, particularly with the chat lobbing insults in the form of graphic, degrading slurs around the appearance or sexuality of the pro-gamers, teams or casters. This sort of behavior is not uncommon in forum posts for sports fans (Kian et al., 2011). In sports, it is a way of demonstrating loyalty and attachment to one team, by putting down the opposing particular team or players. As a form of territorial masculinity (Klugman, 2015), it symbolizes the dominance or superiority of one team over another by way of the fan discourse. The moderators of chat did not address or correct anyone who used these slurs, reinforcing that this was normative and expected behavior from esports fans.

At the same time, the chat was also heavy with commentary about finding pro-gamers attractive or wanting to ‘go gay’ for a player because of their advanced level of skill. This, too, is not uncommon in sports fan culture (Klugman, 2015), and by feminizing themselves as straight males, the fans were representing their favored pro-gamers as superior players. What is interesting is that, as Klugman suggests, this does not necessarily negate the heteronormativity of the fan conveying this emotion. This research instead suggests that, combining both the homoerotic and homophobic messaging may seek to balance each other out, and create a heteronormative masculine space.

This is particularly problematic critical to discourse around understanding hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), as both the homoerotic and homophobic messages were vehicles for communicating attachment that are not available to non-straight males. To use homophobic slurs as a way of devaluing opposing teams and supporters defines the space as one not accepting of non-straight male forms of sexual identity. This, in turn, reinforces who is perceived as the

audience (straight males) and who is not. The same goes for using ‘going gay’ or joking around ‘having babies’ of the favorite players. N. Taylor et al. (2009) highlights that women in esports are often not perceived as being viable competitive players. Part of the way of reinforcing this stereotype is to suggest that women – when they compete – are only there because they are romantically interested in other esports players. If a female fan used the term ‘wanting to have babies’ it would feed into that stereotype. As this terminology is not a way of delegitimizing straight male fans or players suggests that they have the position of privilege, as the core audience, of expressing their attachment in this way. Further, by using this sort of language, they reinforce the masculine domination of the space.

Based on the broadcast and the caster’s orientation to the audience, esports is culture that is merging multiple identities into the audience. They are seen as active players, wanting to learn more about the game than the players themselves. But they are also supporters of esport, using their financial clout to continue to support the industry. In-game purchases, tied to the tournament, were one way that audiences were able to interact with the tournament. It was through those purchases that the majority of funding for the prize pool game from. This suggests that it is not a divide between the act of playing and spectating, but instead, that esports audiences are multiple identities at once: players, fans, and consumers.

Chapter 3: Not Just a Good Seat at the Bar: Esports Gatherings Beyond the LAN

Abstract

This article explores the ways in which fans of competitive video gaming (esports) are gathering in semi-public spaces not always specifically constructed for esports. Focusing on communal practices at five events, from watch-parties at sports bars to amateur competitions at a LAN center, this study examines the relationship between space and performance of a fandom. Specifically, this study examines the relationship between watching, playing, and socializing in these intermediate places. The study concludes that the ways in which esports fans are stepping into performance rituals is both evocative of and unique from other contemporary sports. Beyond highlighting fan practices of esports, a motivation of this study is to shift the focus of the study of esports from a concentration on LANs, which emphasize professional play, towards a broader understanding the spectatorship experience.

Keywords: esports, social gatherings, sports bar, LANs, social construction of space

Introduction

Clustered around monitors in homes and bars, with a pint or a friend (or both), fans are gathering to watch a different sort of sporting event. Announcers narrate the plays, and fans critique strategy and player choices. The fans cheer as their heroes clash… and lament when the Internet crashes. Worldwide, there are a growing number of fans of a type of competitive video gaming, electronic sports or esports -- people who are eager to watch others playing video games. Yet although the esports industry attributes its growth to the exponential increase in those willing to watch others play games (Casselman, 2015), esports research has primarily focused on the professionalization of gamers (c.f. Jin, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010; Witkowski, 2012, 2013). This has limited our understanding of what it means to 'do' esports to the act of play (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010), forcing the lens to focus on one of the multitude of practices that can take place in esports.

This focus on the professional gamer is reflected in studies of esports gatherings. Research to date has focused primarily on the experience of esports through the lens of local area networks, or LANs, a technology that allows several local computers or consoles to connect with one another and play with minimal latency. This focus in research on LANs is likely due to the cultural significance of LANs in the growth of the esports professional scene. In countries like South Korea, LAN centers were a cornerstone of the growth of the esports industry, serving as the major point of access to competitive video game play (Huhh, 2009). Elsewhere, particularly in Europe, LAN events are frequently sites of both amateur and professional gaming tournaments and competitions (e.g. Ackermann, 2012; N. Taylor, 2011; N. Taylor, Jensen & de Castell, 2009; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010; Witkowski, 2012, 2013) or local play (e.g. Jansz & Martens, 2005).

At the root of it, LANs are about bringing players together for playing against one another. Thus, the problem with focusing on LANs as a point of inquiry into esports is this leads research to, in turn, focus on the dynamics of competitive play. But this is just one of the myriad of practices that can occur when esports participants get together (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). For example, spectating is a cornerstone of the esports experience (Taylor, 2012); even at competitions, watching others play is a significant practice woven in with forms of engagement like socializing, eating, and, yes, playing (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). As the audience for esports grows, so too does the demand for a diversity of practices around esports.

Today, esports fans are looking to find public venues where they can both play *and* watch tournaments, yet in many places around the world there are few sites designed specifically for esports. To fill this gap, one place that esports fans are gathering is in sports bars (Johnson, 2015). Sports bars have a long history of supporting sports fandom by giving fans a space to come together to view and consume sports (Aden, Borchers, Buxbaum, Cronn-Mills, Davis, Dollar, Mitchell & Ruggerio, 2009; Buffington, 2015; Dixon, 2014; Eastman & Land, 1997; Weed, 2006, 2007, 2008; Wenner, 1998b). When esports fans choose to view tournaments at a traditional sports bar, it puts the esports community in a place rich with specific rituals (Aden. et. al., 2009) but also rift with barriers, such as the masculine domination of the space (Weed, 2007; Wenner, 1998b).

In this chapter, I explore some of the different venues in which esports fans congregate, in order to understand how those venue choices reflect and shape the social practices and cultural meanings of a fandom built upon more than just playing. The venues in turn provide scripts and social rituals to which esports fans are paying tribute – but are not strictly adhering. Specifically,

I will examine the way esports fans use these spaces to navigate tensions between communal norms and assumptions, derived from both esports and sports bars as spaces to 'do' sport.

Literature Review

Esports at LANs and Beyond

Whether they are called Internet cafés (Hsu & Chiang, 2008), local area networks (LAN) (Witkowski, 2013) or *PC bangs* in South Korea (Huhh, 2009), esports competitors gathering to play and socialize in commercial spaces explicitly targeted towards digital gaming. For the purposes of this paper, I use the term "LANs," in part for its emphasis on the technological affordances of the space. This nomenclature is complicated, as LANs can be both permanent businesses set up to provide networked computers, as well as refer to stand-alone gaming events that last anywhere from 24 to 48 hours (or longer). These events can vary in both their size and the degree to which they are open or closed to the public (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010; Vogelgesang, 2003): they range from a gathering of pre-existing friends to large tournaments hosting 10,000 or more people (Ackermann, 2012; Taylor, 2012; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010; Witkowski, 2013). To distinguish between these different usages, I will use "LAN event" to denote a time-limited occasion and "LAN center" to denote a commercial space.

The key unifying elements of LAN events and centers are: a) infrastructure; b) (social) practices. A LAN stands for a local area network, which means that the machines are connected so that participants can play together. While it may go without saying, the need to have access to high-speed internet and gaming-grade technology is vital to the success of an esport LAN event (N. Taylor, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2012). Any lag, e.g. when there is a delay in the feedback of the game, is a significant obstacle of competitive play (Simon, 2007; N. Taylor,

2011; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2012). Yet the significance of LANs is not simply the information technology. The elements that go into the room of a LAN event, from how the competing players are set up on the stage (Witkowski, 2012) to how the tables and chairs are used (N. Taylor, 2009) all facilitate the gaming experience. In his analysis of these "LANscapes," N. Taylor (2011) illustrates that the emphasis on competitive play impacts both what technology is present, as well as how furniture, player and spectator bodies are positioned within the space. Critical for this research, his analysis highlights that spectating is often divided at these competitions – whether amateur or professional – by a physical barricade. This choice suggests that game developers and community organizers recognize that there needs to be a space for both, while at the same time furthering a divide between playing and watching. In this field observation, analysis of the space itself might reflect the sociology and psychology behind what it means to "do" esport for participants.

However, what is missing is consideration of what it means to select a LAN as the focus of esports gatherings in public. For one thing, LANs have specific barriers to use. For example, LANs are gendered spaces, dominated by male participants (Ackermann, 2012; Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Jansz & Martens, 2005; Sveningsson, 2012) with women being less likely to use a LAN center because it is designated as a space for public competitive gaming (Hsu & Chiang, 2008; Sveningsson, 2012). Although there has been an indication that an increasing number of women are participating in LANs that potentially helps diminish the "boys club" feel (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010), research suggests that gaming spaces are still dominated by men -- and esports, specifically, has cultural barriers that impact the equal participation of women (N. Taylor et al., 2009).

Critical to understanding the dynamics of esports, gatherings at LANs are not strictly about professional competition but encompass a myriad of other practices (N. Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). The very act of setting up the network of a LAN is meant to bring people together into the same room (Ackermann, 2012; Vogelgesang, 2003). Simon (2007) illustrates that central to a LAN event is socializing, exchanging material goods, and consumption (drinking, smoking) and "other embodied practices normal to human sociability" (p. 183). Evidence suggests that the motivations to participate in LANs include opportunities to socialize and learn more about the games being played (Jansz & Martens, 2005; Martončik, 2015), which depends on watching others play (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). The integration of socializing, learning, playing, and watching all go into the experience of being at a LAN (c.f. Ackermann, 2012). By putting the emphasis on competitive play, research has limited the scope of understanding of what makes the esports experience.

Sports Bars: Social Context for Sport

To interrogate the diverse range of motivations and practices of esports fandoms suggests looking beyond spaces where professional play is not the dominant focus, but instead how spaces not traditionally set up for play. In the United States, very few businesses are set up with a focus on facilitating esports (including very few LANs). Their absence has led to esports fans occupying other semi-public spaces not designated for gaming. While this sort of practice could (and has) occurred in such spaces as movie theaters or on campus venues, many are being organized at local sports bars.

Particularly in the context of British and American football, sports bars exemplify a rich history of sports fans congregating in public to view sports (c.f. Dixon, 2014) with a history of specific fan practices and rituals that embody what it means to "do" sports (Dixon, 2013;

Eastman & Land, 1997). The sports bar is a specific public venue where fans can accomplish multiple goals beyond the act of watching: they can socialize, legitimize themselves as fans (particularly of a specific team), exchange or showcase knowledge about the sport or team, all while consuming alcohol (Eastman & Land, 1997). Watching the game in public serves not only to bring fans together, but provides them with a common entity from which to base their interactions with other fans (Aden et. al., 2009; Buffington, 2015; Gantz, 1981; Weed, 2007). A pull for watching in a sports bar is the social component that it offers (Dixon, 2013). Most critically, it is through the social gathering that, in part, reinforces the performance and centrality of sport fan identity (Eastman & Land, 1997). It is only through co-viewing, scholars argue, that certain behaviors become most salient to the sports identity, such as communicative behaviors like talking about what is occurring, critiquing the referee choices, or even yelling at the television (Carbaugh, 1996; Wenner, 1998a).

Spaces like the sports bar are transient and multi-purpose, affording fans the opportunity to adapt the space to reflect their communal identity (Aden et. al., 2009; Eastman & Land, 1997), while at the same time being spaces embedded in social rituals. Aden et al. (2009) noticed that fans performed specific rituals in a sports bar to solidify their identity as a sports fan: they would transform the space with decor such as banners, adorn themselves with team jerseys or team colors, and share in ritualized cheers or greeting rituals centered around their team. Rituals within these places reflect how fans can redefine a space to reflect communal identity and connection to a sport. The context of the space allows fans to construct their identity as a sports fan (van Ingen, 2003). Therefore, to examine these spaces is to not only understand how fans can shape the identity of a space to evoke sport, but also how the context legitimizes fan identity. This suggests that when esports fans enter a space like a sports bar, participants may be selecting

the space to reinforce their own identity as an esports fan through the ways they use the space. Reflecting on those practices, in turn, will help reveal what it means to be an esports fan.

To fully understand the ritualization of sports bars necessitates an interrogation of how those rituals socially construct sports bars as a social space – and one way to understand this is through the construction of the sports bar as the intersection and construction of masculinities (Weed, 2006, 2007, 2008; Wenner, 1998b). Specifically, sports bars are spaces that are overlaid with both the hegemonic masculine practices from sports culture, as well as the hegemonic masculine practices evoked from broader social constructs of semi-public spaces devoted to alcohol (Wenner, 1998b). The term hegemonic masculinity stems from Connell (1995)'s argument that masculinity is not a singular social identity but can consist in many forms, being socially constructed, dynamic, culturally- and historically-situated. In any cultural context, such as sport, there is a stratification of masculinity that results in a dominant form of masculinity (hegemonic masculinity) and non-dominant, subordinate forms of masculinity (marginalized masculinities). To define hegemonic masculinity necessitates defining what is considered a subordinate form of masculinity which results in a social stratification of masculinities (Anderson, 2009), as well as what is femininity (Messner, 1992). In the context of sport culture, the stratification process has led to the dominate masculinity prioritizing physical power, heteronormativity, and norms such as "strength and stamina, self-reliance, and sacrifice" (Denham & Duke, 2010, p. 111). Sport masculinity is often typified by aggression and physical power (Messner, 1992) and, while it is critical to not overemphasize the negative outcomes of this process (McKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000), is typically at the marginalization of masculinities that could be interpreted as homosexual, feminine, or physically weak.

Sports bars are not limited to being examples of sports masculinity, but instead seem to be selected by sports fans because they allow sports masculinity to be reinforced by *other* forms of masculinity. In particular, consumptive cultures around male bonding through alcohol. As Weed (2007) argues, "The pub provides a place where the male holy trinity of alcohol, football and male-bonding come together" (p. 400). Fans congregate in bars to "let loose," particularly in the company of others (Gantz, 1981), and part of that can be through the overconsumption of alcohol (Palmer, 2014). Sports bars are dominated by a culture of heavy drinking (Curry, 2000), which, historically, frames them as a social space of male-domination and female-exclusion (Palmer, 2014; Wenner, 1998b). By layering sport culture with the cultures around male-bonding, the sports bar itself because a social space saturated in hegemonic forms of masculinity and, consequentially, a difficult space to navigate with marginalized or subordinate forms of masculinity (Wenner, 1998b). This ritualized behavior is tied to a particular form of sport identity (Dixon, 2014), which in turn reinforces the sense of who and what behavior has a place in the sports bar. Entering spaces where these forms of consumptive practices are tied to sports cultural rituals could be particularly limiting for an esports audience, especially in light of a history of adolescent participation in LAN events (Ackermann, 2012; N. Taylor, 2011) but also considering esports complex relationship with gender practices and barriers (N. Taylor et al., 2009; Witkowski, 2012).

The reason for esports community organizers selecting these spaces may reflect commonalities between esport and other sport fan practices, or be an act of legitimizing esports *as* a sport. Research has illustrated the commonalities between esports and traditional sports using the definition of sport (Wagner, 2006), an analysis of the physicality of sport (Witkowski, 2012), and an analysis of the industries that support esports (Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010; Taylor,

2012). But the practical reasons for selecting a sports bar may highlight shared practices and motivations common to esports fans and sports fans. Sports bars lend themselves to multiple ways of bonding by using sports as the launching point. By entering these spaces, esports fans are afforded multiple social scripts they can use. They might wear team jerseys, to show affiliation and support camaraderie. However, there may also be different rituals or performances that are unique to esports fans. A closer examination of those practices in sports spaces is therefore necessary to understanding the esports experience and how esports community practices are reflecting sports and video game cultures.

Method

For this research, I selected semi-public spaces (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006) in three major cities on the East Coast of North America (New York City, Washington D.C., and Boston) at five different events for field observation that were found through searching for esports events on the internet. Part of the reason for the limited sample was finding a publicly advertised, fan-focused esport event. Field observation is an ideal method for exploratory research, and is the same method used in prior work examining sports fan practices (e.g. Aden et. al, 2009; Eastman & Land, 1997; Kraszewski, 2008). Three of the events took place in sports bars, each featuring a different game: *League of Legends (LoL), Defense Against the Ancients 2 (DotA)* and *Super Smash Brothers Melee (Smash).* The *Smash* event was a LAN tournament and the other two events were watch-parties. Focusing on different games and different types of events allowed me to compare the variety of social practices of esports fans in semi-public spaces. To serve as a means of comparison and bridge the field work to existing literature in esports, I included LAN center. Previous research has focused on LAN events as a vehicle for understanding both amateur and professional players of esports (Jin, 2010; Taylor & Witkowski,

2010; Witkowski, 2012, 2013). LAN centers have also served as a means for understanding motivations to participate in competitive gaming (Jansz & Martens, 2005; Sveningsson, 2012). Today in the United States, particularly on the East Coast, LAN centers are not prevalent. The few that do exist afford fans the opportunity to participate in amateur or local tournaments around esports games, as well as potentially play for practice. The site selected was an independently owned LAN center in Boston, where two local tournaments took place: one for the game *Hearthstone* and the other for a *Street Fighter* competition.

As part of participant observation, I took field notes, during and after the event, following the thick description method (Geertz, 1973). Notes began with a wide lens, focusing first on setting the scene of the event (e.g. information about the use of the space, how many people were present and who they were with, and what resources/technology were being used). I had basic familiarity with the mechanics and goals of the game, but am not a competitive player and do not identify as an esports fan. This allowed me to serve as the naïve outsider, giving space for informants to guide me through their experience, practice, and perceptions of the game (Lofland et al., 2006). For analysis, these notes were coded iteratively (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), starting with broad codes pertaining to the research questions (e.g. "practices") and becoming more focused as themes emerged.

Findings

In the first section, I will address the layout, attendance, and justifications for using each place. Following that, I will explore some of the major practices that were embodied in these spaces to reflect on how esports fans integrate specific social practices. In doing so, I aim to

address the question of why esports fans would use a sports bar, and what these space allow that speaks to broader esports practices.

Choice of Space

The selection of each site for an esports event depended, partially, on who was organizing the event. In some cases, the space was selected by an organization or business related to esports. In the case of the LAN center, the location was picked in part because the owner was putting on the tournaments to promote his business. For the *DotA2* tournament, the watch-party had started from a thread on the popular website Reddit, and was a collaborative effort from a local organizer and the game company. It was suggested that the game company, rather than fans, contributed mostly to the selection and promotion the space. In both cases, access to the site seemed to be relatively easy, with little need to justify to the business why an esports gathering was happening. This could be, in part, because authenticity was provided to the event through means of it being a business-to-business transaction.

Yet some of the events were fan-organized, with no outside influence of the game company. In fan-organized events, getting esports into places was not easy due to having to justify esports as a financially viable activity for the sports bar. Alice[4], the organizer of the *League* fan group watch-event in NYC, noted, "I've gotten some rejections, you know, just flat out, 'I don't know what you're talking about so I'm not going to even do it.'" Having undergone the process for many bars, she added:

> I'd spend like twenty minutes convincing this bar owner that this would actually bring people who would spend money on their bar to watch sports. Even this most recent guy… he is stunned every time he walks in and he sees a full bar. Because he goes, people are watching other people play video games? He literally says that to me every time. It's so funny. It's the same thing every time, and at every bar.

[4] Pseudonyms are used to protect privacy of the participants

Part of the obstacle for esports organizers was finding a space that would accept the value of having gamers in a sports space. This may be tied to economic viability as well as existing perceptions of what it means to 'do' video gaming; namely, perceiving video games as something one plays, not one watches. In Alice's case, explaining why people were watching other people play video games was part of navigating the sports bar landscape. There were no blatant allusions to pushback against stereotypes around gaming culture and how that would fit into a space defined for sports. At the same time, based on past research that highlights the ways sports bars are an intersection of hegemonic masculine cultures (e.g. Wenner, 1998), it could be that business owners of sports bars were concerned how esports would fit into the culture of sports bars. By legitimizing the event as both one where there would be economic profit through normative consumptive practices *as well as* an activity that fits in with the social rituals of the sports bar – watching competition on televisions – fan-organized events were capable of positioning esports as fitting into sports bar culture. Still, as is illustrated by Alice's quote, the conflict between perceptions of the 'fit' into sports culture, and specifically sports bar culture, needed to continually be negotiated even once entry was granted.

This brings up the question of why it is worth the struggle to fit esports into a venue where this level of doubt exists. In part it is a practical consideration: esports gathering requires both technology and physical space. As N. Taylor (2011) argues in his analysis of *Halo3* LANs, one vital component is the availability of technology – a sentiment echoed in the participants of these events. When asked about other venue options, participants highlighted that the sports bars were often more equipped to accommodate multiple screens of viewing the same game on, had broadband internet, and enough space to accommodate their group.

Note that in North America, esports is not currently reliably available on cable television. To watch esports requires streaming video online, which then to watch in public is more involved than showing up and asking the sports bar manager to change the channel. It requires a small degree of set up – potentially less technological setup than a LAN (see Ackerman, 2012; N. Taylor, 2011) – multiple monitors to accommodate many viewers, and a reliable broadband connection. Sports bars seem to offer the smoothest transition to these needs in a public venue. This was not always the case though. For the *DotA2* event, while the bar staff could direct two televisions to the online streaming website, the venue lacked a reliable broadband connection which made viewing the tournament difficult. Much as lag is the enemy of professional players, it is the nemesis of those trying to *watch* professional players remotely. Many of the participants turned to watching the event on their phones, and some even left the event because of the poor viewing quality. In contrast, the *League* event seemed to be enjoyed by participants not only because of relatively high-bandwidth (though it did go out briefly), but also the fact that there were wall-to-wall TVs to watch the game on.

Tournaments where participants are playing require even more technology. While the LAN center had ten desktop computers built into the space, a certain amount of setup was required to ensure the games were working, the cameras to broadcast the players were working, and so on. Players also had to ensure that their controllers were connecting properly, or in the case of *Hearthstone,* that they could access their online account. The *Smash* tournament required even more, relying on organizers to bring consoles and monitors into the sports bar. For playing, the sports bar requires more labor and pre-planning than a LAN center, for while it may have broadband internet, multiple televisions, or a room to setup outside technology, participants must

still adjust the space to suit their needs. To balance this labor, there must be some other benefit of organizing play in these spaces.

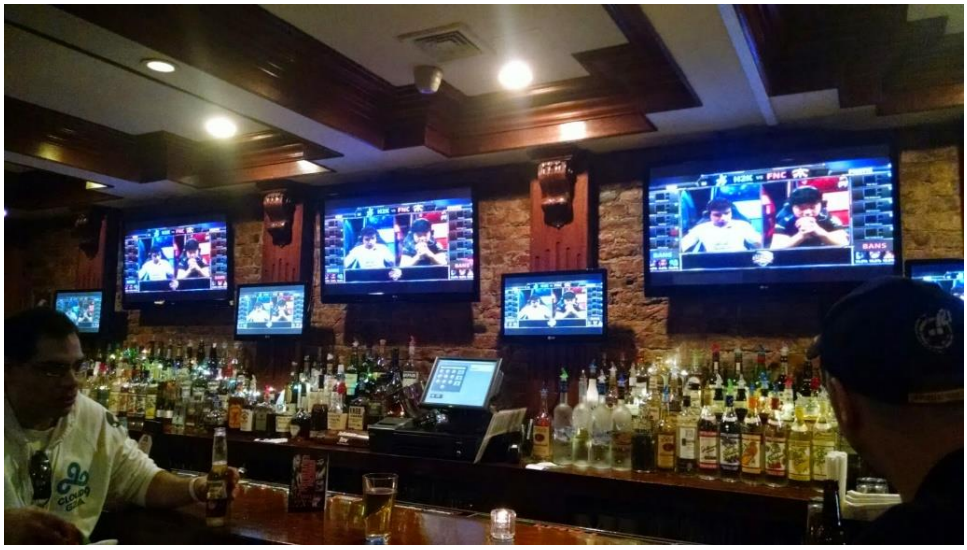


Figure 1 A photograph of the NYC *League* watch-party, illustrating the number of televisions available.

Figure 2 The NYC *League* event took up the second floor of the venue, and had wall-to-wall televisions broadcasting the game. The space allowed participants to sit in groups, at the bar, or stand to watch the game.

Figure 3 The Boston *Street Fighter* competition was hosted at a LAN center. The venue had a seating area (left) with one large TV for viewing. The rest of the space held a 5v5 desktop computer setup, and tables for mobile gaming

Figure 4 The DC *Smash* tournament was held in a private room of a basement of a sports venue. Organizers relied on the stools and tables of the bar, but brought the consoles and monitors.

Space was a key affordance of sports bars. The largest venues in terms of space and participation was the *League* watch-party and the *Smash* tournament, with each boasting over 100 people in attendance. Both were held in separate areas from the rest of the bar, one in a private room and the other on the second floor of the establishment. Both also had a natural division to the space that the organizers could adapt to their own needs. In the case of the *League* event, the room was roughly divided into a group seating area, the bar, and an open area for people to mingle. The group seating area was used primarily by those who came in groups of more than four, and the other half of the room used by those who did not or wanted to socialize outside of their group. For the *Smash* tournament, the space was naturally divided from the rest of the bar. Organizers then created their own divisions, using two rows of tables lined with monitors which were separated by empty space. The space between tables was large, used primarily for watching and talking with other participants. Outside of the room itself, one could order at a bar on the same floor (but a separate area) and then food would be brought into the room. In both circumstances, the ways that participants used the space was both informed and adapted from the given structure of the room.

One of the concerns with using a sports bar is that it will present a barrier towards diverse participation, based on a history of sports bars being male-dominated places (Palmer, 2014; Wenner, 1998). The practices of women at these events did differ, first in their involvement at competitions and second in their involvement at watch-parties.

At the *Smash* tournament, there were many underrepresented minorities and several women present. It was suggested by multiple participants that this representation in participation was something unique to the fighting game community, as the console-based games were more likely to attract racial diversity (see Harper, 2010). With this history, it is likely that any space

that is defined as a fighting game space is open to racial diversity. With regard to women, the ways that female participants were involved in the event seemed to vary. There were women organizers of the event, but they were not the 'head' organizers but did facilitate the tournament through actions like setting up the space per the request of the head organizers. For those who came to play, I closely observed one group of co-ed teenagers, and noticed that the group tended to gravitate towards consoles set up in peripheral positions in the room, separate from the rest of the tournament. The males in this group of teenagers seemed eager to sit at a console, quickly taking position after someone got up, whereas the girls exhibited trepidations – often having to either be encouraged by a male peer or a female member of their group to take a seat. When getting up, they also performed verbal behavior that trivialized their own skill: emphasizing what they did wrong, and deflecting compliments. Further, the females in this group (and in the Smash competition more broadly) seemed to participate less in play and more in spectating.

This behavior was not unusual for male participants; male participants were self-deprecating and certainly watching was a practice used by nearly everyone. Yet given that women were few in number at the tournament events where play was the central focus, the lack of putting oneself out there for play and degradation behavior that occurred after play speak to a lack of "fit" for women in the activity. At the two other competitions, there were no women players. Instead, women were only present in supporting roles – both in the setup of the tournament (e.g. a color commentator, interviewing players after they played but not providing the core caster commentary) as well as there as girlfriends of the players. Taken into stride, these observations echo N. Taylor et al. (2009)'s findings that there are cultural barriers in esports that result women filling support roles and being marginalized in competitive play. Specifically, this suggests that a potential barrier to participation is defining the use as a competitive space. Not all

women may not feel like they can be equal participants in these forms of competitive spaces, where the focus is on competition and the emphasis is on showcasing personal skill in the game.

Yet participation from women may be different when the space is defined as a space for spectatorship, as this changes the type of experience. In the case of *League*, most of the organizers were underrepresented minorities (some female), and there were also several groups of Asian (East and South) and African American participants, as well as white. There were a significant number of women in attendance, coming with either male companions, in a single-gendered group or by themselves to meet other people. At least for this event, neither the venue being a sports bar, the event being defined as a gaming space, nor the intersection with 'sport' spectatorship in public seemed to serve as a barrier to women. It could be some unique element to this specific club, but this suggests that esports events may also provide a greater scope for gendered participation than originally thought (e.g. Taylor & Witkwoski, 2010), particularly when it comes to spectating events.

At the same time, bars were a difficult choice for some of the organizers. For example, at the *Smash* event, there were several underage, preteen or teenage boys playing. This was met with mixed reactions. I observed one woman, who had helped set up the *Smash* event, discussing how she wouldn't let a preteen "wander around DC." Other participants at that event took the age diversity as a positive. Speaking to the ethos of the events, organizer Grayson explained, "Part of what is leading to the growth of the community is getting everyone in the same room together so they could become friends and play." For him, in order to continue on the legacy of *Smash,* it was valuable for the younger generation to become invested in the esport scene. Had the venue been exclusive to 21 years or older, as was the case with the watch-parties, that younger crowd could not have participated.

At the same time, alcohol was part of the appeal to enacting esports in public. At the LAN, the owner was asked at each tournament whether he could provide alcohol to 'facilitate' the gaming experience. He could not, due to license restrictions, although he did provide energy beverages. This may have been part of the draw for the watch-parties, in part because alcohol consumption is tied to other social scripts: related to meeting people or deepening social bonds. The NYC club was an off-shoot from a group that played *League*, where there had also been a desire among the players to watch the major tournaments as a collective – specifically in a sports bar environment. As the organizer Alice explained:

> There's was meetup group already for New York City League of Legends players… and the top event there was League of Libations. It was at a completely different bar, it was, I think, to watch some tournament finals… maybe it wasn't even watching anything, we were just people who played League who wanted to drink together.

For Alice's group, using a sports bar as an esports site provided a means to drink together as well as to watch tournaments. The desire was to layer an existing practice – playing together – with the practice of being together outside of play. In a similar vein, I suggest there were other social practices that are bridge from the practice of spectating and playing esports in public.

Key Practices: Room to Play, Watch, Socialize and Learn

As suggested by research into mega-LAN events (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010), watching was a critical part of the activity across all events. For events like the *Smash* tournament, it was common practice to huddle behind other players during competitions to watch the game. During the tournaments at the LAN center, one concern expressed by fans was that – those not currently competing – were unable to watch the games happening in the viewing area. Regardless of the

event or whether the individual was actively engaging in the act of play, all eyes were on monitors: part of the draw for being at these events was being able to watch other people play.

Watching is a flexible social practice, one that can be multi-tasked with other social practices. While watching, an esports fan was likely to be talking to a friend they brought to the event, drinking, and reacting to the action occurring on the screen. The game itself was the social lubricant for participants as opposed to the sportiness of the tournament. For example, one participant, Sue, had no team she was rooting for when she attended the *LoL* event. She had only been playing for a few months, was new to the concept of esports, and had heard about the watch-party through Facebook. Her attention was not on the game so much as chatting with other attendees. These events were used to make friends, and strengthen social bonds. Two male participants used it as an opportunity to meet for the first time in person, having met previously in-game. They spent time discussing the game, their personal lives, drinking, and talking about their exploits in *LoL*. The event and the space allowed them to integrate several activities intended for social bonding at one time. Later, they made more plans to play in the game. One of the social scripts built into a sports bar is the opportunity to bond (Weed, 2007), whether that be with someone you knew prior to the event or not. Esports, by occupying this space, takes advantage of this social script.

There were other social scripts that seemed to bridge from sports as well. In traditional fan behavior at sports bars, Aden et al. (2009) observed that fans will often greet one another by using introductions that harken back to a college or professional sport fan experience. This social ritual serves to develop a commonality from which conversation can evolve. In a similar vein, one of the common ways I encountered people greeting one another was through the experience of the game itself – not the teams or players, but relying on the assumption that one played the

game you were watching. “How long have you been playing? What is your favorite character to play?” From there, conversation could develop to other shared experiences with the game.

One could argue that these behaviors are similar to how sports are used as an avenue to nostalgically reflect back on past experiences connected to sports (e.g. Aden et. al., 2009; Kraszewski, 2008). But the difference in these events seemed to be that the focus was on their own play, not living through the experience as a spectator but as a player of the game itself. This is best reflected in how fans made commitments to play together with new acquaintances, as opposed to planning to watch together. As a way of socializing with other esports fans, it could be that attending these events serves as much to facilitate a social commitment to playing the game as it does in watching the game.

The phantoms of the social scripts provided by the space were present, but esports gatherings solidified around the play experience and were not strictly analogous to a sports fan form of communication. This further challenged the idea that an event focused on watching would escape fans’ connection to play. Although the space was not constructed around play, play was brought into the event through evoking it as a way of bonding socially.

Yet socialization was different when the event itself focused on play. At the LAN, most of the socialization occurred during lulls in the competition. For the *Street Fighter* game, the viewing area was a primary area of socialization, used to relax and talk with other participants between game sets in a style more evocative of a locker room cooldown. In contrast to the viewing parties, creating a hushed space where those actively playing could concentrate was highly valued. This was particularly pronounced at the *Smash* tournament, where the crowd of watchers seemed to deliberately form a buffer between where the competition was happening and where fans were gathering to socialize.

The flow between socializing, watching, and playing was organic due to the proximity in space. In several instances, once a player had lost, they would get up from the console and turn to the watchers. There, they would discuss how they could have won the game, going over the plays in minute detail. From there, the group may transition to playing again, or watching, or they may gravitate to areas of the room where more vocal socializing or consumption was occurring. While the space itself seemed to be constructed to afford playing, the matches themselves were not the only dominant practice existing in the space.

One final element was key to these esports gatherings: learning about the game. The practice of exchanging information about the game was often used as a liaison for social interaction. At tournaments, this knowledge was often shared directly after playing – going over what they could have done better to improve the game. But it was arguably also central to watching others play and socializing with other participants. The intensity with which players watched others at the tournaments conveyed a sense of deep evaluation of the play occurring. When experience with the game was not shared (e.g. I had only a basic understanding of some of the games), it could prove a potential obstacle for furthering the conversation *or* an invitation to teach the other person more about the game.

I witnessed direct instruction at the watch-parties as well. In most of the groups that I sat with, one person would take on the role as ‘head commentator’: narrating the action as it occurred, or explaining the series of events. It should be noted that all livestreams had paid commentators narrating the plays already; however, as is true in sports, too, this does not stop viewers from also providing color commentary to the action (Wenner, 1995). But instead of being critical of referee calls as a coach (‘C’mon ref, are you blind?’), participants seemed to be critical *as a player*. When poor choices were made, a participant might say, "I could play better

than this!" On numerous occasions the fans would get into discussions over what would have been a more optimal play. This is a common practice in sports, where fans will actively seek knowledge about the game and share their knowledge with other fans (Eastman & Land, 1997; Gantz et. al., 2006). The nuance for esports fans is that this knowledge was also tied back to their experience as a player of the game, as the knowledge exhibited overlapped with not only their understanding of esports teams, players, and tournament structure, but also their knowledge about the game itself through the lived experience as an active player.

Performing Sport?

One way to sports fans convey their fandom in intermediate places is through visual culture, to set the tone of a venue as being intended for sport. For example, a space can be defined as a sports space through decoration: team colors, banners, etc. Fans wearing team jerseys is a powerful way for people to display their fan identity in public, a social script used to signal the saliency of the sports fan identity and as well as their ties to a fan community (Eastman & Land, 1997). These forms of visual culture were, for the most part, absent from esports events. No event was decorated, and few had visual displays of fandom. In NYC, a few fans wore team jerseys; no one at *DotA2* watch-party wore a team jersey. One or two individuals at either the *Street Fighter* and *Smash* competitions wore a team jersey for a team they played on themselves. At all the events, a larger portion wore video game-themed t-shirts or shirts from geek culture (e.g. *Star Wars*). If the display of team jerseys is a way of legitimizing oneself as a sports fan, the visual culture displayed at these events suggests instead that participants were legitimizing themselves as gamers – not fans.

Conclusion

What was most surprising about these esports gatherings was the ways that they reflected the multitude of practices of an esports fan: the desire to view competitive gaming, to play against one another, to consume, to learn, and to socialize are all affordances the fans in these spaces exhibited to different degrees. Yet this research causes me to question what the priority of those practices are for the esports community. In spaces that could not fully accommodate certain practices, such as the LAN center in consumption and watching, or the watch-parties in terms of playing, the participants seemed to organically accommodate those absent practices through communication.

It could be, as Simon (2007) suggests, that these practices are a part of a larger human socialization process: consumption, learning, social bonding, and so forth. But instead these practices seem to emphasize the significance of the video game player identity threaded throughout these practices. Even when play was not the activity at the event (e.g. a watch-party), it was brought into the event through conversation. Arguably, the act of watching was also tied to play. Watching a tournament of professional esports players in action was brought back to the player's own experience through critiques of how they would perform in the same circumstances or how they *knew* from experience that it was a poor game strategy. This is not what sports spectatorship looks like. Esports participants embodied player, commentator and fan. This confluence of identity is significant; in sports, a sports fan is defined by their spectatorship, not by their play (Whannel, 2009). To integrate play intimately into the spectating experience suggests that esports is not 'doing' sports fandom even as it tries to 'do' sports (Witkowski, 2012).

This was surprising, as using spaces like the sports bar may suggest that esports is legitimizing itself as a spectator sport. But it is one thing to use the space, and another to adopt

the social practices embedded in the space. Research has highlighted that there are ways sports fans use a space that facilitate the connection to a team and showcase a fan identity (Aden et. al., 2009; Eastman & Land, 1997; Kraszewski, 2008; Weed, 2006, 2008). Esports fans were selective about which practices to embody while stepping into the sports fan role. Alcohol was consumed, but in moderation. Common practices like shared greetings were tailored to the esports fan experience, focusing on the act of playing. Knowledge acquisition and information exchanges focused on the act of playing, with exchanges about players or teams seeming to run second.

Due in part to the long history of sports bars being defined as a masculine-dominated space, one concern about using this type of place is that it may limit participation, particularly of women and minorities. Instead, particularly in the well-established clubs, this did not so much seem to be the case. Where women seemed to be absent, or struggle in their participation, was when the event intersected with competition. This suggests, much like Sveningsson (2012) and N. Taylor et al. (2009) propose, that there are certain gender barriers built into competitive gaming. This research highlights that this barriers might be negotiated when the event either has prominent minority organizers, or when the emphasis is on spectatorship. Watching provides a more direct avenue to forms of social bonding that may be less masculine-dominated. It may also suggest that the sports bar itself has begun to open up to be a less male-dominated space, when it is especially linked with these forms of social scripts. Instead, the major barrier that esports is having to negotiate is that – by using bars – this limits participation for younger fans. This is particularly limiting when esports is coming together to play, as LANs have a history of younger participation (Ackerman, 2012) and where the game relies on a younger generation to perpetuate

its growth as an esport. As esports negotiates its place in public, one consideration might be how this barrier is being negotiated.

If esports fans are not using sports bars exactly as a sport fan would, it calls into question why they would use the sports bar at all. In many ways, the sports bar afforded more latitude for a diversity of practices than the LAN center did. The space provided a more flexible configuration, and the social scripts embedded in the space – although adapted to the esports experience – provided a backbone and structure to the event. Sports bars, as a center for socialization around viewing competitions, facilitate many of the needs of esports fans wanting to gather in public. For many fans, it is not just a good seat at the bar, but a chance to expand their experience as an esports spectator *and* player.

Chapter 4: Modelling Fandom: Esports Fans by Involvement and Investment

Abstract

This study focuses on understanding the case of fans of competitive video gaming (esports) to explore potential bridges between sports and pop culture fan studies. Esports presents a complication in our understanding of fans in that these fans derive from a community of active play and layer that identity with spectatorship. To examine esports fandom, this study expands on Busse and Gray's (2011) proposed model of fandom, which hinges on the axes of involvement and investment, to demonstrate the ways fan identity can be reflected through both the everyday practice of fans and the consumptive practices. Using this model allows this research to bridge from pop culture fan studies to sports fan taxonomies (e.g. Giulianotti, 2002). This study uses interviews with fans and photo-elicitation of their self-identified esports spaces to better illustrate the ways in which fans prioritize particular practices, and how that prioritization of practice is reflected through the use of space and daily activities. The findings suggest that not only are investment and involvement intertwined, but forms of involvement may also overlap to construct a fan's identity.

Introduction

The study of fans, and defining who is a fan, has largely come from the desire to separate fans from the broader media audience (Busse & Gray, 2011; Giulianotti, 2002; Hills, 2005, 2013; Jenkins, 1992; Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). One way to differentiate a fan from a non-fan is according to the direct, consistent involvement with their chosen fandom and media object (Gray, 2003, p. 74). Fans are not just consumers, but are active in their analysis of the media object and engagement with the surrounding community. Often, this form of engagement is reflected through their habitual, everyday practices towards their fandom (Couldry, 2004; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Sandvoss, 2005). In studies of popular media studies, fan practices are often defined by engagement in a community and through the production of fan material (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Jenkins, 1992; Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). The extent and manifestation of these practices demonstration the connection that fans have to the media object.

But defining fandom through the axes of communal activity and production limits the scope of who fits into the fan paradigm (Busse & Gray, 2011; Ford, 2014; Hills, 2005; Sandvoss, 2005; Schimmel, Harrington, & Bielby, 2007). Not all self-identifying fans will consider themselves to be part of a broader fan community (Hills, 2005; Sandvoss & Kearn, 2014). Further, not all fan practices may have tangible outcomes for researchers to examine (Ford, 2014), and by expanding the scope of what constitutes a fan practice may instead allow us to understand the different ways fans orient towards a media object (Couldry, 2004).

One way may be to bridge between different genres of fan studies (Schimmel et al., 2007). For example, although sport fans can be involved through watching mediated sport, it is just one aspect of engaging with sport. A central way of defining sports fans lies in how they watch sport, their involvement in a community of sports fans, and the centrality of their actions

to both supporting specific teams and displaying their attachment to those teams (Giulianotti, 2002). Sports fan practices manifest through the emotional or economic investment in the sport, and how that investment is embodied through practice. Building on Schimmel et al.'s (2007) argument, I suggest it is necessary for sports fan studies and pop culture fan studies to be put into conversation with one another, especially as there are fan communities that intersect both.

One example of such a community is competitive video gaming (esports) fandom. Esports is an activity that intersects both video game and sports culture (N. Taylor, Jensen, & de Castell, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2013), fitting the definition of sport (Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010; Wagner, 2006) yet rising from video game culture (Borowy & Jin, 2013). The growth of esports depends significantly not just on those who play esports, but those who *watch* others play competitively (Casselman, 2015; Cheung & Huang, 2011; Jin, 2010; Taylor, 2012). Yet while the growth of esports is dependent on the growth of spectatorship (Taylor, 2012), gamer identity, and by extension esport fan identity, is defined by dedication to the act of playing video games and the acts of consuming material goods in geek culture (Shaw, 2011, 2012; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010).

Esports fandom allows us to explore potential connections between pop culture fan studies and sports fan studies. To draw these connections, I examine esports fans using a model proposed by Busse and Gray (2011): that is to understand fans through forms of investment and involvement. Using this model, I will demonstrate how existing models of pop culture fan studies (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998) and sports fan studies (Giulianotti, 2002) can work in conversation with one another to understand the everyday practices of fans.

A Model for Fan Practice: Investment and Involvement

Busse and Gray's (2011) proposed model defines fan identity as the 'the overlapping but not necessarily interdependent axes' of involvement and investment – the breadth and depth of fan practices (p. 426). Involvement may be the length of time of engagement, ties to a community (imagined or actualized), or the production of fan artifacts. Investment is exemplified as a deep emotional or intellectual attachment, the affective nature of their tie to the media object, and time spent in fan practices. A fan who rates highly on both axes is one for whom fandom is central to their identity.

Busse and Gray originally proposed their model as a way of expanding on the work of Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998). Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that fan identity is set on a continuum of an individual coming out of the audience, beginning as a fan and ending as a petty producer of fan texts for a fan community (p. 138). As someone may become more involved in fandom, they become more engaged with interpreting the media object, invested in the community of fans surrounding it, and engaged in producing fan texts for that same community. The practices are intertwined with one another. In contrast, in Busse and Gray's model, involvement can include aspects of community and production, while affording latitude for the depth of their investment – the two forms of involvement do not need to be tied to one another.

This is valuable, as the emphasis on production and community may be problematic for studying fans. As Ford (2014) argues, 'As a field, we cannot lose sight of the everyday process of fandom – to value output over process' (p. 65). While it is convenient to focus on fans who produce something tangible (Gray, 2003), this causes us to hone-in on fan practices that may be genre specific. Similarly, fixating on fans as relative to a community is problematic. Not all self-

identifying fans will consider themselves to be part of a community; namely, their relationship with the text is more important than any attachment to a wider breadth of people (Sandvoss & Kearn, 2014). Busse and Gray argue that the fan does not have to directly interact with a community:

> Thus, the lonely fan reading, watching, and/or enjoying fannish products is in fact often participating in an imagined community of other fans – even when they are not explicitly interacting as part of a community per se, they may think of themselves as part of that community. (Busse & Gray, 2011, p. 434)

Instead, building on the work of Sandvoss (2005), Busse and Gray argue that the imagined community is enough as a form of fan involvement. This is significant as ordinary fans may not be intimately tied to a community (Sandvoss & Kearn, 2014). Instead, fans may actively distance themselves from a community to normalize their own everyday fan practices. The extent of involvement in fan practices in Sandvoss and Kearn's study may be influenced by more direct social connections, such as friends, romantic partners, and family. In the application of involvement and investment to esports fans, one thing to examine is both the extent of community involvement as well as determining if there are other ways to understand potential significant social influences.

A weakness of this model is the lack of grounding for what involvement and investment may look like in practice. To fully explore the merits of this model, I propose to ground it in the case of everyday practices of esports fans. The everyday practices of fans are a way of consistently constructing fan identity. As Sandvoss (2005) illustrates, fandom is a social process (p. 173) and the structure of a fan's consistent consumption informs the weight, shape, and depth of fan identity. One of the defining features of being a fan is the direct, dedicated consumption of the media object (Gray, 2003; Gray, Sandvoss & Kearn 2017). This can not only be reflected in

their direct engagement with the fan object, but how the fan identity is reflected in other aspects of the mundane day-to-day.

One way to ground this day-to-day, habitual practice is to consider the way fandom is reflected in material possessions. For example, Fiske (1992) argues that one form of social capital fans cultivate is through the collection of material goods:

> A habitus involves not only the cultural dimensions of taste, discrimination, and attitude towards the cultural objects or events, but also the social dimensions of economics (and education) upon which those tastes are mapped: a habitus is thus both a mental disposition and a 'geographical' disposition in the social space. (p. 43)

While recognizing the significance of acquiring cultural objects to fans, Fiske goes on to trivialize their significance by referring to these collections as 'cheap.' This reflects an overall concern in the approach to fan studies, in that while we recognize the importance of the everyday consumption of fandom as a reflection of fan practice and orientation to fandom, we cannot shake the sense that capitalistic tendencies degrade the value of fandom.

Yet these forms of consumption are critical to fan practice. Harrington and Bielby (1995) illustrate that the way individual soap opera fans construct their daily practice provides room and agency for their fandom, and that those practices can shape the domestic spaces, such as in the 'shrine' to a celebrity or in the rhythms of the household. These ways of using space provide a lens for understanding what constructs the identity of a soap opera fan and their individualized viewing practices. Similarly, I argue that to embrace everyday fan practices is to also incorporate the way fans construct their daily practice, reflected in part through their use of space and consumption, and not degrade the value of those practices. Instead, these practices can be used to

highlight the depth of investment in a fandom, or the different practices through which a fan is involved in their fandom.

These ways to conceptualize the core of fan practices are particularly important to build bridges to other genres of fan studies, such as sports fan studies, where the specific modes of practice may be different. By integrating Busse and Gray's model with research into sports and pop culture fans, the intent here is to demonstrate how we can begin to conceptualize fans across entertainment media (Schimmel et al., 2007). This integration is important as fan communities may often adopt practices that do not fit into neat categories of pop culture versus sport, such as fans of professional wrestling who produce their own performances (Ford, 2014) or competitive video gaming which adopts norms from both video game culture and sports culture (N. Taylor et al., 2009; Taylor, 2012).

Bridging to Sport Fans Studies

Key to understanding engagement as a sports fan is to note that it is not about playing in the sport itself; sports fans are defined by spectatorship, separated from active participants of playing a sport (Whannel, 2006). A sport fan is therefore understood with respect to their role in supporting professional athletics and being a consumer of professional athletics (Crawford, 2004). For example, Giulianotti (2002) proposes a model to parse the 'true' sports fans from more casual sports consumers. To create clear categories of separation, Giulianotti uses the dual axis of *traditional versus consumer* and *hot versus cool* to define fans. A more traditional sports spectator is someone whose practice centers on aspects such as attending in-person events, whereas a more consumer sports spectator has less direct engagement, such as purchasing merchandise to invoke their fan identity. The hot and cool categories are reflective of the intensity of the relationship and the strength of fan identity. For example, a traditional/cool

alignment is someone who may not be investing time in a specific community, but instead spread themselves widely across multiple, more peripheral practices to engage with sports (e.g. reading online sports columns). At its core, this taxonomy is based on how a fan is involved in sports, how closely they identify with the sport, and how traditional that identity is based on their consumption practices.

There are specific drawbacks to the model, such as searching for the 'authentic' fan (Williams, 2007), which often fails to capture the fluidity of the identity of being a fan (Dixon, 2016). Per this model, the most authentic fan identities are ones where the consumptive is embedded in 'traditional' community acts, such as going to a sports club, bar or stadium, which stigmatizes fandom that occurs online (c.f. Gibbons & Dixon, 2010; Dixon, 2013, 2016) and downplays certain forms of consumption as a less authentic way of embodying fan identity (Dixon, 2016; Stone, 2007; Williams, 2007), such as the purchasing of sport paraphernalia without participating in an active sports community. Yet by unpacking consumption as a distinguishing mark between different modes of fandom, the model highlights that consumption is a vital layer to fan identity, understood best when contextualized in its relationship with other ways of being a practicing fan, e.g. watching and communal practices.

One way to afford latitude in understanding contemporary forms of engagement and consumption is through an intersection of Giulianotti's (2002) matrix of traditional/consumer and hot/cool, and Busse and Gray's (2011) interconnected axes of involvement and investment. In this case, I conceptualize involvement as being analogous to the type of engagement, encompassing the axis of traditional versus consumer. In turn, investment, being analogous to what a fan sinks into their fan identity, is like the hot versus cool axis. Much as Busse and Gray argue, involvement can therefore be represented in a diversity of acts that include virtual

participation in an ‘imagined community,’ such as the participation in online forums. With regard to investment, Giulianotti’s axes of hot and cool offer insight that Busse and Gray do not into how a fan might chose to invest deeply in specific acts or spread themselves across a multitude of practices. Further, Giulianotti’s work reflects on the context of space in consumption and how that may relate to practice. This is critical to exploring the case of esports, as it provides a wide lens to examine fan practices and to understand how they may relate to one another.

The Case of Esports

Esports is where video games are played in competitive sports-like tournaments. Its popularity is growing rapidly, with ESPN reporting upwards of 27 million viewers tuning in for a single tournament (Casselman, 2015). In many ways, esports is a sport (Wagner, 2006), including the professionalization of players and the infrastructure that surrounds professional play (Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010) and the connection to physicality (Witkowski, 2012). Yet it is more apt to conceptualize esports as the intersection of sports and gaming culture, presenting two communities with distinct yet similar practices (N. Taylor, Jenson, & De Castell, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2012).

Yet unlike in sports where play is more distinctly separated from spectatorship (Whannel, 2006), research suggests that in esports watching is intertwined with play and that esports fans are often players of the game they are a fan of before becoming a spectator (Taylor, 2012). To put a twist on Harrington and Bielby (1995), esports fans are players first, and then esports is integrated into their lives (p. 177). One reasons esports fans will watch is to acquire knowledge about the game itself (Cheung & Huang, 2011; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2016). This leads to a unique

dimension of esports fans in that they are drawn to learn from what they are watching and then apply it to their own play.

Interrogating the identity of an esports fan therefore necessitates understanding what it means to be a part of gaming culture and, specifically, what it means to be a 'gamer' or active player of video games. Shaw (2013) argues that two practices central to understanding gamer identity are a) the playing of games and b) the consumption of video games and surrounding geek culture, namely spending time and money on gaming:

> … being a gamer is tied to a particular level of time commitment ('it's my main hobby'), but also an economic investment in clothing, types of games, and in subscription-based PC games that demand time, money, and expertise to navigate.' (Shaw, 2013, Performing Subcultural Capital)

Play and time to play are so critical to the identity of a gamer that those who feel they do not play 'enough' often do not consider themselves gamers (Shaw, 2011). Dedication to playing is central to the identity of gamer, and when that dedication is not there, even those who may play video games can reject the label of 'gamer' due to their participation being more casual. If esports fans come from gaming culture, we might expect that one relevant part of their involvement is a similar level of dedication to play. Determining how esports fans are involved and where they invest their practice will be critical to understanding how play intersects with other daily practices, and whether similar dedication is applied to those practices.

One way to understand how esports fans involve and invest in their fandom is to reflect on their everyday practice and everyday spaces (Harrington & Bielby, 1995). Consumption is another key aspect of gamer identity (Shaw, 2010, 2012, 2013), and one that is often under-analyzed. Consumptive practices can either focus on the video games themselves or surrounding

geek culture such as figurines or sci-fi t-shirts (Shaw, 2012, 2013). Another way of understanding gamers is through a reflection on their domestic spaces (Bryce & Rutter, 2003) and their technology (Simon, 2007). One way to understand the investment of the space is through the locality, or its position within the domestic sphere (Bryce & Rutter, 2003). Much as in Harrington and Bielby's work, the place in which a gaming space is designated speaks to how it is socially positioned in the home as well; namely, whether it is a shared or private space and its overall use (multi or single use) may speak to the sociality of the fandom or the level of investment for that fan. A shared, centrally located space where the fan has limited use of the space to engage with their fan object limits the agency of that fan, and they may find ways to co-opt their agency in other ways. Potentially unique to esports is the use of technology (e.g. computer or gaming console) is a central form of investment for many gamers (Simon, 2007). Gamers may heavily modify their systems, not only to increase performance of play but also to deepen their ties to the culture of gaming. The level of investment in these systems may serve as a means to understanding the scope practice, namely, whether esports fans are more committed to being a part of the playing elements of esports or the spectatorship elements of esports. Consumption, in this sense, can be a way of understanding the depth to which an esports fan will invest in practices and potentially signal the prioritization of the way a fan is involved in esports.

By tracking the ways that esports fans are involved in esports, we can better understand the overlap between different forms of involvement and explore the ways that investment can be reflected. Further, by analyzing the ways in which esports fans engage with their fandom and how deeply through an examination of their mundane practices, we can hone in how the tensions of sport and video game identity manifest in everyday esports fans.

Method

The method for data collection for this project was semi-structured interviews of adult self-identifying esports 'fans' (Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006), much as past studies have focused on self-identified gamers (Shaw, 2011, 2013). In order to participate in the study, individuals had to self-identify as being a fan of esports. A goal was to interview fans not from one specific game, but from multiple games, to avoid the data being skewed to one type of fan experience in esports. Fans were selected through a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. For convenience sampling, I found fans at public esports events. For snowball sampling, I used my social network or asked participants from the convenience sample for referrals. Although not an esports fan, I am involved in online gaming and as a result had access to esports fans within that community.

The demographic spread of the 16 interviews was as follows: three women, the rest men, with most interviewees identifying as white, with two Asian and one Hispanic participant. The age range for interviewees was from 22 to 34. Occupations ranged from an administrative assistant to a business owner to a software developer. One issue that became clear early on was the gender skew of the sample. In part, this may be due to the convenience sampling procedure – women may not be as active in attending public esports events. At the same time, the primary investigator reached out to her own social network to attempt to correct this imbalance, which seemed to result in a larger skew. Future research might solicit interviews through popular sites, such as Reddit, or work with game developers to balance this effect and get a broader sample.

Interviews were primarily conducted through Skype, with two face-to-face interviews. All participants agreed to be recorded, and all appear below with pseudonyms reflective of their gender identity. The interviews lasted anywhere from an hour to three hours total. The interviews

were semi-structured, with open-ended questions following the process outlined by Charmaz and Belgrave (2012). Interviews began with general questions about the individual's background (How did you get started in esports?) to information about playing (e.g. How often do you play? Do you play any games competitively?) or watching (e.g. How often do you watch? What makes esports fun to watch?), depending on the flow of conversation. More reflective questions were held off until the end of the interview, such as behaviors specific to being a fan (e.g. Other than watching and playing games, what do you think an esports fan does? Who is the average esports fan?).

Participants were also asked to send in photos of their esports space, the space they often 'did' esports. Photo-elicitation has been demonstrated to be an effective way of taking inventory of spaces that interviewees may take for granted (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004), as well as an effective method in interviews to expand on questions (Harper, 2002). Many interviewees did not send photos of their spaces – instead, as most interviews were done online, the esports space was the one they were sitting in for the interview and they would turn the camera to show the space. Only those who voluntary sent a photo are displayed in the analysis. Whether with photos or with a live demonstration this part of the interview was used to discuss their personal practice with regard to esports, asking specific questions about the space to better understand the experience of esports fans (e.g. Can you tell me about what's in this space? How do you use the space?). Once the interviews were completed, they were coded iteratively (Wolcott, 1994).

Esports Fans: Emerging from Gamers, Layered with Sport

One of the first questions posed to participants was how they became involved in esports, which emerged from their experience as a game player. "I've been playing games for as long as I

can remember," Liam observed in response, recounting his gaming experience before leading into his esports experience. This is likely because all participants came to esports as an extension of their history with game play. Most of the male participants had grown up playing video games. Noah, for example, first started watching because he went to grandparents and they had an NES. Then he went to arcades when he was in high school. Several years and many consoles and computers later, he got into esports, attributing awareness of esports to Xbox Live which had competitive rankings publicly available to all players. From their living room, a player could see how they compared to other players regionally and nationally. With Xbox Live, Noah saw himself in Halo at the top of the ladder standings – which was motivation to keep going. In college, Noah shifted focus from console gaming to computer gaming, getting involved in League of Legends in part due to the community, "The esports community really started ramping up from League." Already, this suggested not only support for Taylor (2012)'s findings – in that esports fans were players of the game first – but also that the identity of being an esports fan was difficult to separate from the identity of a gamer.

Yet it was not always the case that they had an extensive history with a specific game or title before becoming a fan of esports. While many of the male participants could recount experience with video game competitions from a young age, this was not the case for the women in the sample. Research has long suggested that there are multiple layers of cultural norms that erect barriers between young girls and playing games: whether that be the rightness of using computing technology (e.g. Hayes, 2008; Margolis & Fisher, 2003), cultural perceptions of the appropriate use of leisure time (e.g. Winn, & Heeter, 2009), or the stigma within gaming culture of women as being 'casual' or less committed players (c.f. Yee, 2014). As a result, girls may find it difficult to engage at younger ages with gaming in comparison to their male peers (Hayes,

2008; Margolis & Fisher, 2003; Winn, & Heeter, 2009). Although a small sample, these interviews suggest that women who wish to be involved in esports must surmount the cultural norms have historically erected barriers between gaming and young girls.

Olivia, for instance, got involved in college with little prior experience in gaming. Her partner at the time was playing *League of Legends*, so a prime motivation in taking up gaming as a part of her leisure time was to spend more time with him. This, in turn, led to esports as an effort to learn more about her leisure activity. As with the men in the sample, the more she watched videos of other people playing, the stronger her ties to esports. "The more I got into it, the more I started watching the 'pros,'" she said. This, in turn, led to other forms of involvement, such as buying game related t-shirts, paraphernalia, and attending live events. This still illustrates how playing the game could be used as a vehicle through which an individual became interested in esports, but also served to undermine the notion that all participants had an extensive history with video game culture prior to their involvement in esports.

Esports fans were also not just involved in video gaming prior to becoming involved in esports. Many informants had a history with playing sport growing up – with only a few exceptions, nearly all the male participants had some experience with American Little League baseball, football, track, soccer, or so forth. Many of those informants identified as casual fan of sports: Noah played sports growing up and actively enjoyed football, William and Evan were die-hard fan of sport, Ava enjoyed soccer, and so on. When asked if there was any difference between an esports fan and a sports fan, Ava argued they were largely the same and illustrated her point with an example from one of the first watch parties she attended in a sports bar:

> The main difference honestly is the medium, the sport that they're watching, because other than that I wouldn't say there's difference at all. I wouldn't think anyone can say there's difference if they watched us watch the game. It's the same tension, it's the same excitement, it's the same anxiousness, it's the same vigor – it's all the same. In fact, it was funny, at my first watch party that had like 20 people in at the most? The manager was skeptical when they first let me in, but we ended up making more noise than anyone else at the bar. And there was a Knicks game going on, there was a hockey game, there was like a bunch of stuff. And no one was excited as we were. So much so, that like someone on the other side of the bar apparently took the manager aside and was like, 'What the hell are they watching? We need to know what that is!'

The connection between sports fan identity and esports fan identity was conveyed partially through the ways informants could illustrate esports fan behaved like other sports fans. Informants used other elements to argue the sportiness of esports: dedication to the game, the strategy involved, and the response from fans.

The connection to this identity is critical, because those who lacked a personal history with sports culture had to navigate certain expectation for involvement in the community. For example, Emma was not a sports fan. "A lot of people who are into esports are equally into sports. They can spout off the information about sports as well as esports," observed Emma. With people who are sports fans already, she argued they have the skill to memorize wins/losses, team standings, and so on. Not having the background to know how to memorize this information, she had trouble learning how to retain "sports-like" knowledge, "I try to keep up as much as I can, like watching on my lunch break."

For Emma, who came into esports as an adult and did not have the background of sport, she highlighted the difficulty she often had in navigating social situations with other esports fans. Attending events, she often relied on a (male) friend who had a much more expansive knowledge of the game to explain the action. For her, sports complicated the relationship with video gaming

culture. Adopting sports created a scaffold for what authentic fan practice might look like. Using this, Emma highlighted the need to seek out further information about esports on her lunch break in order to be an authentic fan.

For most informants, they came into esports through being involved in play. Yet using sports to frame esports began to highlight practices that did not seem to draw on that experience. Therefore, to understand esports fan practice, I will first explore the practice of play and then highlight other forms of esports fan practice. It was only these 'beyond play' practices that truly highlighted the ways esports fans increased their involvement in esports.

Fan Practice: Playing, Watching and Beyond

Playing

Play was the foundation of esports fan involvement, and one that fans emphasized they were committed to more so than any other activity. Most fans reported playing a minimum of one hour a day with most reporting at least three hours daily play during the week. Liam, for example, reported that he had played 40 hours of games in the two weeks prior to the interview. If investment is in part about reflecting on the valiance of a fan practice, commitment to play was a form of investment for the esports fan. The emphasis on play may be partially attributed to gamer identity, where gamers will emphasize a dedication to playing video games (Shaw, 2012). Yet this is complicated by the fact that not all interviewees *themselves* identified as gamers. Jacob, for example, who was a former competitive player of the console game *Super Smash Brothers*, argued that he was not a 'gamer.'

> I don't consider myself a gamer, which is an interesting distinction. I played a few games a lot. Like growing up I was into Nintendo and Sega, like everyone else. But when I started turned sixteen I stopped playing a lot of games. I just played a lot of a few games that I really latched onto. And that's been the case for me, still today.

Per Jacob, to be a gamer is not only to invest significant amounts of time in the act of playing games, but in a diversity of games. As he played primarily just one title, he did not identify with the gamer identity. Caden, another *Smash* player who very rarely played games beyond the Smash titles, suggested that those involved in *Smash* as an esport did not always play other games. He attributed this partially to a combination of the age of the game (over fifteen years old) and the age of the players (in their late 20's and 30's). As people became adults with limited time, Caden argued, there was less room in their schedule for gaming, so they focused on one title. The commitment was still present, as well as ties to the *Smash* community, but the diversity of practices present in the atypical 'gamer' was not. So while gaming culture, as embodied through Shaw's (2012, 2013) work, may afford a lens for analysis, it is critical not to overstep and suggest that all esports fans are self-identified 'gamers'.

Participants in this study seemed to fall on a spectrum when it came to how diverse their playing practices were. On one end of the spectrum, there were a few participants that seemed to focus on a handful of gaming titles. On the other end, there were participants who played an extensive range of titles. Opposite to Jacob and Caden, Bart was an example of someone who played a wide range of games, from first person shooters to RPGs. "I'm playing like 500 games and not completing any of them," Bart observed. Consuming a wide range of games, and the act of playing them, was very central to his daily practice. But when it came to esports, Bart was surprisingly specific about the games he focused on. He was mostly interested in esports that were fighting games, yet he only played one title related to that genre, "Mortal Kombat is about the only one….I typically don't go out of my way to play fighting games, but I enjoy them when they come around."

Part of Bart's focus on fighting game was due to, in part, his understanding that esports was primarily constructed of the three dominant genres: fighting games, MOBAs, and real time strategy games. Out of those genres, fighting games were the only ones of interest to him. The lack of specificity Bart showed in play was reversed when it came to watching, where he was highly specialized. In contrast, Jacob was far more willing to watch esports even if it was not a game that he played. In this way, Bart and Jacob seemed to serve as opposite ends of a continuum of involvement when it came to play and spectating: dedication to one genre or game could manifest in either activity, as well as lack of specificity.

Most fans fell somewhere between these two opposites when it came to their play and esports spectating experiences. On the surface, they seemed to follow the expectation of past research that fans watch to bring back to their own play (Taylor, 2012), namely, that fans would be an active player of the title that they were a fan of. Representative of a more middle of the road experience, Mason played a wide range of games casually but also remained dedicated to playing and following some of the top two to three esports titles. He was partially selective when it came to where he devoted his time to spectating:

> It's not that I love esports as a concept necessarily. I love certain games. And I can respect low-skill floor, high-skill ceilings in games. Where they are accessible, you can get in there, you can putz around, and you can see what could be done. Whether you can do it is a different story. When you have that sort of space, it's appealing to me to see what the best in the world look like.

Esports were tied to his playing experience, in that he could see the potential in the game, while spectating was tied to wanting to see that potential unlocked. As Olivia explained, "You see these amazing plays, and you can learn the character and how they build them and how they maneuver them." For her, watching was tied in part to learning about the game and see advanced

strategy. Based on being an active player of the game, a paramount reason for being involved in spectatorship was due to wanting to see the game played at a level they might not otherwise be able to achieve.

At the same time, some fans were involved in watching games that they were not actively players of themselves. Ava demonstrated the diversity of games she both watched and played:

> I play League of Legends primarily, but I also play when I get the chance, I like to play Counter Strike... Hearthstone I play some. I used to play a lot of World of Warcraft. But in terms of esports, I follow primarily Counter Strike, I follow League of Legends and I follow fighting games some. I don't play them as often, but I follow their competitive scene.

For Ava, the games she watched were not limited to the games she was dedicated to playing, a common sentiment among participants. Liam explained his involvement in each esports was for different reasons, depending on the game itself:

> Hearthstone I find easy to watch because it is low-commitment…I watch it for fun, it's just easy to watch, it doesn't ask a lot. I can do other things and have Hearthstone up. For example, playing other turn-based games, even Hearthstone itself. I keep it on in the background at work (less now then I used to). I could passively watch it all day and it's easy. I can't do it with more serious games, because you have to focus on what's happening.
>
> It is very fun to watch professional level *DoTA2* because the game is hard. *CS:GO* is a hard game. Smash Brothers: Melee is a hard game. You are watching professional players doing stuff you can only dream of. You can either spend the thousands and thousands of hours practicing, or you can root for your favorite player and you can live sort of vicariously through them.

For Liam, each game drew him for a different reason. For some of the games he watched it was about being able to see a game played at a level he would likely never achieve.

Although participants watched games they were not actively playing, no participants watched a game that was completely foreign to them. Baseline knowledge was necessary for

enjoyment. Having at least some preliminary experience around in the game (or a game in that genre) was necessary to appreciate, even understand, what was going on. As Liam explained: “Once you understand the game...not only the basic rules, and how to win, the basic meta, the 'how to not suck' ...then it becomes very interesting to watch professional players.” He went further to note that, with that familiarity, it was meaningful when something ‘unique’ happened in a professional game. For most participants, the fan's experience as a player served as a frame of reference to be able to understand what they were viewing. What attracted fans to esports was being able to see the game's ‘true potential’ unlocked, playing vicariously through watching others. The reason watching esports was exhilarating was that they, as players, wanted to see things happen within the context of the game that they had or could not experience for themselves.

An interesting element of watching esports, as opposed to playing esports titles, was that it offered more latitude in terms of time commitment. Play was limited to a time and a place when one had the technological affordances of a computer, whereas with current technology, watching could be done anywhere. Unlike play, however, watching could be – and often was -- overlaid with other forms of involvement in esports, such as gathering information about the game, strategy, esports players, and upcoming tournaments.

Recall Emma’s discussion of the barriers to being involved in esports, linked to the need to learn how to retain sports knowledge. For esports fans, knowledge was a cultural capital that needed to be gathered iteratively throughout the day. Fiske (1992) argues that this form of acquisition of textual knowledge is used to assert participation in the original text, as well as deepen the tie to the media object (p. 43). For esports fans, the habitualization of practice evoked a way of signaling their allegiance and dedication the fandom *as well as* a vital tool needed to

participate as a fan. The expectation of this form of cultural capital can prove to be a barrier for some fans. Emma argued that, if she did not spend her lunch breaks at work diligently watching and reading up on esports, it would truncate her ability to converse and understand esports on the same level as other (male) fans.

Most participants had a similar ritual, with some even being able to listen to esports matches in the background while doing other work. This is an example of how investment and involvement can intertwine. Dedication to being involved in esports through watching and information gathering was tied to investing time out of the workday to these practices. For those who could not maintain consistent connection to the fandom throughout the day, there was a loss of investment. Olivia used to watch regularly at work, but recently her employer had blocked streaming video and gaming websites. As a result, she argued she was cut off from vital information that resulted in direct losses, such as not being able to keep up with information about teams and players for her fantasy league.

Watching throughout the day was vital to remaining ingrained in esports. Other fans developed workarounds so they did not miss out on vital information gathering time at work. Ethan worked in a retail position, and would use his phone to stream while waiting at checkout for customers. Similarly, Bart would take his lunchbreaks away from his building to watch streams on his phone or get in a quick esports website update.

Watching and gathering information about esports, in whatever way possible, was central to their everyday practice. Working around barriers at work was seen as one way to demonstrate their investment and commitment as an esports fan. In part, this could be because the information was tied to their own practice of play (Taylor, 2012). At the same time, some of the information consumed was more about the players, teams, and tournaments in the esports community –

information peripheral to the act of playing, but critical to the act of being a supporter of professionalized sport (Giulianotti, 2002). The very fact that fans sought to remain involved in esports throughout the day in these ways was one way to demonstrate the importance of these practices as a way to be involved in esports fandom.

Investment in Domestic Spaces

To better understand the nuance between watching and playing, and the relative investment in each, part of the interview examined the ways fans performed esports in their own defined "esports" space. Defining what the "esports space" – the space where they did esports – was left open to interpretation. Most participants highlighted a specific location in their home, namely, where their computer resided.

Performing esports in the domestic sphere highlighted several interesting paradoxes. First, there was the issue of how to integrate gaming into the home, which was particularly problematic as the majority of participants were in shared housing situations. For these participants, their esports space was often in their bedroom (e.g. Figures 1-3). When asked why they chose this space, one reason was out of courtesy to their housemates – Emily pointed out, for example, that gaming was a noisy hobby. These fans would use headphones or curtail their playing time so as not to disturb other members of the house. Selecting the bedroom often translated to a limit on the amount of space or time that they could devote to esports. It necessitated critical choices in how much room they would have to set up their computer, and physical restraints on how much space they could allow. This limitations was highlighted when, when asked how they would improve the situation, several participants discussed a desire to live in a home where they could have a room dedicated to gaming. Having a room dedicated to gaming would allow for more space.

The limitation on space meant they also had to prioritize the way the space was defined for involvement. No participants defined their esports space as a space strictly for watching esports – for all participants, it started with a space that was about playing. Playing the game was the nexus of all other forms of involvement. For the most part, the esports fan sites within the home centered on their desktop or laptop computers, set up at a desk. The space was focused on gaming, as one participant put it, 'All stuff for gaming is in one place.'

Other forms of involvement, including watching, were secondary to play in part because play may serve as the activity that required the most dedicated technology to perform. For example, the monetary investment in these spaces focused on technology needed to play games, like the computer and peripherals (monitors, mice, keyboards). Investing in the computer was not a one-time purchase; most participants were frequently updating their computer so that it could run the latest games. Prioritizing the device that would serve as their vehicle to being an active player was crucial to participation in esports, perhaps in part because other functions such as watching could be secondary to this primary function. At the same time, the focus on play indicated a key element to understanding esports fandom: if you could not play games, it was hard to be an esports fan.

Everyone had gaming-grade computers, and often more than one monitor. Beyond the desktop, fans might also have some gaming memorabilia (like the figurines in Figure 1) or invested in technology to support gaming and viewing on the computer (the speaker system in Figure 3).

Critically, although the spaces were set up for gaming, they were also often multi-use spaces. Most participants noted that while that while the most financial investment went into the

room focused on the gaming computer, monitors or chairs to be comfortable while gaming, they could also watch streams, movies, chat with friends, and so on.

These spaces were also in a constant evolution. Participants were talking about how they had just bought a new monitor, a new mouse, new hard drives for their computer, and so on. Emma (Figure 1) had spent years perfecting her gaming setup and had chronicled the process on a popular image sharing website. In part this was for her personal benefit, to keep track of the evolution of her space. But she also used comments from the site to improve her space, transforming it into a ‘satisfactory’ gaming station.

Figure 1: One esports fan's bedroom set up, with the space defined for gaming. Most of the economic investment went into the desktop computer, monitors, and other gaming peripherals. The site also includes lamps (for good lighting while playing), and momentos related to gaming.

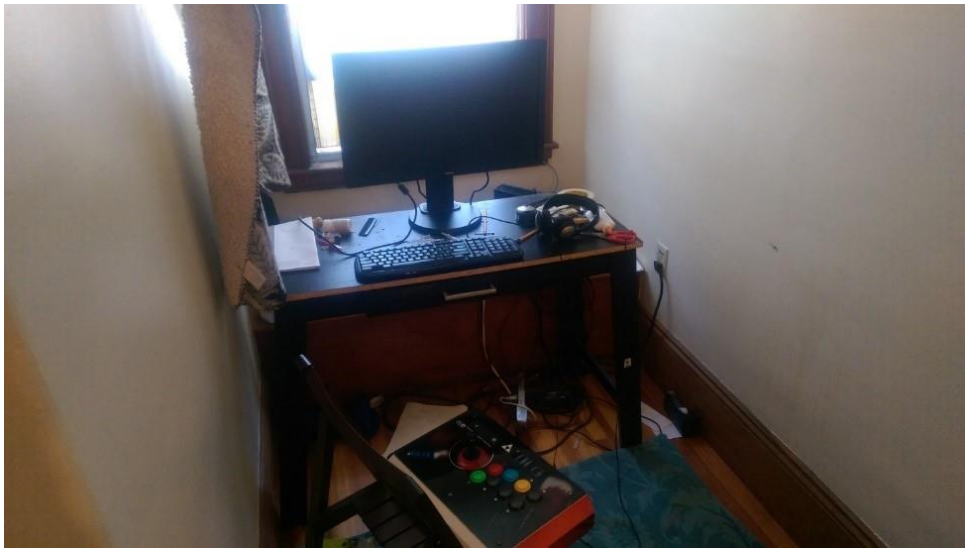


Figure 2: Another bedroom set up. This fan primarily invested in the computer, monitor, and gaming peripherals. He highlighted that what he enjoyed about this space was it fit his bedroom space well. The site was also a dual use for crafting.

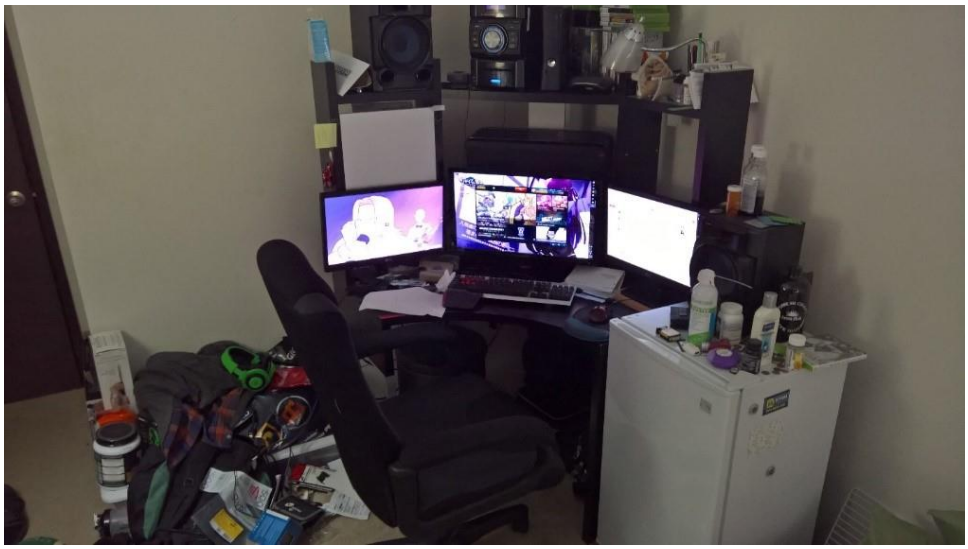


Figure 3: The primary investment for this space was the computer, monitors, and the sound system. The interviewee highlighted that they appreciated that all things were accessible (drinks were held in the mini-fridge), and the space could serve dual purposes of playing, watching, and making the most use of the space.

By showcasing a space online that would otherwise be a private space, Emma used the input to consistently invest in the space. The gaming space itself served as a visual representation of her investment in being an esports fan. This highlights the significance of these spaces to displaying esports fan identity, as well as how a fan is in a constant process of maintaining that identity through the investment in space. These forms of consumptive practices and consequential performance are tied intimately to gamer identity (Shaw, 2013; Simon, 2007) and fan identity (Fiske, 1992). For gaming culture, one of the ways to demonstrate a deep involvement is through investment in the technology surrounding gaming – specifically, modifying that technology to 'perfect' the gaming experience. This form of investment is demonstrative of investing in material culture to gain social capital within the fan community. For Emma, and many participants, centralizing their investment in their gaming devices was one way to signal the centrality of the identity and practice of being an esports fan in their domestic spaces.

Layering Emma's investment is involvement in a virtual community, with the evolution of her space charting her increasing financial, time and emotional investment in esports. This performance of the cultivation of the esports identity, reinforced by the 'imagined community' of esports fans, may be significant as Emma used it to track her journey into the fandom. It may also be significant as she was one of the three women interviewed in this study: none of the other participants talked about this sort of community involvement. Women in sports often have to legitimize their role as a sports fan by employing these forms of visual culture – e.g. in a sports bar, women may have to wear jerseys and showcase knowledge to 'prove' they are a sports fan (Eastman & Land, 1997). While this may not be the motivation for Emma, showcasing her space online was a way of reinforcing her personal and communal investment into esports.

The way that esports fans described their esports space reflected the way playing was just the launching pad for other types of esports fan investment and involvement. A tangible example of this was the investment in certain computer parts. Most participants had more than one monitor: one screen was for gaming, another for reading, watching or chatting via Skype with friends. 'If I am playing a game, I can have a video going on or build information on the other screen' (Noah). Others noted that they used the second monitor for chatting on Skype while gaming, specifically those they were currently gaming with or planning to watch streams with. The justification for having multiple monitors was to support the multi-functionality of information needed to be available while participating in esports. It allowed for fans to be involved through multiple channels to practice their fan identity. To be involved in this way required committing to constructing the space in a way that facilitated multi-use, because esports fandom required multiple forms of involvement.

Influence of the Social on Fan Practice

As Busse and Gray highlight, one form of involvement is through communal involvement. In this research, it was clear that there were different levels of social. As Emma illustrates, sometimes that community can be virtual and broad, consisting of individuals who she may not have had existing social ties to. Yet one practice that seemed to impact fans on an everyday basis was the social affordances of existing friend groups. These, more than anything, influenced their day to day involvement and investment in esports.

This is best punctuated in the way that they set up their spaces. Illustrated above, for fans who had multiple monitors (e.g. Figures 1 and 2) one was dedicated primarily to information gathering or communicating with friends online. They would chat with friends while watching tournaments together, playing together, or performing other daily tasks. Mason would often not only use his secondary monitor to chat with friends, but he also might use his primary monitor to watch one stream while chatting with friends. Through online services like Skype, participants could use their computer as a means of inviting their friends into their domestic space virtually. It was not a habitual practice, but a tool used in the background to maintain a constant connection. One concern from the model of Busse and Gray is that this may not reflect a high form of investment; to leave Skype on required little effort on the behalf of a participation. Yet arguably, maintaining that connection through conversation does require a steady form of engagement and time. Instead, with regard to fandom, the element to tease out would be how centrally this is related to facilitating their esports fandom. For those like Mason and Emma, who used this as a means to connect with friends to watch tournaments, it is arguably a deep form of investment.

A different form social practice was presented with console players. Consoles, which are not always easy to network, have a long history of being played in face-to-face competitions in arcades (Borowy & Jin, 2013; Harper, 2013; Taylor, 2012). Ethan, Figure 2, primarily engaged with other players in live meetups in the Boston area. In part, this might have been because his personal space was limited. Centered in his bedroom with a single chair, the area did not have room to invite others into it: it was intended for practice and other domestic tasks. Ethan did not have the luxury of creating a space to bring friends over due to his roommate situation. For others console players, like William (Figure 4), when the intention was to invite people over there was a designated social space which included a couch. But even for William, his esports space included the spaces he occupied outside of the domestic sphere (Figure 5). By including these spaces into their weekly practice and scope of esports fan practice, these individuals highlighted the significance of being involved in attending public competitions as central to the console esports fan ethos. As Caden argued, "A lot of people who play *Smash*, it is about the community. Their friends are also in the *Smash* community. It's the common thread they have with their friends, and because of that they never gave up playing [Smash] because it's the social experience." For Caden, being involved in *Smash* as an esports was less about the game, and more about involvement in a community.

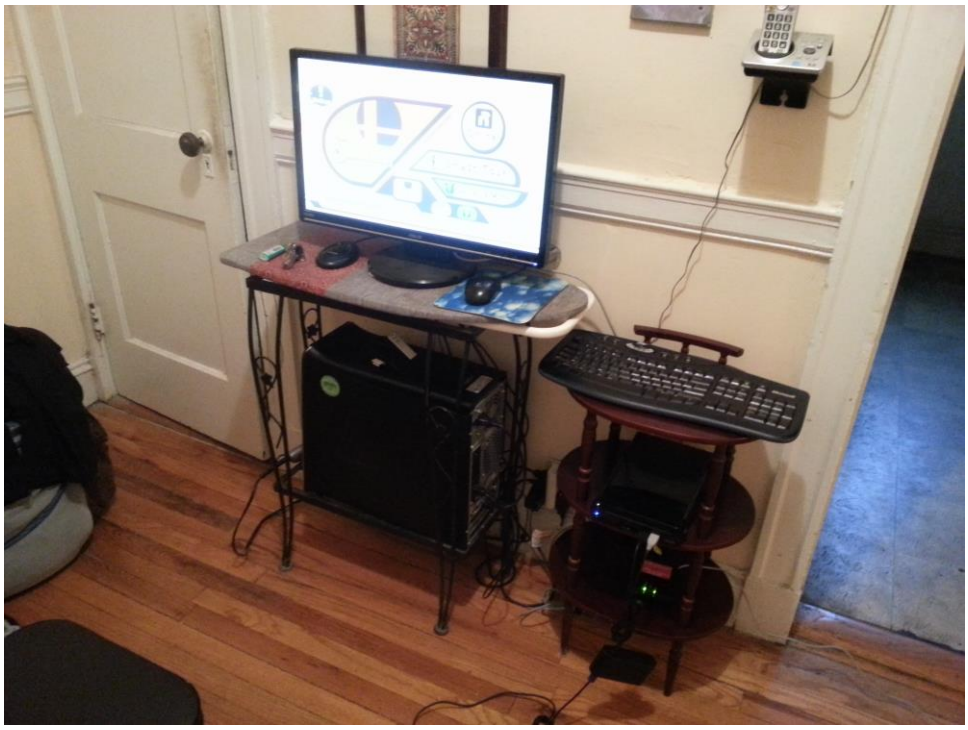


Figure 4: esports fan 'esport space' setup, William, shared gaming space.The space is separate from his practice space, a place for co-play.

Figure 5: esports fan 'esport space' setup, William, competitive Street Fighter tournament. When asked, he talked about the importance of community to his understanding and experience with esports.

This seems at least partially to echo some of the sentiments presented in Busse and Gray's model, as well as sports models of fandom. Community was brought into the habitual practices of fans, brought in either through the facilitation of social bonds (virtually or directly), or through participation in local community meetups. The common thread between these two different ways of being engaged in social practices is that they often reflected back on sharing the experience of other elements of esports. Namely, part of what makes a community in esports is the shared participation in other practices such as playing and watching.

This was best reflected when I asked participants what their ideal transformation of their esports space might be. Keeping in mind that many participants were in shared housing situations, the first response may come as no surprise. "If I could, I'd like a little bit more space. I'd love a dedicated room for all my gaming.….I'd like to have bigger better equipment because I'm greedy," Noah said. Surprisingly, however, the follow-up seemed to always be, "I would love, at some point, if I have a significant other I'd like a gaming space right next to her's that way we can game together. That's probably be the most space I would want."

Fans crave to share their experience with others. The root of this social element could be that several participants became involved in esports through friends. "We all played it, me and my friends," said Jacob, who first became aware of esports because his friends invited him to a local *Smash Brothers* tournament. His desire to attend his first tournament was not out of wanting to learn more about the game; he confesses that he went because his friends were going. Similarly, fans like Jackson, Mason and Ava were active players of a particular video game, but argued that they would not have become involved in esports had it not been through their friends. The attraction of esports for fans was attributed not only to extending play, but to adding a new

depth to their social experience. This is consistent with game studies research that argues one of the pulls to video games is the capacity to build and maintain social ties (Taylor, 2009).

Figure 6: Joint esports fan 'esport space' setup, Olivia and Jackson, separate room. They specifically designed their space to be able to play together and display their gaming artifacts.

There were individuals who shared this experience face-to-face in their everyday life. Figure 6 illustrates what a room dedicated to gaming might look like, in a shared situation where both participants were esports fans. In this case, Olivia and Jackson had moved into a new house where they specifically looked for a place with an extra room to be used specifically for gaming. In addition to the real estate investment, they had invested in furniture so that they could both be in the same space and play. Here, perhaps reinforced by one another's love of gaming, they also

had purchased a display case for game-and-geek culture related paraphernalia. What is critical here is that the space also included room to *watch* esports, in a sitting area where the photographer was standing. This illustrates that the focus of the space was on embodying play and consumptive practices around gaming, with watching also being a practice that – even given the latitude – fans would invest in.

Further, there were three participants who participated in watching live esports events weekly with friends, in the same manner as someone might go to a friend's house to watch a Sunday football game. In both cases, the spaces were group houses occupied by a group of male housemates – all gamers. The living rooms were configured with a large screen television, sound system, gaming consoles, and so forth. These investments facilitated both watching and playing, and using them for play was more common. But also significant was that they were also used for ritualized watching with friends. Noah, for example, had a ritual of going over to a friends' house to watch live esports events weekly. 'We meet and we put on the stream, and it's usually 6-8 of us? And we just hang out during the course of the game. We'll play games off to the side, and we'll usually just sit there and watch the games' (Noah). Discussing the game was also a central component to this ritual practice, and in Noah's estimation, the capacity to both play, socialize and watch at the same time was the ideal situation for an esports fan. Being able to reinforce their identity across many forms of involvement, codified by the social experience, was key to demonstrating the extent of their investment in esports. This example is the height of both involvement and investment on Busse and Gray's matrix.

Conclusion

This study applied Busse and Gray (2011)'s model to the case of esports to illustrate the need for flexibility in understanding fan involvement and investment. Involvement was analogous to the

types of practices that an esports fan took part in, whereas investment was how they demonstrated commitment to that practice. Esports fans demonstrated a rich intertwining of multiple forms of involvement: play, watching, information gathering, and socializing around esports. Watching was integral to transforming from a player to a fan, and similar forms of commitment and dedication typical of gamer identity were also applied to spectator experiences. At the same time, the prioritization of different practices was reflected in a fan's domestic space, which often seemed to put an emphasis on playing. The consumptive practices of fans reflected in their space, e.g. where they invested most of their money, demonstrated that the majority of fans did not prioritize their 'fan' identity over their player identity.

This suggests that just as fan involvement and investment is constructed of a myriad of social practices, fan identity may also be constructed of interconnected forms of identity. In the case of esports fans, practice was informed not just through a spectatorship practice or active engagement with the game as a player, but was also layered with identities by the extent to which they identified as a 'gamer' or the barriers presented between them and co-related identities, like sports fan. For a sports fan, this can be illustrated in the way we might presume that sports ties us not just to one team, but also to a sense of a community around that team, a connection to a geographical location, and potentially an amateur athlete. In pop culture fan studies, closer examinations should reflect upon what overlapping identities may inform participation in a particular fan culture that, further, informs the practice of being that fan. A *Star Trek* fan may also be an amateur star gazer, which leads them not only to their fandom but also informs their participation.

One problem with the existing body of fan studies literature is that there are divergent approaches to pop culture fans and sports fans. This case demonstrates that esports fans are

adopting practices that do not fit neatly into either category. Esports fans are not behaving in the way traditional sports fans might, as most of their practice highlights their capacity to play with the game, not spectate. Yet they are also dedicated to spectating, often fitting this form of engagement in throughout the day. This may call into question whether the contemporary sports fan must be tied to this traditional form of identification. It is clear through their watching practices and their engagement with esports that esports fans are nevertheless committed supporters of esports, and to prioritize one form of connection over another seems to unnecessarily limit the scope of sports fandom. Esports does reflect commonalities between pop culture fan studies and sports fan studies, largely stemming from the ways fans may deepen their connection to their fandom through the practice of information gathering and consumption of the media object. These deep ties to the media object itself, and the critical analysis of it, may in turn present barriers to participation for fans who cannot share common practice. In the case of esports, one of those barriers was navigating the embodiment of information practices native to sports fans and a savviness about sports culture, which necessitated a high investment in information gathering and a learning process on behalf of the fans without those skills. How fans negotiate barriers to participation in other mediums would be an interesting pursuit of future research, as it may highlight limits presented to those with less active voices in fandom.

The layering of esports practices suggests that we need to look beyond forms of production and community to understanding fandoms. Most fans did not produce tangible artifacts, and many were not involved in communities of fans. Instead, as Busse and Gray suggest, the imagined community was enough – social practice was more centralized on intimate friend groups that evolved out of their core identity as a gamer. This study further demonstrates that it may be necessary to not only understand involvement and investment as intertwined, but

that multiple forms of involvement (e.g. watching and play) may go hand in hand. Instead of focusing on one form of involvement, fan studies should examine more broadly the networks of practice that make up fan identity.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research has been an exploration of esports fandom through two core themes. First, to explore themes around the intersection of masculine identities in a particular cultural practice; in this case, the intersection of geek masculinity and sports masculinity and its consequential shaping of esports fandom. Second, to interrogate the different social roles that esports fans may enact through their participation in esports and its intersection with both sports and gaming culture. Specifically, this research has explored how those roles may be layered with practice: spectating, playing, socializing, and consuming. To understand these themes and paint a more holistic picture of esports fandom, this research was broken into three separate studies, examining esports fandom as a media object, through communal fan practices, and lastly as individual fan practice.

I will first discuss each study in turn, elucidating their findings and limitations, as well as the implications of the findings. I then draw the studies together to address what we can learn from this multi-faceted view. I will then explore future directions for research into esports fans and fandom more broadly.

The Media Object: Framing esports Fans, Framing Masculinities

The first step of this research project was to explore esports as a media object to understand the medium and focus of esports fandom. To accomplish this task, I began by looking at the frames and text of a broadcast of a major esports tournament specifically to illustrate the ways in which media producers may represent esports to fans. Esports fans are taking part in a culture that is exhibiting traits from two forms of masculinity – geek and sport (Taylor, 2012). By looking at the media object, this first illuminated how media producers are framing esports players as embodying traits from either geek or sporting culture, particularly around the

framework of differing masculinities. Secondly, examining the broadcast reflected the perception of who the intended audience is of esports, and what role they have in esports: are they perceived as active players of the game, spectators there to support professional players, or something else entirely?

I employed a qualitative textual analysis with data derived from the broadcast of a major tournament, *DreamHack* – specifically focusing on the commentary of the games *CS:GO* and *Hearthstone*. This textual analysis triangulated several points of data that incorporated the visual and verbal framing of the event: tournament transcription of the broadcast commentary, field notes from watching the tournament and recorded video footage. Unique to this analysis was that this latter dataset afforded the opportunity to also include the framing of the event through the lens of the audience, the chat channel. With these combined modes of analysis, I explored the themes of masculinity and the perceived role of the at-home audience.

A Hybrid of Cultures.

While the broadcast visually took cues from sports broadcasts, the frames used in the verbal commentary were a hybrid of sport culture and gaming culture. When pro-gamers were the focus, commentary was concentrated in the frames that overlap between geek masculinity and sport masculinity. Masculinity is not a singular identity, but a multi-faceted gender expression which is based on a sociohistorical moment and is defined through interactions with competing ideals for defining what is the dominant form of masculinity (e.g. Connell, 1995).

The relationship between differing masculine forms was further complicated by the potential intersection with national identity. National identity was critical to highlighting key intersections with masculine identity. This was particularly acute in critiques of emotion and physical touching, with broadcasters reframing such moments as the French team's huddles as giving the audience "the wrong idea." Past studies into the sociology of sport parallel this

framing (c.f. Desmarais & Bruce, 2010), suggesting that future research must be careful about the intersection of sports masculinity and national identity in the context of esports.

Merging Masculinities.

Livestreams are a central force in the esports audience experience. Therefore, I employed an analysis of audiences through livestream chat. This raised more questions than it answered, particularly regarding norms around masculinity. On the one hand, insults were often lobbied against players that centered on negative characteristics of gamers, such as calling out weight, age, shyness, hygiene, and the like. Some of these insults became quite violent, reflecting troubling forms of masculinity that may be permeating gamer culture. On the other hand, when players were praised, homoerotic language was a key framework that fans used saying they would 'go gay' for a player. These polarizing ways of embodying masculine norms were particularly present in *CS:GO*; it may suggest that future research should more deeply, systematically explore the ways fans are using Twitch chat as part of the esports experience. In particular, the dominance of toxic masculine norms in chat may be just one of the cultural barriers that gender minorities – like women – may be encountering, explaining their marginalized role in esports (e.g. N. Taylor et al., 2009).

Perceiving the Audience: Players, Spectators and Consumers.

A critical reason for looking at the media object was not just to understand what it is that esports fans are consuming, but also how perceptions of *who* is in the audience and *what* they do is reflected in the broadcast. At this tournament, the broadcast reflected layered roles for fans: player, spectator, and consumer of esports.

The broadcast was often rich with a deep understanding of game mechanics, terminology, and discussion of strategy choices that would, I argue, not necessarily lend itself to a broad audience but would instead have great utility for players of the game itself. The broadcast

commentary, particularly in *Hearthstone*, was presented in part as an exercise in fostering a deeper understanding of the game itself for people who play. In *Hearthstone,* players were not the focus of the narration. Instead, the narration focused on living the game play as the player, with the commentators arguing about the best play in this situation or recounting experiences of being players themselves. In this way, the commentators were relaying *their* expertise to the audience and showcasing what the various options for play might be at a level of detail that someone unfamiliar with the game would find potentially hard to follow. Even having played the game myself, there were many terms that I had to look up to fully understand the narrative as I was following – it was like sitting in on a class where I had not read the core textbook. This indicates that broadcasters had expectations for how familiar the audience was with the game, as well as that the audience was most likely a dedicated, perhaps competitive, player of the game. As with past esports studies, this indicates that the expectation was that audiences were watching to learn to bring back to their own play.

But there were also moments that were designed for a spectator experience. The positioning of audience members as spectators came not just in the commentary surrounding gameplay but also in the surrounding experience from chat to the visual ways of framing the event and players, the at-home audience was queued to be esports supporters. Entertainment was part of the experience, with chat moderators joking back and forth, or panelists being asked to throw rings onto a boars head, or voting for the "MVP" of the tournament. These activities seemed to be designed to make the experience more engaging and fun, but had no direct relation to being a player of the game.

Underlying both roles was consumerism. This was particularly acute in *CS:GO*, where part of the tournament prize pool had been generated from in-game purchases by fans. The hosts

of the tournament made a point of highlighting this initiative, which was done in thanks to the game developer, and encouraging fans to take part and 'support' esports in the future. The fact that support translated to this form of monetary involvement particularly highlights the way fan identity is constructed in esports. On the one hand, fans are supporting the teams, players and tournament through making these in-game purchases, providing a sense of connection to the esports industry. Through their purchases, they are framed by media producers are champions for the growth of esports. On the other hand, the fact that the purchases are directly related to their gaming experience – not a team jersey or other sort of traditional sport merchandise – emphasizes that the expectation is that fans are also players of the game they follow.

Suggestions for Further Study.

To dive deeper into the duality of masculinities and roles that esports fans encounter, future research should analyze the multiple media forms that go into constructing a fan's experience with an esports broadcast, such as advertising or esports journalism. This would get at multiple modes in which media producers reflect back the perceived roles of the audience. Further, more in-depth analysis needs to go into the behind-the-scenes creation of esports tournament broadcasts. Interviewing those who produce esports tournaments may illuminate the ways they perceive the role of the broadcast, and who they believe the audience is and what it is that the audience does.

To truly understand this underpinning of consumptive practices that esports tournaments seem to rely on, and that esports fans are being turned towards, a closer examination of esports as an industry might be an initial step. Media producers are just one element that shape the formation of the broadcast, and it is clear from past research that the political economy of esports is significant to understanding the shape of the industry and media portrayals of esports (Jin, 2010). The political economy approach has already illuminated that there is a complex

interweaving of different large-scale social actors that shape esports. In South Korea, it was a confluence of a government trying to help a country recover from a recession combined with the growth of telecommunication companies and rise of online gaming that resulted in the subsidies and support for esports. Similarly, future research might bring in the theoretical lenses such as the political economy approach to critically examine what economic or political support is behind major tournaments like *DreamHack*, their games and their broadcasts. Historically, most of the companies have been technology companies – indicating that the consumers of esports are largely people who are going to be buying computer parts. At *DreamHack*, one sponsor was a candy company. Within the past year, not only have major corporations like Disney bought rights to esports broadcasts (Beck, 2016), but owners of major sports teams have also started to buy esports teams (e.g. Soshnick & Novy-Williams, 2016). As esports expands its market, this may further change the dynamic of who is an esports fan or who is perceived as the central market for esports.

The Fan Communities: Not Just a Good Seat at the Bar

The intent of the second study was to better understand the collective practices of esports fans and how these practices were reflected through the use and interaction with public spaces. In particular, it was critical to interrogate these spaces not just as they relate to play (which would paint a perception of esports fans as players) but ones where they may occupy semi-public space for other purposes. Esports research has primarily focused on LAN events (Ackermann, 2012; Jansz & Martens, 2005; N. Taylor, 2011; Simon, 2007; Sveningsson, 2012; Taylor, 2012; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010; Witkowski, 2013), which has resulted in an overemphasis in esports of focusing on competitive play as opposed to other correlated practices, like watching or socializing (Simon, 2007; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). In sports, the role of the fan is separated from that of the active player of sport, with the role of a sports fan primarily being to support

professional athletes through spectatorship (Whannel, 2009). Therefore, to explain sports fans, sports research has gravitated towards spaces where fans commune to spectate, to help understand and define the experience through the means in which fans demonstrate their support (Aden et al., 2009; Eastman & Land, 1997; Giulianotti, 2002). Understanding spaces where fans view sports is vital to understanding the fan experience. Sites that serve as spaces for watching sports are often a nexus for fan socialization and identity performance. Social rituals within the space help sports fans maintain connections to their team and close feelings of geographic distance (Aden et al., 2009) as well as reinforce the identity of being a sports fan (Eastman & Land, 1997). By looking at esports fans in similar spaces, an aim of this research was to examine what practices esports fans would adopt in public spaces that go beyond defining esports public gatherings as a space of play, and explore what other social rituals might be in place.

This study employed field observations at public gatherings of esports fans, from watch-parties in sports bars to tournaments in LAN centers. The selection of these spaces was purposeful, going across three different cities and five different games to provide a range of experiences. Following a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as well as using thick description (Geertz, 1973, 1994), the choice of both viewing parties and tournaments in sports bars and LAN centers was to better understand how esports fans are navigating spaces in-between the private sphere and professional tournaments.

Negotiating Multiple Space Usages.

By examining the interaction of esports fans physically gathering in space, this research highlights tensions concerning the role of play, watching, and socializing and how that was limited by and impacted the space itself. In some cases, such as the watch parties in sports bars, the fans performed the role of the sports fan by adopting *some* of the consumptive practices of

the space. For example, while previous research into sports highlights that sports bars may serve as a space where fans may overconsume alcohol as a way of embodying masculinity (Gantz, 1981; Palmer, 2014; Weed, 2006, 2007, 2008), this research highlights that esports fans do not embody that practice. For other consumptive practices, it was only in the most established watch party – one tied to a longstanding community – that rituals such as wearing team jerseys were actualized (Aden et al., 2009). This sort of semiotic display is often used by sports fans not only to legitimize themselves as a fan, but also to demonstrate the significance of their attachment to the team and sports fan identity (Eastman & Land, 1997). Only a small minority of esports fan wore team jerseys, however, so it was yet not a central display of identity for esports fans in these spaces. Instead, the dominant 'uniform' of these spaces relied on gamer culture: gaming t-shirts, hoodies, and jeans. Showcasing gamer identity was central to the performance in these spaces.

Instead of embodying the practices of a sports fan, esports fans were carefully negotiating the desire to play and watch at the same time, while also socializing with other participants at the event. The events were used to not only create new social bonds, but deepen existing bonds. At watch parties, where the focus of the event was spectatorship, some fans used the opportunity to invite someone that they knew through the game to attend and watch. The venue itself facilitated these practices because of the existing social script for multi-tasking built into sports bars: watching the game, consuming food or drink, and talking with someone nearby. Yet the multiple practices that make up an esports fan identity were prioritized depending on the capacity of the space; not all could be done at once. In talking with fans at these events, esports fans wanted an avenue where it could all be done but such was not possible. At watch parties, socialization was used to further play: making plans with other esports fans to play, or exchanging information

about game strategy. At tournaments, where play was more central, fans wanted more space to watch others play or to consume alcohol as a spectator. This was especially true of the LAN center, where the owner highlighted difficulties in bringing in alcohol and viewing practices to the space. The negotiation of these practices are still in flux, and fans are trying to determine how to enact those practices through the selection and use of intermediate places.

One of the concerns in this study was why esports fans were using sports bars. The narratives that fans used to explain why they enjoyed the space, particularly at watch parties, evoked common narratives that might be used by sports fans: the chance to kick back and watch the game. But although they adopted the narratives of sports fans to explain their experience, the use of the space did not entirely align with rituals common in sports. Part of this is because esports is bridging the cultures of sports and games (N. Taylor et al., 2009; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2013). In particular, the aspect of play was not captured in the sociology of sport research into the fan experience due to the clear separation between spectatorship and play in most professionalized sports (Whannel, 2009). If esports fans are attempting to embody sports fandom through their practice, future research might more carefully examine the implications of fitting esports into the contemporary sports lens, and instead revisit historical interpretations of sport. Specifically, if part of the divide between player and spectator in sports fandom derives from the mediation of sport – positioning fans in front of a mediated object as opposed to defining their support as amateur play – then it may be valuable to go back to studies of the influx of television on sport, or mediated objects into bars (e.g. Gantz, 1981). In doing so, this may not only highlight the impact of media broadcasts on sports and other forms of interactive amateur activities, but also reflect whether the trajectory of sport is one that esports is following. Will esports fans one day be fans of games, when they themselves are not gamers?

At the same time, part of the utility in bringing in sport literature was to demonstrate the tensions between a community that was using the narrative of sports to justify their motivations to use a space, and potentially illuminate a need to re-examine contemporary mediated sports culture. For example, the fact that the sports bar has particular technological affordances and consumption affordances played a large part in the selection of these spaces. One of the implications for this study is that the consumption practices embedded in the space serves as a barrier to participation for those in younger age demographics. By selecting spaces that are intended for more mature audiences, younger participants – as argued from the perspective of fans, vital to the growth of esports – may be excluded from one element of esports culture. On the one hand, this may be deliberate: to legitimize esports as a sport-like activity, the adoption of spaces for certain consumptive practices is vital. Although research has been concerned with the erection of gender barriers in esports (e.g. N. Taylor et al. 2009; Taylor, 2012), these findings suggest that other ways of conceptualizing space as being dominated by certain demographics may also be useful.

This is also critical for media studies writ broadly, as the ties to consumption seemed to help justify the viewing experience at a public venue. Incorporating these sort of 'mundane' practices may help to inform how people select to attend mediated activities – particularly those in public. At the very least, this research provides more evidence that viewing media is not a monolithic practice, but is instead supported interchangeably by multiple forms of engagement.

Suggestions for Further Study.

To go beyond the sport context, future research could use other potential lenses that could explain fan gatherings, such as those derived from pop culture fan studies (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998), studies of gaming communities (Taylor, 2009) or Goffman's approach to

identity performance (1978). In the case of the first approach, research into pop culture fans has looked primarily at the sociological or community aspect through the production of fan texts, and how those productive practices embed an individual deeper into a community. Audience studies leave out the reflection on how fans can use a space to legitimize their identity, focusing instead on paradoxes of consuming a closed media object through viewing and how that may afford latitude for interpretation (e.g. Jenkins, 1992; Ang, 1985; Radway, 1984). This loses the ritualization and deliberate selection of space that fans seemed to be adopting, and the conflict of an active player identity with a spectatorship experience.

Instead, future research might focus on the combination of the intersection of gaming communities as communities united by a shared gaming experience and identity (Taylor, 2009), as well as how gamer identity is embodied within social performance (Goffman, 1974; Shaw, 2012). Gaming communities often negotiate between playing online and socializing offline across multiple sites – for example, the game, forums, and in-person meetups. The fact that esports fans are adopting sports practice might further layer onto this experience within the gaming community and the expectations of what the experience in intermediate spaces should allow for. Unlike in sports, where the mediated experience is from a live performance at a stadium to an intermediate place in a bar, the esports fan mediated experience might be a more complicated intersection of the experience of online play and mediated broadcast, brought together by a shared social experience. As the broadcast illustrates, the live performance is tied to multiple identities that confluence to become an esports fan: player/gamer, spectator/fan, consumer. When this is brought into a shared social experience, fans negotiate these roles by creating connections through their shared play experience, not strictly ties to the ‘sport’ and its players but capitalizing on their own lived experience with the game. Sports fandom provides

similar scripts to knowledge sharing, socializing, and consuming, but esports fans are adapting these to bring it back to their central pillar of their identity: being a gamer.

Involvement and Investment as a Model for esports Fandom

This third study looked at the individual practices of fans by examining the daily practices of esports fans and the intersection of those practices with their esports in their domestic spaces. Using the case of esports fandom allowed this study to fit into two existing conversations in fan studies and game studies: first, bridging between pop culture studies and fan studies; second, examining the everyday practices of fans.

Bridging Between Pop Culture Studies and Sports Fan Studies.

Esports presents a unique opportunity to bring together two divergent approaches to fans: pop culture fan studies and sports fan studies. Scholars like Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby (2007) have illustrated that although both sports and pop culture fan studies are approaching a similar topic area (fans: who are they, what do they do, and why do they do it), the two fields have diverged n focus and approach. This is largely due to the type of media object scholars are analyzing – sport or pop culture -- which has led to a siloing of the disciplines. The two disciplines, brought together, can help us to better understand fan practices – particularly contemporary fans practice in ways typical to either approach (Ford, 2014).

The choice to bring sports and pop culture together under one paper was deliberate, not only to illustrate the connections between the approaches under one model, but also in the sense that it was necessary to understand esports fans. The practices of esports fans did not fit neatly into either sports fan models (e.g. Giulianotti, 2002) or pop culture fan models (e.g. Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). To bring these two approaches together, I employed Busse and Gray (2011)'s model that explains fan identity as the intertwining, parallel axis of involvement and

investment. By using a framework that was written to broadly encompass fans beyond the scope of a specific type of production or community engagement, and one that could also afford latitude in examining the ways identity was reflected through everyday practice and consumption, I was able to examine esports fandom using both sports and pop culture fan studies without them being at odds with one another.

In the case of sports fan studies, the emphasis on authentic, traditional fans as an ideal form of sport spectator was problematic for several reasons. Esports fans largely participate online, and most in the study did not support specific teams. In Giulianotti's model, there were multiple avenues for understanding the depth of attachment of a fan, but largely these forms of attachment seemed to prioritize fandom by team. This research suggests that by focusing on fandom as defined by a team, fans who express their fandom through connections to other objects may be disenfranchised. Committed esports fans, for example, tended to start with the game but then generalize to esports more broadly, including leading to a specific team or player. Yet a specific team or player was not the only way to deepen the relationship, as was expressed by investing in time to watch with friends, go to local events, and refashion their personal spaces to focus on esports. Namely, this suggests that there is less of a linear trajectory of fandom, and that fandom needs to be understood as an iterative process with multiple possible ways of being expressed. By examining the practices of self-identified fans, this helped to illuminate the ways that fans can be involved on a spectrum of practices, and how they can deepen their fan identity based on those practices.

Yet sport fan studies provided latitude to examine consumption and material practices of esports fans, an integral part of understanding dedication to gamer identity (Shaw, 2012). In the case of pop culture fan studies, the emphasis on modes of production and ties to community

largely ignored fans who neither produced (Ford, 2014) nor were active in a community (Sandvoss & Kearn, 2014). Yet pop culture fan studies' models allow us to examine fans not just as supporters of a team, but active participants in the production of their fandom. This was vital to understanding esports fans, as their domestic spaces reflected a centralized practice of play. At the same time, it was critical to understand through the interview how play was fed by other practices, and how that formed the everyday practice of fandom. Esports fans consumed information and broadcasts surrounding esports as a part of their daily practice. Many chose to negotiate barriers at work to do so, watching during their lunch hour or while doing other work. When the capacity to watch was lost at work, fans felt that they were losing out on vital information imperative to their fan practice. This sort of consistent engagement with esports was partially reflected through their domestic spaces, through exploring the use of technology like dual monitors. But it highlights that the practice of fandom may not be pinned to an individual space. Instead, this research suggests that a more holistic understanding of how fans may engage with their fandom as part of their daily practice will illuminate the various ways that they entrench themselves as a fan.

One contribution of this study was expanding on Busse and Gray (2011)'s model. By expanding investment to assume layers of meaning around consumption of both the media object and the economic implications of being a fan, I was able to bridge with Giulianotti's work and, by extension, put Busse and Gray in conversation with sports fan studies as well as gamer culture. Further, this study provided concrete ways of understanding involvement, through many practices fans engaged with, including ways of conceptualizing engagement through play, watching, socializing (both virtually and in-person) with others. It also illustrated ways of conceptualizing investment, such as the amount of time or money spent on each of those

practices. It was crucial in understanding that there was no right way to be a fan, but that by looking at an individual fan we can better conceptualize multiple, interconnected practices that form the fan identity.

Examining the Everyday Practices of Fans.

A secondary goal of this study was to examine the everyday practices of esports fans. This step was desirable as the everyday practices of fans are often an understudied element of fandom (Hills, 2005; Sandvoss & Kearn, 2014). Fan practices are not just about the exemplary behavior, but about the ways the fan identity is reinforced consistently through habitual practice (Couldry, 2003; Ford, 2014). Scholars often focus on the products of fandom to the extent that they forget to examine how it is that a fan orients to the media object beyond the act of producing.

One of the ways this goal was accomplished was through the interview itself, which asked fans to account for how they spend their time in relation to esports. This highlighted the complexities of understanding multiple forms of involvement – watching, playing, socializing and information gathering – that were tied to the ways fans oriented to esports. The findings suggest that not only may involvement and investment be intertwined (Busse & Gray, 2011) but provides evidence that multiple layers of involvement culminate in the fan's identity performance towards esports. This supports the intentions of past models, such as Abercrombie and Longhurst (1997) which outlined how individual fans can fluctuate on a spectrum of fandom through the combined practices of production and ties to a community. This study highlights that the community can be real or imagined, but also actualized through intimate ties to close friends that most pop culture fan studies may treat as 'community.' It further supports that the culture of gaming is threaded with a mixed process of forms of involvement, which may feed into one

another (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). Supporting these forms of involvement were norms around dedication to both watching and playing that are evocative of gamer culture writ large (Shaw, 2012), as well as a central component of being a fan (Gray, 2003).

What was interesting about these different ways to be involved is how involvement was reflected in a fan's use of space and the time in their day. Fans often invested significant amounts of time and money in *setting up* their gaming spaces for play. The act of playing the game was difficult for any fan in this study to disentangle from their esports experience. It *is* significant that the spaces were set up to play, that the esports spaces themselves enshrined play as opposed to other practices. But it was not detached from other practices. While fans could often describe specifically how much time they invested in playing, it was hard to pin down how much time they spent watching or gathering information online because it was so pervasive. Yet they talked about consuming media surrounding esports with as much dedication as playing – it was vital to their fan experience. This highlights that to understand the practices of everyday fans or media consumers, researchers cannot focus on just when people sit down and dedicate time to consume. This is not to say that this is not important – yet it is no longer the ritualized performance that it may have once been. In this study, the everyday practices of fans were constructed by both habitual practices – sitting down to play – as well as more organic practices – catching up on a news article during a moment of free time. Researchers must think of ways to encapsulate the ways in which technology affords us to engage with media constantly throughout the day both habitually *and* with no dedicated pattern, as that will most critically highlight the ways in which media impacts our everyday lives.

By examining esports fans, the study found merit to the argument by Busse and Gray (2011) of understanding fan practices through involvement and investment. Involvement and

investment reflect the ways in which fans engage and the potential valence of that engagement. In this case, the merit of employing this framework was that it allowed for flexibility in understanding the different ways esports fans engaged with esports and merit to understanding them by their everyday practice. For the most part, esports fans were engaged in their fandom in multiple, interwoven ways: socializing with friends, playing games, watching, buying merchandise for gaming, and gathering information about esports.

Directions for Future Research

While there are numerous directions that research into esports could take, I would suggest the following research trajectory to address the limitations and initial findings in these three studies. The theoretical questions raised by this dissertation specifically include a need to understand the producers of esports on a macro-level, while also highlighting a need to explore the ways in which fans are attached to esports. I will address each of these in turn.

First, one of the aims of this research was to explore the media object itself, but as a new media object, there has been research into the amateur practices surrounding Twitch and YouTube (e.g. Postigo, 2016; Zolides, 2015), yet there seems to be a lack of interrogation with the higher-level actors that are involved in shaping the esports scene (exception with Jin, 2010). By higher-level actors, I suggest this means institutional actors that may shape the scene, such as international government regulations, media producers, sports franchises, and so on. The economic forces surrounding esports have not been fully interrogated in the research, although it is a point of interest for popular media (e.g. Schmidt, 2016; Wolf, 2016). It is clear that there are multiple actors coming together to inform the current state of esports, and as of this writing, there

are more and more businesses from sports that are investing in esports (e.g. Novy-Williams, 2016; Wolf, 2016).

This is not a new trend – esports and professional esports players have been commodified since the arcade (Borowy & Jin, 2010). But the extent to which these changes to the economic landscape will impact the audience has not been fully explored. The actors involved in these changes, the ones that determine how to package esports to the audience, will shape and develop the landscape of esports. Considering the levels of amateur production and level of investment the average audience member may have in esports, the impact this will have on audiences of esports will likely be significant in terms of both their experience with esports, namely the centrality of the experience coming back to their own play experience, and their perceived role in esports, likely making their role as a consumer more paramount. It may also change the ways fans can engage with esports: now, any amateur can create a video on Twitch and make a small profit through commercials and donations. This leads to a very saturated market of available video. With the desire to brand and market esports, new media scholars should pay careful attention to the ways in which not only Twitch streaming changes but the marketing of *expertise* in esports changes in livestreams. Will there be an effort to streamline the viewing experience, making it easier to find 'quality' videos? Who will determine that quality?

Employing a theoretical dimension that will allow research to look at multiple actors coming together to shape the industry (e.g. Becker, 1982) would help address the current state of esports and its future directions. It is very likely, given my research, that there will be tensions over how to emphasize certain forms of consumption, practice, and identities that will influence esports fans. Fans are not currently adopting strictly sports-like practices, and play is vital to

their form of practice. Yet if sports teams begin to invest in esports, the likelihood that the media producers will adopt more sports-like narratives increases exponentially.

At the same time, a critical actor in esports will always be the game developers who create the very games the industry is shaped around. If esports fans continue to be players first, then the trajectory of commodifying play through micro-transactions may increase. In one of the tournaments involved in this analysis, the International of *Dota2*, fans 'raised' millions of dollars through micro-transactions that went into the prize pool. Instead of the game developer or another business putting forth the entire prize pool, players of the game participated through the purchase of in-game items. The resulting prize pool was $17 million, breaking all records. This form of contribution to the outcome of a media event is possibly found elsewhere, but the scale seems to be relatively unique feature of esports. It speaks to both the commodification of the fan (e.g. they paid for their tournament) as well as a sense of agency of the fans (e.g. the fans feel like they contributed to something greater, the esports industry or their favorite team). In interviews, fans often spoke about the changing face of esports, and how the economic viability of esports was vital to its growth.

Fans seem motivated to grow esports, to make it a legitimate entity – but are unsure what the consequences of that growth might be. The question becomes what are the goals of those investing in esports teams, and what the game developers want out of this equation. The connection between fans, game developers, and the institutions shaping the face of esports from an economic perspective is something that needs to be more deeply explored in research before we can truly understand the shape of the media object itself.

The next step in a future research agenda would be a survey of esports fans to test the scope of their relationship to esports, informed by the understanding of how producers are

shaping esports. One core theme that emerged from this research was the role of esports fans as a player or a spectator which, in interviews, came out as being motivated to watch esports to learn about the game (to tie back to their own experience) or being committed to certain players, teams. Most interviewees were more concerned with the game, less with the players. While there are some initial studies that examine the motivations of esports fans using a sociology of sport paradigm (e.g. Hamari & Sjöblom, 2015), motivations to watch esports do not address the diversity of practices that esports fans use; namely, motivations to watch esports do nothing to address the centrality of play to esports fan identity. One element that became clear through this research is that play was a central force to fandom. It was central to the narration of the media object, the communal gatherings and individual practices of esports fans. Existing understandings of sport spectatorship do not allow us to account for this type of motivation to be an esports fan.

Instead, I suggest that examining the fans' ties to objects related to esports – players, teams, the game itself – may be the foundation for understanding esports fan practice and identity. Here, I tried to get at this by a reflection of their personal spaces, their gear and how they oriented their daily practice towards esports to prioritize particular identities. In future research, adapting player motivation surveys and their relationship with the game (e.g. via avatars, Banks & Bowman, 2016) may tease out the ways strengths in those identities and how they confluence to become an 'esports fan.' I believe the next step is integrating existing game studies surveys with sociology of sport fan attachment instruments, such as basking in the reflected glory (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). Layering these different models together would allow for an understanding of where the critical points of attachment are for fans. One of the difficulties with this research was that the structure assumed

the critical point of engagement would be the media broadcast of esports. Instead, the findings suggest that it is through the interconnection of that broadcast, experience with the game, experience with the information surrounding esports, and social affordances such as friends that truly inform the motivation to participate. They also explain barriers to participation, as fans who were missing one element found it more difficult to be involved as an esport fan. Therefore, it is critical to understand what elements best inform the point of attachment in esports, to better understand what may motivate someone to be a fan and what may also come between someone and full participation as a fan.

One of the obstacles with this study was finding fans that were more 'casual.' Any future study in the area of esports fandom must consider how to target underrepresented audiences; the less visible, less vocal, everyday fans. A concern threaded throughout this research was the centrality of identities to the esports fan performance, both identities surrounding gender and race as well as identities focused on gaming and sport. There are some games that have more racial diversity in the player base, such as fighting games, in part due to the history of the game design itself (being placed in spaces like arcades), the technological needs of the game, and the cultural norms embedded in the community (c.f. Harper, 2010, 2014). Yet as this study illustrates, there is a need to shift the focus from those in front of the screen to those who are watching the screen. It is critical to talk to esports fans and non-fans to better understand what might distinguish between the two (e.g. Gray, 2003), what may have facilitated their participation and what may obstruct participation. The implication of this would be to discover if there are prejudices developing in esports through the co-construction of practices that might favor certain forms of gender identity and racial identity.

This research illuminates a greater need to fully investigate the questions of what motivates someone to become a fan of esports and how being a fan shapes their everyday lives. As Ford (2014) suggests, there is more to fandom than the spectacle of practice. After all, we are all fans of something, and fandom has the potential to shape our identity and everyday life. Fandom is not constructed of a singular mode of participation, but part of a myriad of different ways to be involved. While in esports this may translate to dominate practices such as play and spectating, informed by practices of consuming, information gathering and socializing, for others there may be other practices that when combined form the meaning of a fandom. It is not just about 'active' production; fans here found significant meaning in learning about their fandom as much as partaking in it, and socializing around watching others play. It was when these came together that the fandom became rich, and embedded in their daily lives.

Final Thoughts

This study highlights the need not to pigeonhole esports into a sports paradigm – or at least, our existing understanding of a contemporary sports paradigms. This is exemplified not only through the media object esports fans consume, but also through their practices. The esports broadcast commentary focused on describing the action or discussing potential strategies that the casters themselves would use. This highlights that esports broadcasts may be geared more towards facilitating learning the game (Taylor, 2012), as opposed to developing an attachment between fans and the teams and players being watched.

This finding was reinforced through the field observation and interview studies. In intermediate places, esports fans did not behave or consume as the literature defines a contemporary sports fan's behavior, in part because their attachment may first be to the game itself through their practice as players (Taylor, 2012). While fans might echo some of the

practices of sports fans, there were enough differences to suggest that the sports fan identity was not the core identity for an esports fan. Instead, an emphasis on the intersection of both playing and watching – as opposed to being a spectator of sport – was the core of their practice in intermediate places and in the domestic sphere. Part of this could be pinned to the fact that esports fans are having to legitimize themselves as sports fans as opposed to gamers. These are not only two forms of masculinity that are at odds with one another (Taylor, 2012) but also two communities that may be at odds with one another (N. Taylor et. al., 2009). As gamers, esports fans consume in a different way than sports fans consume: the emphasis is on their practice of being a gamer. At the same time, esports fans see being legitimized as a sport as an optimal goal.

This could suggest that there is a need to re-examine contemporary sports, in particular, the viewing and ritualization of viewing of sport. With a change in the broadcast structure of sports and the availability of streaming video, it could be that there is a need to address the impact of this on sports fans. Sports fans are more likely to not only use the internet to find out information about sport (Dixon, 2014), but they may also be likely to use the internet for watching sport. Sports networks are beginning to accommodate this model with packages, available through cable providers and social media sites that account for the streaming video. But the impact this has on sports fans and their expectations is unclear. For esports, the expectation is that fans will either watch it live, or read up on the tournament afterwards and watch, or some interchangeable practice within. Most fans talked about the sheer saturation of content, meaning that they could watch esports 24/7. Traditional professional sports, on the other hand, has enshrined the ritualization of watching at a specific time. Partly, this is due to the history of the broadcast schedule, but it is also partially because sport is a cultural institution (Wenner, 1998a).

The impact of sports on esports, and vice versa, may suggest a reconsideration of the centrality of the ritualization of watching a media broadcast live.

The Negotiation of Consumer Agency

At least to some extent, esports seems to be trying to follow in the footsteps of sports and provides a contemporary case to reconsider the history of the development of mediated sports. Vamplew (1988)'s book on the history of contemporary economic infrastructures of sports emphasizes that, through the pressures of commercialization of sports writ-large, sports fans have transitioned to becoming a consumer. This shifting prioritization to consumerism over spectatorship for sports fans is eerily similar to the pressures of esports media producers to facilitate esports spectatorship over gaming. Past research suggests that a consequence of shifting from an active role to a consumer undercuts from an authentic attachment to the media object (e.g. Giulianotti, 2002). My research highlights that if esports fans are at a similar moment of negotiation, they are still managing to maintain their agency as a direct tie to their role as an active player of the game. They are selecting how to consume in public venues, and they are also deliberate in their choices of consumption in the home. Yet it is equally clear that esports fans believe one way to legitimize their activity is through the embodiment of contemporary sports, and it may be that the prioritization of player identity fades. Research has already suggested that the identity of 'gamer' is transitive (Shaw, 2012). Future research into esports and similar emerging sports might well benefit from carefully examining the political economy of esports, in particular drawing on sociology of sport research that could serve as a historical lens.

Instead of painting consumptive practices as detracting from fan agency, research might revisit how fans can project their agency through their consumer practices and how those consumer practices reflect active choices in identity construction as a fan. This thread of thought

began with the broadcast, which underscored that being a consumer of esports – someone who financially supported the tournament itself – was one key role for fans could take part in the tournament. This was tied to both their identity as a spectator of esports (supporting the tournament) but also the player identity, as the means through which most fans supported the tournament – buying in-game items – added to their own gaming experience. If this were an isolated study, this could seem like it was a way of taking advantage of esports fans as a market. Yet building on the findings from the other studies in this research project highlights that fans are using their consumer power selectively and to reinforce their own active agency in esports. They are not blindly following the industries desires out of them, but are more likely steering the experience.

Esports fans can use their consumer power to reinforce their own intersected identities and navigate the experience to their own benefit. In communal practices, fans exercised selectivity and agency in what they would partake in around visual projection of identity (e.g. clothes) and the consumption of products (such as food, drink). Part of the spectator experience was the availability of certain goods, typically associated with the sports spectator experience. But the ways in which esports fans operated in these public spaces highlighted that their identity as a player was also central to the experience – they did not overindulge so they could be sharp, critical of the game play or able to play themselves.

But the agency as it can be reflected through consumer power was most aptly reflected in the way that esports fans prioritized the acquisition and cultivation of goods that were directly related to their player experience. In fan spaces, most material culture was a curated, carefully selected process that went towards their gaming experience. Some were aware of when these objects were esports sponsors, but most argued their selection was based on the quality of the

object to facilitate the gaming experience. This suggests that although the industry may wish to commodify the fan as a spectator, at the moment, they are being selective and conscious of the agency they have on the industry.

Role of Gender for Esports Fandom

Another key finding from these studies was the role of gender as layered with the identity of an esports fan. In an analysis of the frames applied to esports, it was clear that many of the hegemonic frames we would expect to find were not present. At the same time, the concentration in certain frames may be the artifact of two masculine identities coming together: geek and sport (Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2013). These frames may suggest the common ground between these two identities, or the selective nature of media producers in highlighting particular elements of those gendered identities. Within the context of the field observation, the emphasis on a desire for the availability of certain forms of consumption (e.g. alcohol) was belied by the fact that fans did not partake in the consumption in the same overabundance that a traditional sports fan might. Combined with the interview findings of the emphasis on play, I propose that geek masculinity may be the dominant form of masculinity for many esports fans, as fans are coming out of gamer culture. This may explain the selectivity of certain practices that might be native to sports, but are not at home in geek culture.

This does not mean that esports is managing to negate the hegemonic masculine practices derived from the intersection of two male-dominated cultures (N. Taylor et al., 2009). Far from it. The very fact that it was hard to find alternative gender identities (including women) at the field observation indicates barriers to the participation of those who do not adhere to the gender performances native to gamer or sport culture. Compounding this with the dominance of white males in all three studies suggests that there may be something about the intersectionality of

white and male that affords latitude to be a visible esports fan. Although the industry may be trying to highlight the presence of alternative ethnicities and genders (Casselman, 2015), they are not visible minorities. On screen, few professional esports players are beyond the paradigm of Asian or white. The prioritization of Asian identity has, in some communities, led to a confluence stereotypes around the racial superiority of certain qualities that are, arguably, historically more gendered – such as dexterous hands being thought of as Asian (Harper, 2010). Future research should delve more deeply into the implications of the intersection of race, nationality and gender within esports both within the United States and at an international level.

In Sum.

Overall, this work highlights that we can explore a cultural phenomenon through fan practice, communal engagement, and an interrogation of the media object. It is through the confluence of these different modes of practice that this work highlights not only specific practices about the esports community, but about media consumers writ large. First, we should not be afraid to critically analyze the role of consumptive practices in the role of audiences. The ways in which audiences chose to engage with material objects surrounding their medium – or not – is instructive for how they can reflect their identity. It signals a way of entrenching oneself into a community. But their involvement in the community is not limited to consumption, and may, instead, be multi-fractured. More research should critically examine audiences not as passive "viewers" of a medium, but as having selective, informed motivations for how they spend their time with that medium.

This research suggests that the existing notions of how and what we do with media objects, built upon the back of television broadcast research, may be changing. Being a media consumer is not set to a fixed schedule, and is not necessarily constructed as a direct engagement

with the media object. It may be an iterative and interactive process, constructed through blips of time throughout the day. It could be about binge-watching a program, combined with other forms of engagement. Watching is not a monolithic activity, but one that lends itself to be integrated with other activities, such as deepening social bonds with friends or chatting about strategies for play.

Finally, this research highlights that the fan experience is situated and constructed through the everyday practices of viewers. It is contextualized through the ways that they chose to incorporate media into their everyday lives, and informed through a multi-modal engagement with media outside of the core text. These practices may vary from individual to individual, but any singular practice should not take priority over another. We are all fans of something, and those forms of constructing fan identity may be dependent on the way we chose to actualize it.

References

Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. J. (1998). *Audiences: A sociological theory of performance and imagination*. London: Sage Publications.

Ackermann, J. (2012). Playing computer games as social interaction: An analysis of LAN parties. In Fromme, J. & Unger, A. (Eds). *Computer games and new media cultures: A handbook of digital game studies.* New York and London: Springer, p. 465-476.

Adams, T., & Tuggle, C. A. (2004). ESPN's SportsCenter and coverage of women's athletics: "It's a boys' club." *Mass Communication & Society, 7*(2), 237–248.

Adams, A., Anderson, E., & McCormack, M. (2010). Establishing and challenging masculinity: The influence of gendered discourses in organized sport. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 29*(3), 278-300.

Aden, R. C., Borchers, T. A., Buxbaum, A. G., Cronn-Mills, K., Davis, S., Dollar, N. J., Mitchell, I., & Ruggerio, A. A. (2009). Communities of Cornhuskers: The generation of place through sports fans' rituals. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 10*(1), 26–37.

Anderson, E. (2009). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. New York: Routledge.

Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. New York: Routledge.

Angelini, J. R., Billings, A. C., MacArthur, P. J., Bissell, K., & Smith, L. R. (2014). Competing separately, medaling equally: Racial depictions of athletes in NBC's primetime broadcast of the 2012 London Olympic Games. *Howard Journal of Communications, 25*(2), 115–133.

Angelini, J. R., MacArthur, P. J., & Billings, A. C. (2012). What's the gendered story? Vancouver's prime time Olympic glory on NBC. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 56*(2), 261–279.

Angelini, J. R., MacArthur, P. J., & Billings, A. C. (2014). Spiraling into or out of stereotypes? NBC's primetime coverage of male figure skaters at the 2010 Olympic Games. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *33*(2), 226-235.

Ang, I. (1985). *Watchin9g Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. New York, New York: Routledge.

Banks, J., & Bowman, N. D. (2016). Avatars are (sometimes) people too: Linguistic indicators of parasocial and social ties in player–avatar relationships. *New Media & Society*, *18*(7), 1257-1276.

Beck, K. (2016, December 16). Disney and MLB purchase streaming rights for 'League of Legends'. *Mashable*. Accessed from: http://mashable.com/2016/12/16/league-of-legends-streaming-mlb/#KZMbHqRiX5q8

Becker, H. S. (1982). *Art Worlds*. Berkley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Begy, J., Consalvo, M., Scully-Blaker, R., & Ganzon, S. C. (2017). Methological consideration in the study of tandem play. *Loading… The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association*, *10*(16), 149-161.

Billings, A. C. (2009). Conveying the Olympic message: NBC producer and sportscaster interviews regarding the role of identity. *Journal of Sports Media*, *4*(1), 1–23.

Billings, A. C., & Angelini, J. R. (2007). Packaging the games for viewer consumption: Gender, ethnicity, and nationality in NBC's coverage of the 2004 Summer Olympics. *Communication Quarterly*, *55*(1), 95-111.

Billings, A. C., & Eastman, S. T. (2002). Selective representation of gender, ethnicity, and nationality in American television coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympics. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *37*(3-4), 351–370.

Billings, A. C., & Eastman, S. T. (2003). Framing identities: Gender, ethnic, and national parity in network announcing of the 2002 winter Olympics. *Journal of Communication*, *53*(4), 569–586.

Blum, B. (2017, June 1) Franchising in esports means esports are here to stay. *ESPN*. Accessed from: http://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/19514784/franchising-esports-means-esports-here-stay

Borowy, M., & Jin, D. A. (2013). Pioneering esport: The experience economy and the marketing of early 1980s arcade gaming contests. *International Journal of Communication*, *7*(21), 2254-2274.

Bowman, M. (2014). How *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* is turning into the world's most exciting esport. *PC GamesN*. Retrieved from http://www.pcgamesn.com/counter-strike-global-offensive/how-counter-strike-global-offensive-is-turning-into-the-worlds-most-exciting-esport

Braithwaite, A. (2016). It’s about ethics in games journalism? Gamergaters and geek masculinity. *Social Media+ Society*, *2*(4).

Busse, K. & Gray, J. (2011). Fan cultures and fan communities. In Nightingale, V. (Ed.). *The Handbook of Media Audiences*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, p. 425-443.

Busse, K. (2013). Geek hierarchies, boundary policing, and the gendering of the good fan. *Participations*, *10*(1), 73-91.

Bryce, J. & Rutter, J. (2003). Gender dynamics and the social and spatial organization of computer gaming. *Leisure Studies, 22(1),* 1-15.

Buffington, D. (2015). You'll never watch alone: Media and community in the sports bar. *Soccer & Society*, 1-16.

Burroughs, B., & Rama, P. (2015). The esports Trojan Horse: Twitch and streaming futures. *Journal for Virtual Worlds Research*, *8*(2).

Carbaugh, D. (1996). *Situating selves: The communication of social identities in American scenes*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Carter, M., & Gibbs, M. R. (2013, May). Esports in EVE Online: Skullduggery, fair play and acceptability in an unbounded competition. In Proceedings of *FDG'13*, May 14-17, 2013 (pp. 47-54). Chania, Crete, Greece.

Casselman, B. (2015, June 12). Resistance is futile: esports is massive ... and growing. *ESPN*. Retrieved from http://espn.go.com/espn/story/_/id/13059210/esports-massive-industry-growing

Channon, A., & Matthews, C. R. (2015). "It is what it is": Masculinity, homosexuality, and inclusive discourse in mixed martial arts. *Journal of Homosexuality, 62*(7), 936–956.

Charmaz, K., & Belgrave, L. (2012). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In Gubrium, J. F., Holstein, J. A., Marvasti, A. B. & McKinney, K. D. (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Interview research: The Complexity of the Craft*, *Second Edition*. Thousands Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, p. 347-365.

Cheung, G., & Huang, J. (2011, May). Starcraft from the stands: Understanding the game spectator. In Proceedings of the *SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 763-772). Austin, Texas.

Chess, S., & Shaw, A. (2015). A conspiracy of fishes, or, how we learned to stop worrying about# GamerGate and embrace hegemonic masculinity. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *59*(1), 208-220.

Cialdini, R. B., Borden, R. J., Thorne, A., Walker, M. R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L. R. (1976). Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *34*(3), 366.

Clark-Ibáñez, M. (2004). Framing the social world with photo-elicitation interviews. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *47*(12), 1507-1527.

Coltrane, S., & Messineo, M. (2000). The perpetuation of subtle prejudice: Race and gender imagery in 1990s television advertising. *Sex Roles*, *42*(5-6), 363-389.

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities: Second Edition*. Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Coppa, F. (2006). A brief history of media fandom. In Hellekson, K. & Busse, K. (Eds.). *Fan fiction and fan communities in the age of the Internet: New essays.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, p. 41-59.

Coppa, F. (2014). Fuck yeah, fandom is beautiful. *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, *2*(1), 73-82.

Couldry, N. (2003). *Media rituals: A critical approach*. London and New York: Routledge.

Couldry, N. (2004). Theorising media as practice. *Social semiotics*, *14*(2), 115-132.

Crawford, G. (2004). Consuming sport: Fans, sport and culture. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, *6*(2), 47-62.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Curry, T. J. (2000). Booze and bar fights: A journey to the dark side of college athletics. In McKay, J., Messner, M. A., & Sabo, D. *Masculinities, gender relations, and sport*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Daddario, G., & Wigley, B. J. (2007). Gender marking and racial stereotyping at the 2004 Athens Games. *Journal of Sports Media*, *2*(1), 29-51.

Denham, B. E., & Duke, A. (2010). Hegemonic masculinity and the rogue warrior: Lance Armstrong as (symbolic) American. In Hundley, H. L & Billings, A. C. *Examining identity in sports media*, pp. 109-132. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Desmarais, F., & Bruce, T. (2010). The power of stereotypes: Anchoring images through language in live sports broadcasts. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *29*(3), 338-362.

Dixon, K. (2013a). *Consuming football in late modern life*. London: Routledge.

Dixon, K. (2013b). Learning the game: Football fandom culture and the origins of practice. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 48*(3), 334-348.

Dixon, K. (2014). The football fan and the pub: An enduring relationship. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *49*(3-4), 382-399.

Dixon, K. (2016). Fandom. In Cashmore, E., & Dixon, K. (Eds.). *Studying Football*. London: Routledge. p. 44-63.

Duncan, M. C. & Messner, M. A. (1998). The media image of sport and gender. In Whannel, L. A. (Ed). *Mediasport.* London: Routledge, pp. 170-185.

Durham, M. G., & Kellner, D. M. (Eds.). (2009). *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Eastman, S. T., & Billings, A. C. (1999). Gender parity in the Olympics: Hyping women athletes, favoring men athletes. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 23*(2), 140–170.

Eastman, S. T., & Billings, A. C. (2000). Sportscasting and sports reporting: The power of gender bias. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 24*(2), 192–213.

Eastman, S. T., & Billings, A. C. (2001). Biased voices of sports: Racial and gender stereotyping in college basketball announcing. *Howard Journal of Communications, 12*(4), 183–201.

Eastman, S. T., & Land, A. M. (1997). The best of both worlds: Sports fans find good seats at the bar. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 21*(2), 156-178.

Eastman, S. T., & Riggs, K. E. (1994). Televised sports and ritual: Fan experiences. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *11*(3), 249-274.

Elmezeny, A. & Wimmer, J. (2015) How gaming achieves popularity: The case of *The Smash Brothers.* In Proceedings of *DiGRA 2015: Diversity of play: Games – Cultures – Identities*. Lueneburg, Germany.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4), 51–58.

Entman, R. M. (2007). Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication*, *57*(1), 163–173.

Fiske, J. (1992). The cultural economy of fandom. In Lewis, L. A. (Ed.). *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media*, London and New York: Routledge. p. 30-49.

Ford, S. (2014). Fan studies: Grappling with an 'undisciplined' discipline. *The Journal of Fandom Studies, 2*(1), 53-71.

Frey, J. H., & Eitzen, D. S. (1991). Sport and society. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *17*(1), 503-522.

Gantz, W. (1981). An exploration of viewing motives and behaviors associated with television sports. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *25*(3), 263-275.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Geertz, C. (1994). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In Martin, M. & McIntyre, L. C. (Eds). *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. Boston, MA: MIT Press, p. 213-231.

Georgen, C., Duncan, S. C., & Cook, L. (2015). From lurking to participatory spectatorship: Understanding affordances of the Dota 2 noob stream. In Proceedings of the *11th International Conference on Computer Supported Collaborative Learning. ISLS*. Gothenburg, Sweden.

Glaser, B. G, & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Gibbons, T., & Dixon, K. (2010). 'Surf's up!': A call to take English soccer fan interactions on the Internet more seriously. *Soccer & Society*, *11*(5), 599-613.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the new left*. Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Giulianotti, R. (2002). Supporters, followers, fans, and flaneurs: A taxonomy of spectator identities in football. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, *26*(1), 25-46. doi: 10.1177/0193723502261003

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goffman, E. (1978). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Harmondsworth.

Gray, J. (2003). New audiences, new textualities: anti-fans and non-fans. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *6*(1), 64-81.

Gray, J., Sandvoss, C., & Harrington, C. L. (Eds.). (2017). *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world*. New York: New York University Press.

Greer, J. D., & Jones, A. H. (2012). Beyond figure skating and Hockey: How US audiences gender type Winter Olympic sports. *International Journal of Sport & Society*, *3*(4).

Guttmann, A. (1986). *Sports spectators*. Columbia University Press.

Guttmann, A. (2004). *From ritual to record: The nature of modern sports*. Columbia University Press.

Hamari, J. & Sjöblom, M. (2017). What is esports and why do people watch it? *Internet research, 27*(2), 211-232.

Hamilton, W. A., Garretson, O., & Kerne, A. (2014, April). Streaming on Twitch: Fostering participatory communities of play within live mixed media. In Proceedings of the *32nd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1315-1324). Toronto, Canada.

Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies, 17*(1), 13-26.

Harper, T. (2010). The art of war: Fighting games, performativity, and social game play (PhD Dissertation). Ohio University, Athens, OH.

Harper, T. (2014). *The culture of digital fighting games: Performance and practice*. New York, New York: Routledge.

Harrington, C. L., & Bielby, D. D. (1995). *Soap fans: Pursuing pleasure and making meaning in everyday life*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Harris, J. (2012). The 13th man: constructions of fandom at the 2008 Ryder Cup. In Earnheardt, A. C., Haridakis, P. M., & Hugenberg, B. S. (Eds.). *Fan Power, Identity and Socialization: Exploring the Fandemonium*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, p. 37-47.

Hayes, E. (2008). Girls, gaming and trajectories of IT expertise. In Kafai, Y. B., Denner, J., & Su, J. Y. (Eds). *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New perspectives on gender and computer games*, Boston, MA: MIT Press, p. 138-194.

Hein, R. J., & Engerman, J. A. (2016). Knowledge production in e-Sports culture: Learning with and from the masters. In Valentine, K.C. & Jensen, L. J. (Eds.). *Examining the Evolution of Gaming and Its Impact on Social, Cultural, and Political Perspectives*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, p. 238-257.

Hills, M. (2002). *Fan cultures*. New York: Routledge.

Hills, M. (2005). Negative fan stereotypes ('Get a life!') and positive fan injunctions ('Everyone's got to be a fan of something!'): Returning to hegemony theory in fan studies. *Spectator, 25*(1), 35-47.

Hills, M. (2013). Fiske's 'textual productivity' and digital fandom: Web 2.0 democratization versus fan distinction. *Participations, 10*(1), 130-153. Available at: participations.org.

Hsu, Y. & Chuang, O. L. (2008). Are Internet cafés gendered spaces? *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 11*(2), 224-226.

Huhh, J. S. (2009). The "bang" where Korean online gaming began: The culture and business of the *PC bang* in Korea. In Hjorth, L. & Chan, D. (Eds). *Gaming Cultures and Place in Asia-Pacific.* New York: Routledge, p. 102-116.

Jansz, J., & Martens, L. (2005). Gaming at a LAN event: The social context of playing video games. *New Media Society, 7*(3), 333–355.

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New Yorl, New York: NYU Press.

Jenny, S. E., Manning, R. D., Keiper, M. C., & Olrich, T. W. (2016). Virtual(ly) athletes: where esports fit within the definition of "sport". *Quest*, *69*(1), 1-18.

Jin, D. Y. (2010). *Korea's online gaming empire*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press.

Johnson, E. (2015, May 25). The promise of esports bars: With your beer, a shot at fame. Recode. Retrieved from: http://recode.net/2015/05/02/the-promise-of-esports-bars-with-your-beer-a-shot-at-fame/

Jonasson, K., & Thiborg, J. (2010). Electronic sport and its impact on future sport. *Sport in Society*, *13*(2), 287-299.

Karhulahti, V. M. (2016). Prank, troll, gross and gore: Performance issues in esport live-streaming. *In Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*.

Kaytoue, M., Silva, A., Cerf, L., Meira Jr, W., & Raïssi, C. (2012). Watch me playing, I am a professional: A first study on video game live streaming. In Proceedings of the *21st International Conference on World Wide Web* (pp. 1181-1188). Lyon, France.

Kendall, L. (1999a). Nerd nation: Images of nerds in US popular culture. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *2*(2), 260-283.

Kendall, L. (1999b). "The nerd within": Mass media and the negotiation of identity among computer-using men. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 7*(3), 353-369.

Kendall, L. (2000). "Oh no! I'm a nerd!" Hegemonic masculinity on an online forum. *Gender & Society*, *14*(2), 256-274.

Kendall, L. (2002). *Hanging out in the virtual pub: Masculinities and relationships online*. Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Kendall, L. (2011). "White and nerdy": Computers, race, and the nerd stereotype. *The Journal of Popular Culture, 44*(3), 505-524.

Kian, E. M., Clavio, G., Vincent, J. & Shaw, S. D. (2011). Homophobic and sexist yet uncontested: Examining football fan postings on internet message boards. *Journal of Homosexuality, 5*(58), 680-699.

Klugman, M. (2015). "I Love Him in an Absolutely Gay Way" Heterodox Fragments of the Erotic Desires, Pleasures, and Masculinity of Male Sports Fans. *Men and Masculinities*, *18*(2), 193-213.

Kraszewski, J. (2008). Pittsburgh in Fort Worth: Football bars, sports television, sports fandom, and the management of home. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 32*(2), 139–157.

Lau, A. (2014). DreamHack Winter attracts over 25,000 live attendees and millions of viewers online. *NeoSeeker.* Retrieved from http://www.neoseeker.com/news/26254-dreamhack-winter-attracts-over-25000-live-attendees-and-millions-of-viewers-online/

Lee, D., & Schoenstedt, L. J. (2011). Comparison of esports and traditional sports consumption motives. *The ICHPER-SD Journal of Research in Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport & Dance*, *6*(2), 39.

Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. (2006). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Margolis, J., & Fisher, A. (2003). *Unlocking the clubhouse: Women in computing*. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

Massanari, A. L. (2015). Gaming at the edge: Sexuality and gender at the margins of gamer culture. *American Journal of Play*, *8*(1), 139-142.

Massanari, A. (2017). # Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New Media & Society*, *19*(3), 329-346.

Martončik, M. (2015). e-Sports: Playing just for fun or playing to satisfy life goals? *Computers in Human Behavior, 48*, 208-2011.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1993). The evolution of agenda-setting research: Twenty-five years in the marketplace of ideas. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(2), 58-67.

McKay, J., Messner, M. A, & Sabo, D. (Eds.). (2000). *Masculinities, gender relations, and sport.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Meân, L. J., & Halone, K. K. (2010). Sport, language, and culture: Issues and intersections. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *29*(3), 253-260.

Messner, M. A. (1992). *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Messner, M. A., Dunbar, M., & Hunt, D. (2000). The televised sports manhood formula. *Journal of Sport & Society, 24*(4), 380–394.

Messner, M. A., Duncan, M.C. & Jensen, K. (1993). Separating the men from the girls: The gendered language of televised sports. *Gender & Society, 7*(1), 121-137.

Palmer, C. (2014). Sport and alcohol -- who's missing? New directions for a sociology of sport-related drinking. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 49*(3-4), 263-277. doi:10.1177/1012690213480353

Pellicone, A. (May 2016). Performing play: Cultural production on Twitch.tv. Proceedings of the *2016 CHI Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 244-248). San Jose, CA.

Postigo, H. (2014). The socio-technical architecture of digital labor: Converting play into YouTube money. *New Media & Society, 18*(2), 332-349.

Price, V., & Tewksbury, D. (1997). News values and public opinion: A theoretical account of media priming and framing. In G. A. Barett & F. J. Boster (Eds.). *Progress in Communication Sciences: Advances in Persuasion* (Vol. 13). Greenwich, CT: Able, pp. 173-212.

Radway, J. A. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.

Raney, A. (2009). Why we watch and enjoy mediated sports. In Raney, A. & Bryant, J. (Eds). *Handbook of sports and media*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 339-356.

Real, M. (2011). Theorizing the sports-television dream marriage. In Billings, A. (Ed). *Sports media: Transformation, integration, consumption*. London: Routledge, pp. 19-39.

Roche, M. (2000). *Mega-events & modernity: Olympics and expos in the growth of global culture*. London: Routledge.

Rowe, D., McKay, J. & Miller, T. (1998). Come together: Sport, nationalism, and the media image. In Whannel, L. A. (Ed). *Mediasport.* London: Routledge, pp. 119-133.

Salter, A., & Blodgett, B. (2012). Hypermasculinity & dickwolves: The contentious role of women in the new gaming public. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 56*(3), 401-416.

Sabo, D. & Jansen, S. C. (1998). Prometheus unbound: Constructions of masculinity in sports media. In Whannel, L. A. (Ed). *Mediasport.* London: Routledge, pp. 202-217.

Sandvoss, C. (2005). *Fans: The mirror of consumption*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Sandvoss, & Kearn (2014). From interpretive communities to interpretive fairs: Ordinary fandom, textual selection and digital media. In Widholm, A. (Ed.). *The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures*. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. pp. 91-108.

Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, *49*(1), 103-122.

Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication*, *57*(1), 9–20.

Schimmel, K. S., Harrington, C. L., & Bielby, D. D. (2007). Keep your fans to yourself: The disjuncture between sport studies' and pop culture studies'. Perspectives on Fandom. *Sport in Society*, *10*(4), 580-600.

Scott, O. K. M., Hill, B., & Zakus, D. H. (2015). When the home team is not featured: Comparison of two television network commentaries during broadcasts of the 2006 Fifa World Football Cup. *Sports Management Review*, 15, 23-32.

Sell, J. C. (2015). E-sports broadcasting (Masters thesis). Retrieved from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/97996

Seo, Y., & Jung, S. U. (2016). Beyond solitary play in computer games: The social practices of esports. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *16*(3), 635-655.

Shaw, A. (2010). What is video game culture? Cultural studies and game studies. *Games and Culture*, *5*(4), 403-424.

Shaw, A. (2012). Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity. *New Media & Society*, *14*(1), 28-44.

Shaw, A. (2013). On not becoming gamers: Moving beyond the constructed audience. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, (2). Available at: adanewmedia.org

Simon, B. (2007). Geek chic: Machine aesthetics, digital gaming, and the cultural politics of the case mod. *Games and Culture*, *2*(3), 175-193.

Smith, L., & Bissell, K. (2014). Nice dig!: An analysis of the verbal and visual coverage of men's and women's beach volleyball during the 2008 Olympic Games. *Communication & Sport*, *2*(1), 48-64.

Soshnick, S., & Novy-Williams, E. (2016, September 26). 76ers Owners Harris, Blitzer Add esports Team to Portfolio. *Bloomberg*. Accessed from: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-09-26/76ers-owners-harris-blitzer-add-esports-team-to-portfolio

Stone, C. (2007). The role of football in everyday life. *Soccer & society, 8*(2-3), 169-184.

Stubbs, M. (2017, May 30). Prize Pool For The 'Dota 2' International 7 Hits $12.5 Million And Is Still Growing. *Forbes*. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikestubbs/2017/05/30/prize-pool-for-the-dota-2-international-7-hits-12-5-million-and-is-still-growing/

Suits, B. (2007). The elements of sport. In W. J. Morgan (Ed.), *Ethics in sport* (pp. 9–19). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Sveningsson, M. (2012) 'Pity there's so few girls!' Attitudes to female participation in a Swedish gaming context. In Fromme, J. & Unger, A. (Eds). *Computer Games and New Media Cultures: A Handbook of Digital Game Studies.* New York and London: Springer, p. 425-441.

Taylor, N. (2011). Play globally, act locally: The standardization of pro Halo 3 gaming. *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology, 3*(1), 228-242.

Taylor, N., Jenson, J., & De Castell, S. (2009). Cheerleaders/booth babes/*Halo* hoes: Pro-gaming, gender and jobs for the boys. *Digital Creativity, 20*(4), 239-252.

Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Raising the stakes: E-Sports and the professionalization of computer gaming*. Boston: MIT Press.

Taylor, T.L., & Witkowski, E. (2010). This is how we play it: What a mega-LAN can teach us about games. In Proceedings for *Foundations of Digital Games Conference*, June 19-21, Monterey, CA.

Tocci, J. (2007). The well-dressed geek: Media appropriation and subcultural style. In Proceedings of *MIT5, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.* Boston, MA.

TrackDotA (2016, August 13). The International 6. Accessed from: http://www.trackdota.com/matches/2569610900

Tuggle, C. A. (1997). Differences in television sports reporting of men's and women's athletics: ESPN SportsCenter and CNN Sports Tonight. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 41*(1), 14–24.

Tulloch, J., & Jenkins, H. (1995). *Science fiction audiences: Watching* Doctor Who *and* Star Trek. London: Routledge.

Wagner, M. G. (2006). On the scientific relevance of esports. Proceedings from the *International Conference on Internet Computing* (pp. 437-442). Las Vegas, Nevada.

Weed, M. (2006). The story of an ethnography: The experience of watching the 2002 World Cup in the pub. *Soccer & Society, 7*(1), 76-95.

Weed, M. (2007). The pub as a virtual football fandom venue: An alternative to 'being there'? *Soccer & Society, 8*(2), 399-414.

Weed, M. (2008). Exploring the sport spectator experience: Virtual football spectatorship in the pub. *Soccer & Society, 9*(2), 189-197.

Wenner, L. A. (1989). Media, sports, and society. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.

Wenner, L. A. (1998a). *Mediasport.* London: Routledge.

Wenner, L. A. (1998b). In search of the sports bar: Masculinity, alcohol, sports, and the mediation of public space. In Rail, G. (Ed). *Sport and postmodern times*. New York: State University Press of New York, p. 301-332.

Wenner, L. A., & Gantz, W. (1998). Watching sports on television: Audience experience, gender, fanship, and marriage. In Wenner, L. A. (Ed). *MediaSport*. New York: Routledge, p. 233-265.

Whannel, G. (2005). *Media sport stars: Masculinities and moralities*. London: Routledge.

Whannel, G. (2009). Television and the transformation of sport. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 625*(1), 205-218.

Williams, D., Consalvo, M., Caplan, S., & Yee, N. (2009). Looking for gender: Gender roles and behaviors among online gamers. *Journal of Communication, 59*(4), 700-725.

Williams, D., Yee, N., & Caplan, S. E. (2008). Who plays, how much, and why? Debunking the stereotypical gamer profile. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*(4), 993-1018.

Williams, J. (2007). Rethinking sports fandom: The case of European soccer. *Leisure Studies, 26*(2), 127-146.

Winn, J., & Heeter, C. (2009). Gaming, gender, and time: Who makes time to play?. *Sex roles, 61*(1-2), 1-13.

Witkowski, E. (2009). Probing the sportiness of esports. In Christophers, J. and Scholz, T. (Eds.). Esports *Yearbook 2009*. Norderstedt, Germany: Books on Demand GmbH. p. 53-56.

Witkowski, E. (2012). On the digital playing field: How we 'do sport' with networked computer games. *Games and Culture, 7*(5), 349-374.

Witkowski, E. (2013). Eventful masculinities: Negotiations of hegemonic sporting masculinities at LANs. In Consalvo, M., Mitgutsch, K. & Stein, A. (Eds.), *Sports videogames* (pp. 217-235). New York: Routledge.

Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis, and Interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Vamplew, W. (1988). *Pay up and play the game: Professional sport in Britain, 1875-1914*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

van Ingen, C. (2003). Geographies of gender, sexuality, and race: Reframing the focus on space in sport sociology. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 38*(2), 201-216.

Vogelgesang, W. (2003). LAN-partys. Jugendkulturelle erlebnisräume zwischen off- und online. *medien + erziehung, 47* (5), 65–75.

Yee, N. (2006a). Motivations for play in online games. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 9*(6), 772-775.

Yee, N. (2006b). The demographics, motivations, and derived experiences of users of massively multi-user online graphical environments. *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments, 15*(3), 309-329.

Zhang, J. J., Pease, D. G., & Smith, D. W. (1998). Relationship between broadcasting media and minor league hockey game attendance. *Journal of Sport Management, 12*(2), 103-122.

Zolides, A. (2015). Lipstick bullets: Labour & gender in professional gamer self-branding. *Persona Studies, 1*(2), 42-53.