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THE SELF-PERCEPTION OF VIDEO GAME JOURNALISM: INTERVIEWS WITH GAMES WRITERS REGARDING THE STATE OF THE PROFESSION

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GAYLORD COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Video game journalism is a contentious area of examination. At its heart is the question as to whether it is even journalism. This study explores that question by conducting interviews with 15 writers for various video game websites and publications. Through qualitative interviews, the respondents describe their work environment and how they self identify in the industry of games writing. The responses were analyzed through the framework of the social responsibility of the press, play theory, and existing ideas of professionalism and expertise in journalism.

Keywords: journalism, video games, product reviews, social responsibility, play theory

Chapter 1

Video Game Journalism

Video game development has a history of over fifty years. The first video game, *Spacewar*, was designed to be a technical demo for the PDP-1 computer system (Graetz, 1981). This video game featured two players flying two space ships around a black hole. While an entertaining game, it was designed merely to show the computer's processing capabilities. The developers likely had no idea that their creation was going to plant the seeds for the creation of video games as a popular source of entertainment.

Computer Space was the first commercially sold video game. *Computer Space* was the first of a long line of coin operated stand-alone arcade systems (Edwards, 2011). These arcade machines were widely distributed to bars, restaurants, and college campuses and allowed for owners to profit by requiring players to pay coins each time they played. With the creation of *Pong*, arcade machines reached a height of popularity throughout the 1970's and 1980's (Kent, 2001).

Video game developers then sought out ways to bring the arcade experience home. This led to the development of home video game systems, such as the *Magnavox Odyseey* and the immensely popular *Atari 2600*. Home gaming all but disappeared for a period in the mid-80's due to poor business decisions on the part of industry leader *Atari* (Katz, 1985; Ramsay, 2012). However, home gaming would return with a vengeance with the American release of the *Nintendo Entertainment System* (Sheff, 1994).

This boom would lead to the release of several other console gaming systems such as the *Sega Genesis* and the *Turbografx-16* (Kent, 2001). Future console development and improving technology would see not only a disappearing gap between

arcade gaming and home gaming, but also the development of portable gaming systems. These improvements in technology have caused a downturn in business for the formerly popular arcade business. This has led to many arcades being forced to close their doors due to the lack of business.

The current generation of gaming systems is comprised of home systems, portable systems, and personal computers. Documenting this history and developing alongside gaming has been the industry of video game journalism. Video game journalism has acted as a source of information for consumers of video game media. Gaming journalism first came into being with the writing of video game articles in newspapers and magazines followed by the creation of gaming magazines designed to preview and review upcoming game releases, both in the arcade and at home. As the industry progressed so did the development of game journalism. Game journalism has since expanded to online videos and podcasts.

Why then is game journalism an important field of study? Game journalism has a 30-year history. When we compare that to print and broadcast journalism, we see games journalism is still a relatively young form of journalism. In a short amount of time, game journalism has changed from being deeply rooted in print, to being almost exclusively a part of video focused electronic media. This transition has lead to a reevaluation of what it means to be a games writer and a questioning of what a games writer even is. Individuals who work as writers covering games may not even consider themselves to be a journalist in the classical sense. Many games writers do consider themselves journalists and use journalism ethics and standards as a guideline in their occupation. However some writers may not adhere to journalistic ethics or expectations, since they do not

consider themselves a journalist. This provides a unique relationship between the "journalist" and their audience. At what point does being a fan of video games intersect with being a games journalist. This relationship can provide an interesting view into better understanding the games journalist/writer profession. This relationship could provide a broader understanding of the changing landscape of writing in the mass media in an electronic age. As a result, what is discovered about games journalists may have broad implications for what is considered journalism in the modern era. Just because the public applies the label "journalist" to the games writer, does not mean that the "journalist" adheres to the same label. This disconnect could help us to make distinction in what makes a game journalist different from a games writer. This distinction could go even further to understand what makes a games writer different from a gamer with internet access. These distinctions could be applied to discuss the differences between bloggers and electronic journalists.

Video games are a multi-billion dollar industry netting $36 billion dollars in revenue for 2017 (Entertainment Software Association, 2018), yet the outlets that cover these games have been in either a period of consolidation or closing. Many print magazines have ceased print all together (Peterson, 2013). Successful gaming websites that were once independent have been bought and subsequently closed down by larger corporations. *1up.com, Gamespy* and *Joystiq* were popular sites that were bought, sold, and closed during the course of this study.

For websites to remain viable they have been forced to adapt and transform into something different from what was the norm in the past. Many sites offer up increased advertising. Some sites focus mostly on video and audio podcasts in order to deliver

content. Other sites offer a catch all of entertainment stories rather than focusing solely on video games. The purpose of this study will be to examine the current state of games writing as well as understand the decline and change of games writing from the perspective of those who work in that field. Insights from interviews with games writers will be analyzed through the perspectives of social responsibility (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963), play theory (Stephenson, 1967), and the concepts of expertise and professionalism.

The problem faced in game journalism may be representative of a larger problem of journalism as a whole. This problem becomes more apparent particularly when examining niche styles of journalism such as those in entertainment journalism and reviews. Are the games writers that work for the major outlets facing different obstacles and challenges than that of an independent site? Do the independents face their own set of problems by attempting to set themselves apart from the cacophony of other voices that are available? An understanding of these difficulties in terms of video game journalism can be helpful in understanding the role of entertainment based journalism and the future of journalism in this era of new media.

Chapter 2

Video Game Journalism History

Video game journalism's history can be traced to the popularity of arcade games in the early 1970s with a New York Times article covering the release of the Atari game *Pong* (Range, 1974). The first regular video games column, called *Arcade Alley*, began in 1978 as a way of covering games for the magazine *Video* (Apar, 1981). The column's authors, Bill Kunkle and Frank Laney Jr., would go on to create *Electronic Games*, the first North American magazine dedicated to video games. This magazine provided readers with reviews of games, details of behind the scenes development, and tips and tricks for game releases. While this magazine only lasted until 1985, it set established a template for future video game journalistic endeavors.

Magazine publications regarding video game coverage experienced a downturn during the video game crash of the 1980's. The gaming publications focused less on game consoles and more on computer gaming. With the development of the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1985, gaming publications once again grew in popularity. Several other gaming publications were developed over the next two decades. Publications such as *Electronic Gaming Monthly* and *Gamepro* would offer information regarding games on all available platforms. Publications such as *Nintendo Power* operated as an extension of the platform designers and would only cover games related to their respective platforms. At one time *Nintendo Power* was the number one selling magazine targeted towards children with a monthly circulation of five million copies (Donovan, 2010).

Video game journalism in print has struggled in recent years as business consolidation has led to most magazine publishing to be handled by two major publishers; Ziff Davis and Future Publishing. At one time Ziff Davis published over ten gaming related magazines and several gaming websites. In 2008, Ziff Davis filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and was forced to discontinue all of its gaming magazines and sell off its existing gaming websites (Sinclair, 2009). Future Publishing at one time was the official magazine publisher for Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo. As of 2012, it was announced that due to a downturn in publishing sales that two of these three exclusive magazines would be discontinued (Reilly, 2012a, 2012b) leaving only *OXM: Official Xbox Magazine* as the only official console exclusive magazine.

Game journalism has also extended to television with limited success. The television show *GamePro TV* debuted in 1990 as a television extension of magazine *GamePro*, and ran for two seasons (Henzel, 2012). The show offered previews and reviews of games and was able to offer the unique ability to show the games in motion. This was an option not available in print game journalism. With the cancelation of *GamePro TV*, there was little in the way of video game programming until the launch of the *G4TV* network in 2002 (Sieberg, 2002). This network was built upon by programming based around gaming and technology. In 2005, *G4* was restructured to offer a more mainstream male oriented programming, scaling back on gaming and technology based programming. In October 2012, *G4* announced the cancellation of *X-Play* and *Attack of the Show*, the last two gaming and technology oriented programs left on its program schedule (MacKenzie, 2012). In February of 2017, Spike TV rebranded and canceled the last game review show on network television (Andreeva, 2017). In

2018, Disney began airing video game related programming focusing on eSports competitions airing on their ESPN and Disney XD networks (ESPN.com, 2018). This coverage was less inclined towards coverage of the games and more of the sports dynamics of eSports in general.

In the early nineties, gaming websites created. Sites such as *Game Zero* first offered video game related content that served as a supplement for print magazines. Many websites followed. As time developed, many websites were developed to serve independently without a print equivalent form. These sites have become the primary source of video game journalism providing videos and podcasts on top of the written articles. Popular, contemporary websites include *IGN, Kotaku, Gamespot,* and *Giant Bomb.*

As time has progressed, there are few gaming magazines left in circulation in the United States, with multiple websites being the source for current video game content. In a recent change of ownership, Ziff Davis re-entered the game journalism market as the company purchased *IGN.com* and it's subsidiaries leading to a renewed presence in the online game journalism market (Simmons, 2013). This renewed presence came at the cost of several of IGN's subsidiary sites. Ziff Davis closed several of its owned gaming sites such as *1up.com* and *Gamespy,* laying off most of its staff and taking a few of the remaining staff and consolidating them under their IGN banner. Ziff Davis, a former leader in publications related to games journalism, has downsized their role significantly in what is seemingly an attempt to remain profitable.

When we compare the economic woes of games journalism to the economy of video games we see interesting trends. Economic projections speculated that the video

game industry will be an $82 billion dollar industry by 2017 (Gaudiosi, 2012). While falling short of that estimation by about half, popular online game *Fortnite* netted $3 billion dollars profit in 2018 (Parab, 2018). Despite the economic boom that video games have been experiencing, the game journalism industry is experiencing an increase in consolidation and downsizing (Moss, 2012; Oravasaari, 2012). Games journalism, despite a 30-year history, is still a young and developing form of journalism. This is a very interesting time to examine the field of games journalism, as the changes that occur during this time may be critical in how this journalism survives. The games writers who are still a part of this industry may be those who set the groundwork for the future of this industry. An analysis of this young form of journalism at this critical point could add to the greater knowledge of the development of journalism in new media.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Despite being little scholarly information regarding game journalism, there are some studies that may be pertinent to this field. The following literature review examines the dual nature of the gamer journalist. The first half examines the role of the gamer as a journalist. This examination will explore scholarly literature regarding video game journalism as well as studies that may be related such as film critics, sports journalism, and citizen journalism. The second half explores the reverse of this existence in which the journalist is a gamer. This examination will explore the motivations behind why people game and what causes them to explore gaming as a pastime.

The Gamer as a Journalist

Game journalism can be a difficult field to examine. Video game journalism, like other forms of entertainment journalism, focuses on niche content. There are few studies that focus on the practice of video game journalism. Some studies have used video game journalism as a method for analyzing video game content. A study by Miller (2010) used a content analysis of videogame magazines as a method for determining whether the implementation of video game ratings had an effect on content. Another study by Ivory (2006) used a content analysis of video game reviews as a method of assessing gender portrayals in video games.

There have been a few studies that have specifically focused on the process of video game journalism. Hall (2003) discussed the ethics of games journalism. He described the dangers involved in games journalists who participated in PR events surrounding a game's release. However, he addressed ways in which games writers are

able to establish methods of credibility in the eyes of their audience. Also cited is the idea that most gamers have access to a multitude of websites to compare and contrast gaming experiences as a way of making their own educated judgments about the games they want to buy.

Zagal, Ladd, and Johnson (2009) conducted an analysis of game reviews as a way of understanding them as a form of journalism and discourse rather than merely a shopping guide. The researchers found that game reviews often contain game design suggestions, hypothesize about what the game creators intended in making the game, and also offer helpful advice to the readers. Reviewers also provided a first person account of their experience with personal narratives to frame their experience. The authors also concluded that game reviews are helpful in preserving gaming history as they provide a historical context for the game within our society as well as how a current game may relate to older video games.

Barkl (2011) examined how video game journalism has changed with the advent of digital publishing techniques. The author notes that when video game journalism moved online, a new dialogue was created between journalists, the industry, and the audience that they served. Social tools such as tagging and forums shifted the focus to a more social form of media. According to the author, the social expansion of video game journalism will serve as a foundation for future advancement in the field.

Film Criticism Studies

Due to how the reviews and articles are used by the consumer, there are parallels between the field of video game journalism and film criticism. The process of reviewing movies could provide a good analog for examining video game journalism. A study by

Reinstein and Snyder (2005) examined the relationship between the movie criticisms of two popular movie critics (Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert) to the opening weekend box office of the movies they reviewed. By comparing the "thumbs up" and "thumbs down" ratings to the box office of popular movies, the researchers found that the ratings did have an effect. Positive reviews were found to have a significantly high influence on the box office of movies of the drama genre.

A similar study by Eliashberg and Shugan (1997) yielded another interpretation. The researchers suggested that critics could fall under two categories: influencer or predictor. As an influencer, the critic acts as an opinion leader with the ability to "make or break a motion picture opening" (p. 71). As a predictor, the critic simply represents the market and the audience. The predictor predicts the results but has no real influence on them. This study showed that the film critics were more likely to act as a predictor rather than an influencer.

Another study suggests that movie reviewers become are less effective motivators when compared to word of mouth information (Liu, 2006). Word of mouth information created by registered users on the Yahoo Movies website was shown to be a significant indicator of the box office success of a released movie. The author admits that this may be more a subject of the volume of information rather than its quality, but it could suggest that the average consumer may be more swayed by another average consumer's opinion rather than the opinion of a paid journalist.

Plucker, Kaufman, Temple, and Qian (2009) examined the changing landscape of movie reviews examining the differences between amateur and professional film critics. The researchers examined how the rating process differs between novice and expert

movie critics and how those compared to college students who reviewed movies. The researchers found that there were some correlations between the three groups of reviewers. The researchers concluded that the distinction between what is an amateur reviewer and what is an expert reviewer has started to overlap. However, despite this blurring distinction, there is still importance placed on expertise in this field. The distinction between expert and amateur movie reviews could be extended to the practice of video game reviews.

Similarly, Moon, Bergey, and Iacobucci (2010) examined the potential relationship between movie reviews and economic performance. The researchers found a multitude of effects through this study. Movies that make more money early on in their release cycle tended to have better movie reviews. They also found that highly rated movies that also invested in advertising tended to gain higher revenue. Most interestingly they found that movie viewers' viewing experience could cause them to become progressively more critical in writing their reviews. The researchers conclude that a review system can be vital to the success of new and existing products and that they could be used as a way of managing customer relations in regard to their films. This may also parallel the relationships that occur between the video game industry and the gaming press.

Movie reviews can have a significant effect on the success of a movie, but this can also depend on the quality of the reviewer. Chen, Liu, and Zhang (2012) found that a review's power to influence was not just reliant on the review, but on the quality and validity of previously published reviews. The authors also found that reviews could have significant impact prior to the release of a movie, and that the impact is highest during the

actual release window of the movie. While these were shown to be significant factors, the authors noted that reviews had a major impact that could be mediated with effective advertising and marketing. Video game journalism, while differing from film journalism, seems to share in its ability to have an impact on the success of a video game release. While differing fields, they appear to share these common traits.

Sports Journalism Studies

Studies regarding sports journalism, another form of entertainment journalism, may also provide an area in which similar methods and similar theories may be applied to video game journalism. Sports journalism, like video game journalism, is often criticized for being a non-serious form of journalism despite requiring the same rigors of mainstream journalism (Zion, Spaaij, & Nicholson, 2011). Sports journalists provide context and backgrounds that are absent from simply visiting a sports blog. They also are capable of looking beyond just the issues of sports and are able to contextualize an issue in a broader social setting if necessary (Hardin & Ash, 2011).

Banagan (2011) explored the ethical complications that have become a part of sports journalism. In a case study, Banagan examine ESPN's coverage of LeBron James's announcement that he was leaving the Cleveland Cavaliers for the Miami Heat. ESPN, chose to televise the announcement live as a one-hour television special known as *The Decision*. ESPN was criticized as lacking journalistic integrity and James was vilified in subsequent press coverage as being arrogant. Banagan focused on the confusion of ethics that occurred because of *The Decision* and the problems that occur when sports journalism places its emphasis on ratings and profitability. The author regarded this as a case where ESPN's marketing department trumped journalistic

integrity. Banagan concludes by suggesting that if sports journalism is to act as an objective voice in sports, then further dialogue is necessary to re-evaluate prevailing ethics in the field. Such evaluation could apply to video game journalism as well. Games writers may be pressured to cover high profile games over lesser-known independent games. This pressure may come out of a need to attract more readers, but this might come at an ethical cost.

Product Review Studies

A study of the effect of the online review process was conducted to see how these reviews could affect purchasing decisions. An analysis of reviews from Amazon.com examined review structure in relation to products purchased. This study found that reviews did influence the consumer perception of the products. Reviews that were extremely positive or extremely negative were less effective than moderate reviews. Reviews of great depth were more effective than simple reviews (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Consumers, rather than journalists, typically write the reviews on Amazon. These findings may support the idea that video game players may look towards word of mouth information rather than that of journalists.

Applying product review analysis to video game journalism could be a logical area to explore when often a video game's success is reliant on positive game reviews. A study by Zhu and Zhang (2010) explored the effect that consumer reviews can have on sales in the video game industry. This study found that customer reviews could have a more influential effect on games that are less popular and do not receive as much mainstream press coverage. The findings also showed that games that had players that had greater Internet experience were more likely to be affected by consumer reviews.

This suggests that perhaps the opinion of other gamers may be more influential than video games writers when considering which games to purchase.

Jong and Burgers (2013) explored the differences between written reviews created by consumer critics as opposed to reviews written by professional critics. The authors found that movie reviews written by consumers were written from a personal POV perspective. The professional critics reviews would be more detached and simply describe the movie. The authors found that there was not significant difference between consumer or professional critics. The difference came in what content was present in the review.

Blogging Studies

Studies dealing with blogs may also be useful for examining games journalism since many gaming sites operate in a similar fashion. A growing number of blogs posters treat their craft as if they are journalists (Ji & Sheehy, 2010). The process of blogging has influenced the practices of journalism. Lowrey and Mackay (2008) demonstrated that the presence of local blogging can have a profound effect on the planning of journalistic activities and can lead to the blogs being used as sources. However, some scholars believe that blogs lack the needed social context needed to provide a more complete story like those provided by journalists (Hardin & Ash, 2011). Many video game coverage sites could be compared to blog sites as one or multiple users frequently update the content. Many video game sites offer blogging services for registered members in which users can make their own blog posts that other users, including video games writers can comment on.

Citizen Journalism Studies

Citizen journalism may also be an important area to analyze when considering video game journalism. Often outlets for video game journalism allow for readers to post their own reviews of the products featured. This falls in line with the rise of citizen journalism as been facilitated by technological convergence. This convergence has been led to a development of a media environment where citizens function as not only sources, but also recorders and creators of news (Mythen, 2010). In some cases journalism occurs even when that was never the intent (Lasica, 2003a). Citizen journalism can also help to personalize and humanize the news as well as foster a sense of community among audience members (Lasica, 2003b).

Despite the rise of citizen journalism, news editors still place more importance on the role of professional journalists over citizen journalists (Nah & Chung, 2009). Citizen journalists in a study were identified as reporting soft news. There were few instances where reporting on policy, local officials, or the people affected by policy changes occurred (Holt & Karlsson 2014). However, a citizen journalist who provides information about their background can help improve their credibility (Johnson & Wiedenbeck, 2009).

With improvements in technologies, citizen journalism is on the rise. In videogame journalism, there has always been a variety of crowdsourcing or citizen journalism present in this medium. Often video game magazines would solicit readers to submit tips and tricks regarding games that would then be published. Also, many publications would ask for high-score submissions, fan artwork, and written feedback from its reader base. This has extended to the electronic publications as users are

encouraged to review new game releases. Often users may also contribute to story content when possible and are cited as sources in stories.

New Games Journalism

With video game journalism there have been efforts to try analyzing video game journalism in terms of conventional journalism. Gillen (2004) coined a term referred to as New Games Journalism (NGJ) which is an adaptation of the New Journalism model which is applied to video game journalism. New Journalism, a term popularized by Tom Wolfe (1972), refers to a style of journalism in which information is imparted in a story form drawing from the personal stories of the journalist. Such journalism is common practice in magazine publications such as *Rolling Stone*. By this rationale, Gillen believed that this would make an effective method of reporting about video games.

With NGJ, articles about games deal less with reviews, and more with understanding the gaming experience by relating them to their own experiences. This creates a form of journalism similar to what may be seen in travel journalism. In this format, journalists relate their personal experiences within the game space coupled with anecdotes that they experience within. The journalist's subjective experience becomes the focal point of the story rather than an objective perspective of the video game being reviewed.

There are currently no scholarly articles exploring the field of NGJ. Concern has been raised regarding the lax standards that come with the use of NGJ as a model. The concern becomes that NGJ becomes less about reporting and more about personal opinion (Lepine, 2009). While there may not be an academic basis for this viewpoint, it may be important to recognize this approach as it may play a role in current games

writer's practices. Storytelling is a key component in gaming, so it may be logical to see storytelling as being a key component in effective game journalism.

The Journalist as a Gamer

Games writers, in most cases have extensive experience in gaming. As a result, it may necessary to understand some of what is known about gamers. There has been some research that has sought to understand the link between motivation towards game play and why gamers engage in play. Early research suggested that enjoyment in game play is linked to a variety of phenomena such as performance, perceived complexity, and the relationship between user personality and the game itself (Holbrook, Chestnut, Olivia, & Greenleaf, 1984). Further research suggested that factors such as in-game autonomy (the freedom for gamers to make their own decisions regarding gameplay) and game competence (the gamers' ability to play the game) add to the users overall enjoyment (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006).

Yee (2006) used a factor analysis to design an empirical model of massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG) player motives. Yee identified three key components that motivate MMORPG players: The achievement component, the social component, and the immersion component. As part of the achievement component, the player sought advancement (gaining power and achieving in game status), mechanics (understanding the rules and how best to use them towards their advantage), and competition (the ability to compete with others). Within the social component, players were interested in socializing (interaction with other players), relationship building (forming meaningful relations), and teamwork (the satisfaction of working in a group). The immersion component's four key elements were identified as

discovery (learning innovative factors about the game that other players did not know), role-playing (creating an alter ego to act out in the virtual world), customization (altering the appearance and characteristics of the in-game avatar), and escapism (using the game to relieve real life problems). While these game play motivations were identified in MMORPGs, the author goes on to suggest there is potential for application of these principles to other types of games. The games journalist may draw upon these motivational components as a basis for describing and writing about their experience within video games.

Research has also examined the motivations of adolescents for playing video games. Sørensen (2003) conducted an observational study of boys 11-15 years of age who play online computer games. Sørensen's study focused on the more general category of online games, focusing on the action game *Counter Strike* and the strategy game *Dark Age of Camelot*. Sørensen identified three reasons this category of youth play computer games. First, for some children, the mere act of *playing* is the purpose. This can take the form of pleasure in an active role and in having significance for the successful outcome of the game. Some children are attracted to the challenge that they find in computer games, while others are attracted to the competitive aspect. For other children, what is important is the *social life*, which unfolds around and in front of the computer. Being able to communicate and socialize with friends, even through a computer game, is very important to them. There are also children for whom the *content* of the game defines their purpose. This basis for play and socialization can play a large part in articulating a games journalist's experience within an online game.

Sørensen also observed a difference in the sense of community versus the sense of competition. The players of these games would form their own community structures within the game, in the form of groups referred to as "clans." The dedication of these clans would range from a loose affiliation to a huge commitment, depending on the individuals who make up this group. The members of these clans could be made up of people who know each other in real physical space, or people who only know each other from the virtual online space. These clans join together not only to play games, but to socialize as well. On the other hand, Sørensen discusses the competition aspect among children in these clans. In physical space boys compete against one another baseball in order to win admiration and acceptance. In the virtual world of online gaming, there is no difference in this show of masculinity. The boys attempt to outdo each other in feats of virtual strength to gain admiration and acceptance. Sørensen concludes that the online world gives these gamers a chance to assert their masculinity in a virtual world when they may not be able to perform in the real, physical world.

Sanford and Madill (2006) examined motivations of young male video game players. In this study, the gaming habits of six adolescent males and five young adult males were examined. The six boys were observed at their middle school, both in-class and outside of their classrooms. They were interviewed twice with a particular focus placed on their computer use and game playing habits. The group of adult males was observed and videotaped in their homes, playing videogames independently or with friends. Both groups were interviewed two or three times over the course of three months. These interviews served to determine the reasons behind their game playing and the effect it had on their lives. Resistance was a common theme identified between both

groups of male game players. Three areas of resistance were identified, and included institutional authority, hegemonic masculinity, and femininity. The researchers liken the use of video games as resistance to the use of graffiti or alternative music. They caution that using video games as a sole basis for engaging in literacy can be potentially harmful to the user based on the one-sided messages that they can receive. They conclude by stating that researchers need concern themselves with understanding why these games are played and the potential effects they have on others.

This research suggests that gaming can offers its users an opportunity for interaction, cooperation, and communication with others. Gamers also are noted to play games for escapism. Video games provide an opportunity for gamers to experience a world similar to their own. However, in this world, gamers may be able to do things and participate in behaviors that they otherwise could not be able to do in the physical world. This was a strong motivation for why people might seek out video games as a form of entertainment (Frostling-Henningsson, 2009).

Motivations for gaming could easily be applied as motivations for games journalism. Motivations, community dynamics, and simple escapism are interesting topics that can lend themselves to a journalistic form of expression. In a way, it could be a merging of two shared interests in playing games and delivering information.

The Problem of Defining Games Writers as Journalists

There can be great difficulty in examining those who chose to write about games in relation to their identification as a journalist. Many of those that work in games media do not identify themselves as journalists at all (Jordan Hall, 2013). This may be a result of the lack of formal education in media. The games writer may also believe that their

profession does not compare to journalism. This may also be a belief on the part of the games writers that what they write about is not a serious profession and not bound to the same ethics and restrictions of actual journalists. Whatever the case may be, the games writer may be participating in journalism whether they know it or not.

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) identified ten core principles of journalism that have endured from the early days of journalism to the current forms of media. Journalists have adapted their work, and their audience has adapted the way they receive news. These basics principles have endured and are as follows:

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.
3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.
4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. It must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion.
9. Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.
10. Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news.

(Kovach & Rosensttiel, 2007, pp. 7-8)

Applying these principles to game writing one can see many parallels between the two groups. Most, if not all of these principles are present in media sources that provide information about video games. The successful writers attempt to report in a truthful manner and are extremely loyal to their audience. Games writers will attempt to verify

every bit of information that they report on and will clearly identify instances when they cannot independently verify information. Most established gaming websites are independent of game publishers and developers. Nearly every gaming site will allow for forum posts as a way to serve for a forum for discussion for their audience. Successful gaming sites offer significant comprehensive news. The games writers may be writing out of the belief in the rights and responsibilities of the readers of their content. Games writers may not identify themselves as journalists, but much of their ideals and work ethics reflects what is found in journalism. As a result of this, using journalism theory is an effective theory for examining this unusual field.

Chapter 4

Theory

With the unique nature of game journalism, it is possible that two theories may be required to explain its properties. As a journalist who primarily writes product reviews, may function as a type of consumer advocate. An ethical theory such as social responsibility may be useful in examining the writers' relationship with their audience and what makes that different from a person not writing as a professional. Due to the unique nature of game journalism, particularly the fact that they play games for their profession, a theory such as play theory may be ideal for examining the games writer and what makes them unique from other gamers. Despite the fact that these are two varied theoretical approaches, they may be necessary to explain the various aspects of being a games media writer and what sets them apart from other sources of video game related. Also useful in an examination of games writing would be the concepts of expertise and professionalism. These concepts may be what separates games writers from regular gamers.

Social Responsibility Theory

Following an ethical shift away from libertarianism came the idea of social responsibility theory of the press. Under this theory, the press serves the following functions: (1) Service of the political system (2) Enlighten the public (3) Safeguarding the rights of the individual (4) Servicing the economic system (5) Providing entertainment (6) Maintaining its own financial self-sufficiency (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963).

This theory came from growing criticism of the press and its practices during the twentieth-century. According to Siebert et al. (1963) the following criticism were levied against the media at the time: (1) The press wielded enormous powers to their own ends (2) The press had been subservient to big business (3) The press had resisted social change (4) The press had often paid more attention to superficial and sensational news (5) The press had endangered public morals. (6) The press has invaded the privacy of individuals (7) One socioeconomic class controlled the press.

Similar arguments had been made against other forms of media. Books, and magazines had been labeled as corrupters of morals. Movies as well had faced criticism for their emphasis on sex and other vices depicted on screen. Such criticisms have gone as far back as the twenties. Movies, as well as television and radio were attacked for their apparent monopolistic control over their industries. A small majority of studios and networks controlled all content on each of these media. There was real concern over who had real control over this content (Siebert et al., 1963). Were the messages truly the product of the providers or the advertisers who did business with them?

The social responsibility theory of the press is the product of the Hutchins Commission on media ethics. This commission was formed during World War II with the purpose of establishing a proper function of media within the existing democracy. The commission identified five core responsibilities of the media:

1. The press should provide a "truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning."
2. The press should provide "a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism."

3. The press should provide "a representative picture of the constituent groups on society."
4. The press is responsible for "the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society."
5. The press should provide "full access to the day's intelligence."

(Hutchins Commission, 1947)

To look for improvement of the press's social responsibility the Commission said that they needed to come from three sources: the press, the public, and the government. The press were expected to "assume the responsibilities of common carriers of information and discussion, should experiment with high quality content which offers no immediate promise of financial return, should engage in vigorous mutual criticism, and should seek to improve the caliber of its personnel" (Siebert et al., 1963, p. 92). The public was obligated to understand the power of the press, the shortcomings of the press and the hazards of their reliance on this media. They stated that there were a variety of ways for the public to keep the press in check. Either by creating educational institutions centering around mass communication or establishing groups to examine the performance of the press. The government was also asked to help facilitate legal remedies that may be able to help the press meet their social responsibilities.

Government is an important part of social responsibility theory. The social responsibility assumes a positive freedom approach to its ethics. Instead of the citizens being free from an infringement on their rights, they are instead free to express themselves. The press is a primarily a private enterprise. By limiting the expression of the press, the government would be limiting the rights of their citizens. Therefore,

government must be careful to not do anything to limit the ability of the press (Siebert et al., 1963).

The press, however, does not have carte blanche to do whatever it wants. The social responsibility theory must act with the public's interests in mind. This theory assumes there is little efficacy in the ability of the press to self-right. This was the basic reasoning behind the creation of the Hutchins Commission. If the media did not act in the best interest of their public by acting responsibility, then they risk losing their freedoms.

Christians and Nordenstreng (2004) would expand upon Social Responsibility in terms of the worldwide media that exists in the 21st century. They spoke of the need for adopting universal ethics that go beyond professional ethics. These universal ethics include human dignity, truth telling, and benevolence. These additional ethics apply to the same social domain where the principles of social responsibility comer from. The researchers stressed that these universal ethics were essential in a worldwide connected media landscape.

The social responsibility seems to be an applicable theory to apply to video games journalism, even though the "social good" they serve may be arguable. To the games writer, what they are able to do for their readers may seem like a "social good" to them. Games writers may act as a type of activist for the video game players. Games writers often have advance access to video games prior to their release to the public. As a result, they are able to know things about the games before other people can purchase. As a reviewer they can impart upon their readers the content of the game and their experiences with the game. If a games writer may believe that there is a problem with a game, such

as poor game design, they write a review as warning to their audience. While there is no imminent danger to a gamer if they purchase the game, the journalist may be acting out of concern for the gamer's finances. Since the journalist can play the game before it is released, they may be acting as a way to protect their readers.

The games writer may believe they are offering a service to their audience by letting the gamers know about their thoughts about the games that they are able to play before release. As a result, the gamers may be able to know based on the reviews whether the game is something that they may want to play. Gamers may often seek out reviewers and websites that they believe that they can trust. This trust may form the foundation of what we may call social responsibility, as the games writers try to act in consideration of the interests of their audience. Social responsibility speaks of the journalist's responsibilities to society as a whole. The games writer world of social responsibility can be a unique stylized society of gamers and the writer may seek to protect and serve them.

Play Theory

Games writers are in a unique position of reporting on how they play. A games writer may have completely different reasoning on why they play as opposed to a normal gamer. Stephenson's (1967) play theory can be a useful tool for understanding why and how people use video games for entertainment. Play theory examines why people use media as a diversion in their everyday life. Games, books, toys, and movies are examples of media that can be used expressly as escape from the everyday life. Media creates some sort of inviting environment that the user chooses to visit again and again.

According to Stephenson, play follows a set of guidelines. Play is pretending. It creates a world outside of normal responsibilities. Play is an interlude in the day's events. Play is voluntary. It is not something we do as a task or out of some sense of moral obligation. In some cases, play is disinterested. It provides satisfaction with no serious sense of import. Play is secluded. It takes place in an area that is set aside for the purpose of uninterrupted entertainment. Play is a free activity that absorbs the player completely. If a player is properly enjoying his or her self, then he or she is free of self-conscious behavior. Play theory seeks to distinguish the use of mass communication for work from the use for pleasure. Video games seem to be a natural area that can be studied by play theory, as it is a form of mass communication that is rarely used for any other purpose but for play (Stephenson, 1967).

There has been some research that has examined the application of play theory towards video games. Salonius-Pasternak and Gelfond (2005) discussed the adaptation of play theory in terms of video game play. In this article, they discussed the unique ability of video games to allow play that transcends reality. Using the game *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* as an example, they discuss how the player is able to leap higher and move faster than a real skateboarder ever could. They explain "Not only does the child playing this game transcend the ordinary rules of physics, she also experiences a sense of mastery – if only symbolically – over the physical world and her body in it" (p 9). The researchers also discussed play theory's application to a violent game such as a game from the *Grand Theft Auto* series. They attribute the success of such games not to the violent subject matter, but the free-form design of gameplay. The researchers said, "This design allows players to entirely disregard the main plot lines and instead explore the

virtual city complete with a plethora of interactive details, including delivering pizza and driving the injured to the hospital in an ambulance" (p 10). They point out that deviation from the plot of the game does not have any consequences for the player. Rather than following a set of rules and progression, the players get to play in the electronic equivalent of a sandbox.

It is not effective to simply examine the games writer using strictly journalism theory. With the unique nature of game journalism, the concept of gameplay is core to the profession. Games journalists are tasked with quantifying the nebulous idea of fun. How do they explain that? How do they know if they have found it? By examining gaming in terms of play theory, it may help explain the complex relationship that occurs when game play is not just a tool for play, but also as a source of employment.

The Role of Theory in the Gamer/Journalist Relationship

The theories discussed in this study are important in the examination of the multi-faceted properties of game journalism. In the examination of the gamer journalist and the journalist who is a gamer, this multi-theoretical approach can be useful in this examination. Social responsibility is effective at examining the relationship of the gamer as journalist. Each of these reflects the responsibilities and practices of a journalist writing in this field. While examining the journalistic qualities of games writers is important, examining the qualities of gameplay in games writers is equally important. It is because of these unique aspects of game writing that a multi-theoretical approach is important.

Expertise, Professionalism, and the Changes in Game Writing

Games journalism, like other forms of journalism, operates with certain caveats. The chief of these is idea of a professional skill set that allows for the games writer to be an authority in the subject matter. Often games writers have knowledge of journalistic standards and basic composition skills, coupled with experience in gaming. Originally, the biggest differentiating factor was the access to an audience. Games writing was limited to a variety of publications, followed by a series of online media outlets. With the advancement of technology, this access has become less exclusive. The tools of acquiring an audience as well as composing a narrative, have become much easier for a layman to access. A wealth of information at our fingertips coupled with a 24-hour news cycle has greatly changed what it means to be a journalist in modern society. Journalists are expected to be multi-faceted, multi-skilled and to produce more content than their predecessor (Aldridge & Evetts 2003).

Singer (2011) identified three areas in which journalism has changed in the face of the development of the Internet: the exercise of control, the journalistic practices, and the relationship structures between the journalists and others. Control refers to the ability to control the content involved in journalism. What information is released to what parties at what time? Journalists once served as gatekeepers for the content they covered. Now a person with Internet access can quickly access and redistribute the information with little impediment. Journalistic practices have changed in the face of new technology as to how information is gathered and disseminated. Journalists are expected to not just be good news gatherers and writers but must be able to develop multimedia content through a variety of formats. This information must also come at a faster rate in an era of breaking news. The relationship between journalists and the public has changed greatly.

No longer to do journalists just serve as storytellers but as collaborators (Singer 2011) or instigators (Bowman & Willis, 2003). This suggests that the journalist learns from the audience just as the audience learns from the journalist. The audience may take a new perspective from the information presented which leads to new conversations which then circles back to the journalist which feeds future narratives

These three changes have spread forth in games writing and games journalism as well. The development of technology has changed the way games writers approach their profession in relation to these three areas. It has progressed from a media of print to web articles, podcasts, and web videos.

With the exponential growth of the Internet since the early 1990s, it has created a world in which everyone can be a publisher. With a digital medium, the Internet user is able to create written word with the greatest of ease. This does not necessarily mean that everyone can be a journalist. However, with the changes in social development that coincide with technological development, how does a journalist differentiate themselves? Singer (2011) posits that highlighting the occupational qualities of a journalist does this. Journalists should deliver information that has quality and is credible. However, journalists cannot simply ignore their changing roles as gatekeepers.

With these changing roles comes a change for the audience as well. The Internet serves as a democratization of principles of journalism and makes it into a collaborative culture. The journalist then justifies their existence by citing their experience with their profession and ethics (Singer, 2011).

In regard to games writing, this concern over professionalism and changing roles can be seen throughout the industry. Games writers are increasingly expected to not only

write but to contribute regularly to video and audio content. While games writers may specialize in writing, they are not always capable of fulfilling these multiple roles. There may be a trend suggesting that games writing is moving to a more inclusive role where writers can market themselves on the internet. However, what seems to occur is that there are still games writers that admittedly only specialize in individual aspects of the job. While games writers may claim an area of expertise in journalism and/or gaming, it appears to be difficult to differentiate how this specialization may set them apart from the gaming public.

As discussed earlier, game writing is in a period of change. With games such as *Grand Theft Auto V* making an excess of 1 billion dollars in sales, it seems unusual that the game writing industry would be in a state of decline. One potential explanation may be the unique nature of game writing and the expertise associated with it.

Expertise can be demonstrated by showing gifts and talents in a particular domain. The expert often obtains such status through the acquisition of skills and the demonstration of skills through an expert level of performance from their individual ability (Posner, 1988). These experts are able to display a level of knowledge and skill that can set them apart from the novices. In our example, games writers could demonstrate a level of expertise that is beyond that of an average gamer.

The difficulty with determining expertise can stem from the trouble differentiating between a novice and an expert. A novice may not be less knowledgeable than an expert. They just may lack the ability or confidence to make an assessment on their own. When looking beyond the novice/expert relationship and looking further at the expert/expert relationship, the difficulty becomes which expert knowledge is more valuable to the

novices (Goldman, 2006) If put in the frame of games journalism/writing, what parts of the expert knowledge are more important: the ability to compose a compelling message using proper journalistic techniques, an encyclopedic knowledge of video games, familiarity with a specific game genre, or something else altogether?

Hodges (1986) explored the relationship between professionalism and journalism. Hodges identified six criteria for professionalism derived from Flexner (1915):

1. Ability to move intellectually from a body of knowledge to practice.
2. Expertise necessary to translate ideas into practice.
3. Ability to apply the knowledge for the benefit of the people.
4. Possession of educationally communicable technique.
5. Ability to self organize.
6. Altruistic in motivation.

Essentially these criteria place the emphasis in professionalism on making a contribution as opposed to the emphasis on profit. Hodges extends Flexner's ideas to state that for journalists to maintain professionalism is to understand the welfare of the audience. By maintaining professionalism for games journalists would involve an understanding of the gaming audience. With this understanding, a degree of distance from the audience may be necessary. A games journalist should not let the welfare of the audience directly or indirectly influence their writing.

Timmermans (2008) argued that the key claim of professionalism is that it comes with a desirable set of skills that can be obtained via regulated training and regulation. By doing this, the profession becomes sheltered in the idea that this training equates to legitimacy. However, by creating this shelter the professionals runs the risk of stifling

innovation. Abbot (1988) argued that if a profession is unable to adapt to changes either through technology or through other means than the argument of a professional jurisdiction becomes increasingly weak. An occupation has the potential to become professionalized or de-professionalized over the course of time. For example, live television broadcasts used to be a strictly professional affair that would take months of professional training. Now anyone with a smartphone can be online streaming video in a matter of minutes. This can directly relate to the decrease in print games journalism as well as the increase in online and amateur games writing. While it is extremely easy to publish online, that does not mean that it meets the same professional standards that one would expect from traditional journalism.

Reese and Cohen (2000) examined the role of scholarship in professionalism of journalism. The researchers argue that an emphasis on academia helps to broaden the journalists' professionalism. This tends to be counter to common trends in journalism education, which emphasizes a hands-on approach to journalistic training. While valuable, hands-on training can make it difficult for the journalist to separate themselves from the business pressures of journalism. In contrast, providing an academic background could provide for a more professional and impartial take on journalism. If applied to games writing this approach may suggest that an academic background in journalism or a related field may be important to a games writer's professionalism.

Deuze (2007) argued that in the age of the Internet, the responsibility of professionalism has shifted from the organizations involved to the individuals. Employers emphasize the need for enterprise to be seen as an individual accomplishment and not an organizational one. Work becomes a fluid operation in which skills become

important. The argument becomes whether or not the skills that are part of a journalist's skill set are truly enough to set them apart from their audience. In games journalism/writing, the emphasis has been placed less on the organizations that deliver the stories and more on the personalities involved. An audience may follow a games writer from one site to the next, instead of sticking with one site. The difference is that often when a story is cited in another piece, those writers may cite the organization involved as opposed to the individual. (ie "Kotaku reports ….)

Feighery (2011) would also examine the role that bloggers and citizen journalists could have on the rethinking of journalism and professionalism. Feighery states that the practice of self-criticism that journalists would conduct amongst themselves has been expanded with the use of social media for dialogic exchanges. This gives way to a new model of symmetrical two-way communication, which allows for collaboration, compromise, listening and a desire for balanced power. Feighery concludes by stating that these attributes allow for communication between the journalists and their audience that they have long shared amongst each other for years prior. What this implies for games journalism is the open communication that now exists between games writers and their audiences. Games writers are able to have instantaneous feedback through article comments, video comments, and even live stream communications as they are speaking or playing games. This allows for the writers to have direct communication with those they serve, but it also allows for the audience to exercise a degree of influence on the writers. The audience may make observations that the writer may have overlooked in their initial analysis, which in turn affects their perspective on the information.

The role of professional journalists and amateur journalists has been explored in detail with the increase of online journalism. At the heart of the issue is whether there is a difference between a professional journalist and an amateur journalist. In a study of professional journalists Orenbring (2013) found that three identified traits set their skills apart from that of the citizen journalist: expertise, duty and autonomy. While this was what the professional journalists identified as their own unique traits, one could argue that non-professionals can share these traits.

When a key requisite of being a games writer is playing video games, such skill alone cannot be the sole source of expertise. The audience that consumes the games writer's work also plays games and, in some cases, may be more skilled gamers than the writers are. One such public example comes from Dean Takahashi. In his attempt to review the game *Cuphead,* Takahashi had considerable difficulty with the game's controls. Takahashi himself shared video of his poor performance online. Comments on the video condemned Takahasi as a poor journalist that had no business reviewing games as profession. Takahashi had been reviewing games for 18 years. His experience in gaming did not translate well to *Cuphead*. This became a public debate about the state of gaming journalists and what kind of qualities they should have. Is it then a case that the games writer has a background that separates their work from the play of the gamer?

A study by Johansson and Kindmark (2010) would suggest that games writer is not much different from a gamer. In their study of Swedish game journalists, the authors found that most of the respondents did not consider themselves to be journalists, and even lacked basic education in writing or journalism. The respondents suggested that an

education in journalism or a related field may be useful, but what is more important is the passion and interest in video games.

It then becomes difficult to define what separates a gamer from a games writer. Seemingly, a person with access to a keyboard and the will to document their experience can become a games writer. The games writer may be no different than the gamer with a blog on Tumblr. Games writing may be in a decline due to this blurring of the lines. It becomes difficult for a business to justify the expense of running a gaming website, when there is a great deal of content created for free by games enthusiasts. How does this change the what it means to be a games writer?

Research Questions

RQ1: How do games writers view the place of social responsibility in the current environment of games writing?

RQ2: How do video games writers believe that gaming for work is different from gaming for play? How do these differences affect the success of games writing?

RQ3: How do video games writers, in their roles as professionals, differentiate themselves from the average video game player population? Do they believe that they these differences have changed over the years? Do they believe these changes are important to the success of games writing?

RQ4: How do video games writers perceive the recent changes that have occurred in the gaming press industry?

These research questions were useful for understanding games writers in what was their current environment and what they believed separated them from regular gamers. The research questions were also useful in understanding the decline and change

of games writing from the perspective of those who work in that field. RQ1 helped determine what role if any that the audience served by the games writer plays in their coverage of video games. RQ2 examined how "playing for work" compared to "playing for play" and what role that plays in a games writers field. RQ3 explored how games writers believe they differ from the average gamer. This distinction offers some explanation to the changing role of the games writer, which in turn helped to answer RQ4. RQ5 explored the distinction between the larger games writer companies as opposed to the smaller, independent games writers.

Chapter 5

Method

As there are no current figures regarding the number of active games writers within America, it may be difficult to know what an acceptable sample size is. At one time, a PR firm representing a video game company stated that their media list consisted of 1,200 affiliates (Ward, 2006). This estimation included not only for-profit video game journalism sites but also fan driven sites and non-gaming services. This shift was attributed to current changes in game development to expand beyond the core audience (Ward, 2006).

There is currently no known union or national membership for games writers. Bob Mackey, a former writer for various gaming sites and a current podcaster, estimated that there are approximately 200 full time video games writers active at various sites within the United States. This is not including journalists who work as part-time freelancers or who work for free. A drop in full-time employment has occurred, but the current amount is uncertain. This drop in full-time employment is due to many factors such as layoffs, media consolidation, or leaving game journalism for careers in public relations.

For the purposes of this study, a gaming journalist was considered an individual who contributes written stories or reviews for either a website or magazine publication or contributes videos or podcasts for a website. This definition extended to games writers regardless of whether the person is paid. Freelancers and volunteers make up an important part of the games writer population and were included in this study regardless of their income. A snowball sampling method was used for recruiting interview

participants. Snowball sampling may be used in situations where the desired population may be elusive and difficult to contact. Snowball sampling uses existing contacts as an initial sample. These contacts were asked to help recruit further participants for additional interviews. As the proverbial snowball increased, a larger sample was available from this population (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

Since there are no recorded statistics for the number of games writers in the United States it was difficult to establish an acceptable sample. When interview responses began to show similarities to the point where no new information is gathered, then that was considered an acceptable sample for a study in which the population was not known (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). To obtain an initial sample for the snowball, contact was initiated with notable games writers who had a large audience reach. This reach was determined by the number of Twitter followers that the games writers had. The first respondents contacted had Twitter followers ranging from 50,000 to 100,000. This method was useful as many games writers were actively engaged in Twitter as a way to communicate with readers and with fellow practitioners. Contact was initiated with these writers with the hope that they would serve a dual purpose of being an interview subject as well as assisting with establishing other interview contacts.

These interviews followed an open-ended respondent model. The goals for these types of interviews had five primary goals. First, these interviews were needed clarify the meaning of key concepts. Second, these interviews distinguished different elements of the expressed opinion. Third, the interviews determined what influenced a person to act in a certain way. Fourth, they classified complex attitudes, and fifth, they helped interpret motivations to action (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). This was a useful model for

conducting interviews, as much of the information regarding games writing was not readily apparent to the public. By following an open-ended respondent model, the participants were able to impart information that may not have been specifically asked for in the interview questions.

Interviews were conducted via Skype. Many gaming websites at the time were operated out of offices located in Northern or Southern California and various locations throughout the East Coast. Freelance writers work from their homes throughout the United States. Due to the variances in location, it would have been exceedingly difficult to conduct a face-to-face interview. Skype interviews allowed for contact to be made with all available population members. Skype interviews suffered without the benefit of non-verbal cues that are associated with face-to-face communication, but as the focus of this study was the content of the discussion, non-verbal communication was not deemed necessary for these interviews.

An interview guide was developed as a guideline for conducting interviews. This guide contained questions and topics related to video game journalism. Interviews were conducted in a way to help answer the research questions, but were not limited to specific questions. These interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews. Rabionet (2011) describes six steps in conducting effective semi-structured interviews. These steps include: a) selecting the type of interview; b) establishing ethical guidelines, c) crafting the interview protocol; d) conducting and recording the interview; e) analyzing and summarizing the interview and f) reporting the findings (p. 563). A completely structured interview runs the risk of restricting the line of questioning and limiting the ability to learn information that may not be obvious to a layman. A completely

unstructured interview runs the risk of not answering the research questions. By following a semi structured methodology, the participants will be able to give data rich responses, but also be able to help answer the research questions. Topics and questions were restructured and reordered as to follow the progression set forth by the interview participants.

Exhaustive notes were taken during each interview and audio of the interviews was be recorded. These recordings were transcribed later for thorough analysis. Analysis consisted of finding important elements of the interviews and coding them and categorizing them based on their content. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was a useful tool for analysis in this study. This coding followed an open coding structure similar to the grounded theory practices of Strauss (1987), which involved an all-inclusive way of coding the data. Open coding was useful as a way of being able to name and specifically identify phenomena present within the data. This structure allowed for the researcher to "consider the meanings of words, phrases, sentences, and larger expressive or dialogical units on an equal basis" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010, p. 219).

Data was broken down into conceptual units to look for observations, incidents, and other ideas of interest by the researcher. Interviews were examined to explore instances of established theoretical concepts discussed in social responsibility theory as well as play theory. Special consideration was given to concepts of expertise that were expressed throughout the interviews. These concepts of social responsibility, play, expertise and professionalism are important factors in understanding what games writers believed made them distinct from other gamers. For example, wording dealing with concern for audience members was interpreted as social responsibility. Dialogue

regarding play was of course be interpreted as play. Discussions regarding how the games writers' experience set them apart from normal gamers were interpreted as expertise. Instances of professionalism was documented and identified within the interview responses. Instances where games writers referenced the need for professionalism and or the distinction between amateur and professional status were documented as instances as professionalism.

Units were given conceptual names based the incidents they represent. These incidents were then compared throughout the analysis and similar events were labeled with the same name. These were grouped to reduce the number of labels or categories to be analyzed. These categories were given abstract names to combine elements into subcategories and groups. These groupings formed categories documenting the presence, if any, of social phenomenon. Quotes that compliment and explain concepts and categories were included in the manuscript where appropriate.

Open coding used the research questions as its basis. Coding was done in the form of categories and codes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). Responses that reflected the research questions were coded according. Groupings occurred in a broad measure and were classified as a category. From that point more specific codes were necessary to specify the content contained in the interviews. Results were coded using Dedoose software so that data could easily be sorted based on the codes established during data collection.

Interviews

Over the course of a four-month period in 2014, a series of 15 interviews were conducted. Each interview was scheduled with the participant upon the receipt of the

study consent form. The interviews were conducted via Skype. The researcher conducted the interviews while in a quiet office setting, while the participants interviewed in a setting of their choosing. The interviews were recorded using Piezo, an audio recording application. Nine of the interviews were approximately an hour long. The shortest interview was 45 minutes while the longest was almost 90 minutes long. Five of the interviews were over an hour long. The researcher took extensive notes during the interviews. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed each interview for coding purposes.

Of the 15 interviews, 12 participants were male and three were female. Only two participants worked for print outlets while the remainder worked exclusively for online outlets. Most major sources of games journalism media are online websites. Some print magazines still exist, with most of those being owned and operated by gaming retailers such as Gamestop. Most successful games writers work as online contributors, and that is reflective of this sampling of writers. Ten of the participants were full-time employees at their outlets. Four of these writers were also freelancing as a second job on other websites. The remaining five journalists were only freelancers at the time of the interviews. There were two common reasons for why writers became involved in games writers; either they had an interest in gaming from an early age, and/or they had a change in career path.

To provide further context for these interviews, it is necessary to set the stage for what was happening in the games press around this time period. This was almost a year after publishing company Ziff Davis had purchased *IGN* and its sister sites *1up, UGO,* and *Gamespy*. *1up, UGO,* and *Gamespy* were closed by Ziff Davis and its staff either laid

off or merged with *IGN* (Cheredar, 2013). Also in 2012 gaming site *Joystiq* saw a mass exodus of writers who left the *AOL* owned company to found *Polygon* , which was owned and operated by *Vox* Media. These writers included *Joystiq* editor-in-chief, Chris Grant and managing editor, Justin McElroy (Solomon, 2012).

These interviews were conducted months before the advent of the so-called "GamerGate" movement, in which gaming journalism ethics was used as a shield for online bullying and harassment. GamerGate is discussed at length in a later section. A year after these interviews were conducted *AOL* closed gaming site *Joystiq,* laying off all of their writers (Futter, 2015).

For anonymity, each of the participants in the study was assigned a pseudonym. The need for anonymity in discussions regarding games journalism has become even greater with recent events that will be discussed later in this document.

"Gary" has written about games since middle school for what he approximates as 17 years. He wrote for a major gaming website and was its managing editor for several years before leaving and establishing a new gaming website with other games writers with whom he worked. In addition to serving as an editor for his current website, Gary also is a participant in several entertainment related podcasts which operate separately from his current site. These podcasts are supported by advertising and audience donations, which serves as a supplemental income for Gary and his family.

"Norman" began in advertising working for a newspaper. As the newspaper he began working for was downsized due to budget constraints, he began writing about games on his personal blog. Following encouragement from his wife, Norman contacted a gaming website and began writing for them as a freelance writer. As the newspaper

downsized further, Norman was let go. Norman chose to focus more on games writing and freelanced on many other websites. At the time he was editor in chief on a major gaming website, while still occasionally freelancing on other sites.

"Erika" was started as an English major and quickly switched to journalism. While in journalism school she looked at a variety of writing jobs and discovered a gaming website offering $10 an article for game reviews. From there she made contacts at various gaming sites and began working at a major website during her senior year of college. A year after our interview, Erika's website was closed down and she was transferred to a technology site within the same company as a games writer.

"Chuck" was a games writer and was the only respondent contacted that was located within the Midwest. He wrote about games remotely from his home. Games journalism used to localized to coastal communities, but with the games journalism becoming more and more decentralized due to improving technologies, writers do not need to be located at a home office. Chuck exemplified this change as his website was located on the west coast while he was able to live with his family in the Midwest. Chuck had spent ten years in games journalism and continued to write after starting a family in his Midwestern home. Chuck's job at the time was for a major gaming site that closed down a year after the interviews. Chuck had extensive experience in web design and management, which was useful in his development as a games writer.

"Misty" at the time was a college student who wrote about games as a freelancer. She had written for many of the major gaming websites at the time such as *IGN* and *Gamespot*. She wanted to continue writing about games after graduation and championed Internet rights amongst its users. Her major was outside of journalism so

she had not decided if games writing would be her only source of income, as she considered working in other areas as well.

"Wallace" was a games writer who wrote online content and at the time was also an editor for a print gaming publication. Wallace maintains a regular podcast dedicated towards gaming. The podcast website has a rich community forum with a loyal online community. Wallace had a unique perspective due to his status working at a print magazine as well as online publications.

"Ash" was a games writer who has co-founded a website providing specialized game content via articles, podcasts, and video content. He was able to pay for the support of his website with the development of a Patreon campaign. Ash followed trend of many other Internet content providers by allowing the audience to play a direct part in the funding their games coverage. Ash's site self-published site and content continues today with over 1,800 paid subscribers.

"Byron" was a college student who wrote about games in his free time. His games writing experience was limited and he had not been a continual provider for gaming sites. He was uncertain if games writing was something that he wished to pursue or if he had more interest in general online journalism. While not the most notable games writer, his story seemed to be indicative of an individual who gets involved in games writing while still in college and uncertain of their future. This was a popular refrain among many of the study participants. "I was in college and didn't know what I wanted to do, but games writing seemed like a good opportunity."

"Brock" was a games writer for a major website that was co-founded by fellow games writers. Formerly Brock wrote simultaneously in both print and online games

outlets. His experience in covering games had continued over 10 years. He had a long history in games journalism and has been a regular on several gaming websites.

"James" was a freelance journalist for several websites concurrently. James started a gaming website dedicated to mobile games from scratch. His reviews were a combination of work as freelance as well as his own content provided on his mobile gaming website. He maintained a regular gaming blog from his home. James was representative of the changes in gaming as most of his reviews were dedicated to mobile/smartphone gaming.

"Cress" was a games writer who started as a teenager in high school and began his career covering the Electronics Entertainment Expo, a large scale press event that has become a central focus for video gaming. Cress has worked at a variety of gaming sites. Cress left games writing for a time to work in television on a gaming related tv series, but soon returned to online games writing for a personality-driven website. While writing was a big component of the site, heavy emphasis was placed on providing video and audio content.

"Clay" is a games writer who was part of major gaming website that had been closed down the following year. Clay was a freelancer for a time before becoming involved in localization of games. Localization is the process in which games are translated into different languages to be marketed in other regions. Soon after completing the gaming project Clay had returned to writing for a gaming site as well as participated in multiple video game podcasts. Not long after his site had been shut down, Clay chose to leave games writing and explore other opportunities.

"Grant" had worked for a variety of gaming websites as a games journalist and had served as editor in chief of his most recent website. This website closed down shortly after this interview. Prior to being a games journalist, Grant wrote a blog dedicated to portable gaming. Shortly after our interview, Grant left games writing and became involved in game development.

"Blaine" was one of the few games journalists who identifies primarily as a print journalist, with online being a secondary outlet. From his perspective, he wrote for the print magazine first and his content would be republished on the website. Blaine has also been able to work in an additional career as a voice actor and on-air radio talent. While working in these multiple positions Blaine still found time to regularly maintain a daily blog independent of his publisher.

"Dawn" is a games writer who has been involved in publishing for years before getting involved in games journalism. She had previously been involved in print journalism as a result of her interest in gaming. She had been interested in video game magazines since a young age but was not able to become a writer due to her geographic location. She became involved with local print journalism, until it became a viable option to write articles online. With the development of games writing as an online medium, Dawn was able to get more directly involved in covering video games. In addition to her work as a games writer, she was the founder of a non-profit charitable organization.

Chapter 6

Findings

Is Games Writing Journalism?

While there was not a specific research question regarding the question of whether games writing is journalism, it presented itself as a noteworthy area of questioning as every participant had something to say about the subject. This surfaced during early informal discussions about the subject. Many participants were hesitant about whether what they did qualified as journalism. Others were enthusiastically positive about being a journalist. The simplest question to begin with proved to yield the most interesting results. There was clear disagreement between the participants about what games writing truly was.

When asked point blank about whether games writing is considered journalism, Gary, who categorized himself as an editor, said, "obviously it's journalism right?" He mentioned that there could be food journalists or film journalists. "However, anytime you have entertainment journalism, there's a different connotation. You aren't dealing with life or death situations, yet some people take it seriously." While he noted that games may not be considered a serious topic, he noted that there can be instances in which games writing can delve into significant territory, such as instances of consumer protection or employment layoffs. In which case, the writing becomes something of "concrete value."

Another participant, Grant, thought it was rare to find games writing that would be considered journalism. Although he was quick to add that what the games writer does should not be discounted. He stated that the publishers and PR firms control the

information, but that doesn't negate the interviews and fact-checking that many writers do. "There are people trying to find scoops in whatever way is possible." He still didn't think most writing was journalism. He also mentioned that using the term journalist is often misused to describe anyone who writes about games, regardless as to whether they are conducting research or acting as a critic.

One participant pointed out how much of games writing had changed, not in terms of journalistic practices, but how the writers distribute the game information. Misty said that gaming journalism was born online. While there were print outlets available, it really wasn't until the mid-nineties when gaming journalism really began to take off. Modern technology had a key role in the development of the medium. She also noted that gaming journalism is often very jargon heavy. The audience of games writers is often familiar with terminology that an average reader may not be familiar with such as DPS (damage per second) or frame rate. Ultimately, she said that games journalists served a very different audience than those in standard journalism. "Most journalists have to write to the masses so they may have to dumb down their content. Which isn't necessarily true in the games journalist market."

Games writing also allowed for a great deal of manageable freedom. Byron said that he thought of games writing as journalism, but "with standard journalism, you are assigned a story and report on it, but with games journalism you are very much reporting on what interests you." A games journalist would most likely be covering games and topics that are in their interest area. A journalist that favors RPGs would not be asked to cover a sports game. While they may be able to comment on the technical competency of the game, they wouldn't be knowledgeable enough to comment on the content.

There was also an admission by many that the term "journalist" was simply appropriate shorthand for labeling what they did. "Writers who write about games is a mouthful," said Dawn. "Ideally we would just call ourselves game writers. Unfortunately, when you say *game writer* people think that means you *write* games. So we just fell into using *journalists* because it was a concept people understood."

Norman said that using the term *journalist* can help get the point across. "When we think of journalists we think of Woodward and Bernstein, we think hard hitting stories. Every newspaper has people on staff that just attends budget meetings for the local government and writes a blurb about that. Does that mean they are not a journalist because they are not doing hard hitting reporting?" Ash thought of a gaming publication as being on par with enthusiast press and used a similar example as Norman. "There is very few Woodward and Bernstein pieces out there. Most of what happens out there is product review and press releases. A lot of the industry critiquing itself." He was quick to point out that there were definitely examples of journalism at work, but that the majority of work was more critique and opinion.

James said he had no problem with being labeled a journalist, but he said that the term journalist carries with it a lot of baggage. A journalist has certain expectations of what they provide in their content; an objective, balanced view. He noted that this view is extremely difficult in games journalism, as the writer's perspective is often what makes their voice worth hearing.

Dawn didn't consider herself a games journalist. She also was quick to say that not all games writing was games journalism. "A lot of writing doesn't require researching or investigative techniques. And a game review is a critique, an opinion.

That's not journalism as I understand it." Dawn said that there were definitely games journalists out there, but the use of the term "game journalist" is out of the fact that "we just don't have a better word" to describe what is happening.

Norman also brought up the idea of "games journalist" being just a shorthand term. Norman admitted not feeling passionate about the term either way. He did not study journalism in school, but he learned much of his current skills by working in the field. He feels these self-taught journalistic standards can set most writers apart. "You have a gut instinct that says 'this sounds sketchy'. Your editors will teach you this sort of thing is okay; this sort of thing isn't. There are certain ethical quandaries that if you're not formally trained in journalism that you pick up as you go. Or you hope you do!"

James spoke about the difficulty in identifying oneself as a games journalist. He thought of himself more as a critic but acknowledged that he had training in journalism. Ash, meanwhile, thought of games journalism as a misnomer. Even in the early days of print magazines he thought that use of the term journalist was problematic due to the questionable ethics of content that was produced by game magazines at the time.

Cress said that the term journalist is thrown around broadly. Some people are journalists, some are critics, and some are entertainers. Cress considered himself a journalist, due to the higher standard he held himself in his job. He admitted the difficulties in doing the job of a journalist, since a game publisher cannot be compelled to share records much like a government entity could. Those writers that take that extra step could be considered journalists, but most writers are something else entirely. Erika was quick to label herself as a journalist since she had a degree in journalism. She also found no problem with other writers referring to their craft as journalism, "as long as they are

doing journalism." Games writers that understand the basic tenets of journalism are able to cover video games and could call themselves games journalists. She acknowledged that this could be problematic in different journalistic situations. "I would be worried if some video game writers went to a situation such as covering rape victims which has a completely different ethics code." Games writers have a different tool set that can make them a specialized journalist in games coverage, but it may not be applicable in other situations.

Blaine, with a background in broadcast journalism, thought of game journalism as a gray area. "We are the softest of the soft news. We aren't curing cancer, we're covering games." He did not consider himself a journalist. He acknowledged that there are definitely games writers that are journalists, but he saw himself more as a critic or as an entertainer and less like a journalist.

I'm Not a Journalist, but

The term journalist seems to be variable based on who is using and who is applying the term. Some individuals identify as a journalist. Those people were either those with an education in journalism or extensive experience. Others did not self-identify as journalists but would point to other writers as being journalists. Others did not consider what they did as journalism or themselves as journalists. They suggested that they were "critics" and that what they did was opinion. It is interesting to see how these opinions varied and how they seemed to be rooted in the participants' individual experiences.

Participants who did not believe they were journalists would identify as a critic or what they do as editorials or opinion pieces. Others would say they weren't a journalist

because they didn't have a journalism degree. Chuck didn't mind being referred to as a journalist but preferred the term critic. "I chased down my share of leads." He thought that a lot of games writers were journalists. He listed examples of many of his co-workers that he referred to as "newshounds". Games writers have to make sure that what they write is accurate. This would separate a journalist from a casual blogger.

Clay considered himself a critic and not a journalist. He said there was a very important difference between the two. In his view being a journalist means that you are expected to be unbiased and impartial which he "was not interested in". He was more interested in starting discussions about games based on what he thinks to be relevant topics. He also mentioned that being a critic does not bind him to the same rules as being a journalist. That is not to say, that he can just say whatever he wanted, rather than it makes him less constrained then being a journalist.

Wallace said that he was "loathe" to refer to himself as a games journalist as he did not go to school for journalism. "Writing was a skill that I used to get involved in publication management. What I am more interested in is getting involved in starting a conversation with the public. I stumbled into this." Of the subject of whether games writing is journalism, he felt it was a term that got thrown around a lot. Wallace felt that use of that term comes from a place of insecurity. What they do is something that they want to write and something somebody wants to read. Until they let go of the idea that people think games writers are "children" that no one will think of them as anything else. Using the term of journalist does nothing to improve that image.

Brock thought that there was judgment and shame associated with being a games journalist. He said that people would be quick to discount games journalism as not being

real journalism. "I know a lot of people who are great at this job who do not consider themselves journalists. I know a lot of people that are terrible at this job who think that they are." To Brock, the term fit what he did at his job. He wrote stories. He did research. He interviewed people. He admitted that the concern of whether games writing is journalism didn't weigh on him much at all.

Respondents present what could be considered third person effects. "I'm not a journalist, but that person is." A respondent does not believe that they are performing games journalism, but they project the identity of journalist to their peers. Respondents may not think of their work as journalism, but the casual observer sees no difference.

Social Responsibility in Games Writing

RQ1: How do games writers view the place of social responsibility in the current environment of games writing?

Social responsibility becomes something different in games journalism. However, from the information gleaned from these interviews, games writers still find a need to serve society. Some of the participants speak of social responsibility in terms of serving society by providing that "truthful" form of communication in terms of being honest with the audience. Others speak of the importance of considering the voice of the audience similar to how the Hutchins Commission thought the press should provide a forum for comment and criticism. Increased coverage on issues regarding gender, race, and sexual orientation evokes the ideas of providing "a representative picture of the constituent groups on society. While it may be debated as to how games writing relates to serving society, many participants argued that their service comes from their coverage. By warning participants about a poorly received game, a games writer is not serving society,

rather they are serving the "society of gamers." The games writers seem to demonstrate several fundamental ideals. The audience is the most important consideration. Above all else games writer must also be honest. The games writer also strives to create a community within its audience in order to create an open exchange of ideas. While social responsibility in a classical sense may not be at work here, it is evident that some sense of responsibility is in effect here.

The Importance of the Audience

Most apparent in this is the importance of the audience. The relationship is seen as a mutual exchange of ideas, as well as a concern with the perceptions of the audience. Much can be demonstrated in the desire to protect the audience. Many participants see that obligation as extending to the consumer advocacy, in both finances and consumer satisfaction. Gary also spoke of satisfaction with helping his readers. "I like the idea of helping people with a buying decision that's not the most interesting thing for me about writing a review. I'm more interested in if I can provide someone a new way of thinking about games or provide some insight into a game…In reality what I'm trying to do is make people's lives a little bit better and a little bit happier. That's how I sort of justify my existence."

Gary called his audience a "primary motivator." "They are the reason I am able to do what I do, whether I'm writing news or a feature or review or anything I mean. Keeping the reader in mind is my number one priority, and where I have a sense of loyalty. The reverse of that is true. Where the audience, they'll keep coming back to you because they feel that same sense of loyalty and obligation." Chuck felt a strong obligation toward the audience. There was no obligation to publishers or content

providers. "This is sort of our smell test. Whether or not we should post something. Is this something that is of use to our readers? That's what it is about as far as I'm concerned." He admitted it was hard to judge the effect he had on his readers. Sometimes he had to base it solely on the comments that readers left regarding his articles. He also admitted that he feels like many gamers would rather read an aggregate score on Metacritic rather than read a well thought out review article. That made him question whether the readers felt the same obligation to him as he did to them.

Byron spoke of the idea that he served as a kind of consumer watchdog. He was able to "warn" the public about games that may not be worth the purchase price. By playing games and writing effectively about them, he was able to help his readers make choices regarding which games to play.

Blaine thought that his role was to protect the consumer. "We are the last line of defense between the consumer and the publisher. We can say 'no don't go out and buy Amazing Spider-Man 2 because it's awful.'" He thought it was his job to help them make the most informed decision that they could have. Although he said that he could not control the buying habits of the seller, as it was ultimately their decision. He said that ultimately they were there to inform and entertain. "Once we stop doing any of these we're screwed."

Wallace said that his responsibility to the readers depended on who he was writing for. When writing for his own website, he would write without paying much attention to the comments. With this he didn't feel like he had much responsibility towards the readers, since he was not hearing their feedback to his work. However, when appearing on his gaming podcast, he feels a very close tie to his co-hosts and his

audience. This can be because the nature of that media allowed him to communicate with old friends and new listeners. He felt very strongly about his obligation towards delivering effective and useful information.

Honesty Above All Else

Part of this relationship with the audience is the need for honesty and transparency. Norman stressed the need for transparency in reporting about games. He recounted how his site had begun disclosing possible influences as part of an article. For example, if a games publisher paid for airfare and a hotel at a review event the resulting article would have a disclaimer documenting that conflict. Norman admitted that the main reason that occurred was because their site was too small to provide room and board for its employees. By providing a disclaimer the writers give their audience an informed decision as to whether to accept or reject the article.

Gary spoke of the need to be honest with the audience. "It's important to serve the audience but not be a servant to what the audience wants to hear." James stressed that his responsibility to his readers was to be honest and transparent. "Everything can be a story, it just depends on how you present it." He stated that in journalism overall, it was impossible to be objective. The best a journalist could do was to be honest and clear about their biases and opinions going into a story. He acknowledged that his relationship with readers varied from site to site. Some websites required more interaction than others. Others, the relationship was much less personal, but overall honesty and transparency were key.

Cress said, "with enthusiast press, you get in this tricky gray area…and people build trust in you." He spoke of the uncomfortable feeling he has with the fact that he

has many friends that work within the gaming industry. "If I was to explain that in my Journalism 101 course I'd probably get laughed it." Cress said that to build relationships and gain access he often befriended his sources in the process of reporting. He stated that he wouldn't have had the reporting opportunities he had without these relationships. He stressed the need to be upfront with the reader about the relationships going in, but also the need to be honest with his sources/friends. There needed to be an agreement on when information could be disclosed and an awareness of the consequences of disclosure.

Creating a Public Discussion

The participants seemed interested in creating a fair and balanced community that promoted the exchange of ideas, not just "yes men". Grant ultimately thought that his goal was to serve the community. That did not mean to give them everything that they want. The readers could expect quality, fact checked news. This did not mean that he existed solely to appease his fan base, but instead offer them the best story writing that they could. Clay mentioned that approaching an article from the perspective of respecting the audience's time and commitment to his work was key in his responsibility to them. He felt that by knowing this he would be able to better serve the readers needs and improve on his own work.

Dawn wanted to make her site a welcoming place that encouraged discussion within the community. She saw it as a responsibility to also make the readers aware of new perspectives that they may have not considered before. She felt that she provided a unique voice that was rare in gaming; one of an older female in a management position within games writing. This unique voice was not common to her audience and she felt by

offering this unique take on video games, that she was doing a great service to her readers.

Erika saw her role as being that of creating an informed "electorate". She was able to allow the readers to know more about a subject in order to allow them to be better able to comment and critique on their own. By educating the public about particular aspects of game development or game history, she helps to add to the collective voices of the gaming community. Ideally, they become a group of people that effectively articulate their ideals and take in new experiences every day.

Relating and Communicating to the Audience

Norman spoke about how a games writer's responsibility to the readers increases as the writer rises through the ranks. As a writer becomes responsible for more and more obligations within an organization, their responsibility toward the audience increases. An editor in chief has much more of an obligation than a freelance staff writer, for example. He also spoke more about the need to contextualize all aspects of game coverage, as it provides a great service to the reader. "There might be something that doesn't match my tastes. If I just say 'I hate it', then that does no one any good. But if I'm able to let the readers understand my voice and read the review in context, then they are better able to make judgments based on my words. I may not like a particular aspect of the game, but the reader may look at same thing and enjoy it, because I explained it." Ash also noted how it is important to provide a frame of reference for the readers. It is not just enough to say that something is wrong with a game. By being able to articulate the writer's state of mind, they are better able to present their argument to the readers.

Brock saw it as his goal to find interesting stories and make them into a "down-to-earth" subject matter. He admitted that he did not have an outgoing relationship with his audience. He tended to be more reserved but was accessible if needed. "If someone asks me a direct question, I'll answer them, but I don't go out of my way to be seen." A games journalist, according to him, should be accurate but not necessarily entertaining. He admitted that the shift of games coverage had made things difficult. He did not feel he was reaching as much of an audience now as he used to since games coverage has shifted to personality driven media.

Misty thought that the responsibility towards readers was that of accuracy as well as timeliness. Reading about games online as opposed to print or video was successful largely due to the ease of updating information. She felt an obligation to tell not only and accurate story, but one that can be accessed in a timely fashion. If information could not be accessed in a timely fashion, then it would not be useful to the audience. Having that immediate interaction with the audience was vital for the audience relationship to be maintained.

The idea of social responsibility in games writing appears to have some different qualities at work but still share some of its principles. The audience is the key consideration. There is a need to be honest, a desire to create an informed reader community, and a desire to serve as an advocate, protector, or reference to the audience. While this may vary based on the audience served, it seems as though this is true among all participants serving all audiences.

Gaming For Work VS Gaming For Fun

RQ2: How do video games writers believe that gaming for work is different from gaming for play? How do these differences affect the success of games writing?

Games writers note that there is a seemingly paradoxical relationship between gaming and games writing. While writers get to play games, they are doing at as part of their job. This means that the games are played usually on a deadline, and often times multiple games are played within a short amount of time. Frequent exposure to games can also lead to writers seeing patterns within game development. Gary jokingly referred to this as seeing "how the sausage is made" since a writer begins to be able to see how game development occurs, even without ever directly experiencing the process. The games writers interviewed in this study had mixed opinions about how their career was influenced by their gaming.

Enjoying a Game

A concern of many people when something you enjoy becomes your profession is the fear that you are going to stop enjoying it. So if you enjoy playing video games, this may mean that as a games writer you may start to hate playing them.

Dawn said that a negative reaction is much more likely during a busy review season. "You'll just get through the playing, playing, playing, playing, and then you finish what you have to do for work. Then you have free time and you're like, 'Oh my God! I just don't wanna look at a video game right now.' Your brain shuts down." Similarly Chuck said "at the end of the day, the last thing you want to do is get in front of a screen and play another game. That is the problem you face when you take a hobby and make it into a career. It ceases to be a relaxing pastime."

Grant lamented what he called the "churn." There can be the tedium and a grind in the repetitive nature of the business. "It's easy to become jaded and cynical when reviewing your umpteenth Call of Duty game." He talked about how it was important to not lose perspective on the innovations of what makes games fun and entertaining.

Byron spoke about how being a games writer was a bit of a "double-edged sword". It can either make the gaming experience fun or excruciating. On one hand it enhanced is enjoyment because he would be required to play a game to completion that he might not otherwise. "Sometimes though, I'll start a game and know, that this is going to suck, but I have to play it for my job."

Wallace said that initially his career pushed him away from his hobby. He would attempt to distance himself by committing to other hobbies in his off time. He was quick to point out that he still enjoyed games, but he would frequently explore other forms of entertainment to not get burned out. He didn't consider himself as "specialized" as other writers since he had interests in other hobbies besides games.

Ash jokingly spoke of procrastination as the best way to juggle gaming as work. Waiting until a deadline to write about a game can help ease the tension brought about by work. He would plan out a schedule for completing his games. "If you complete four chapters of this game you can watch these episodes of *The Simpsons*…. I try to stay one or two steps ahead of my deadline to complete my job, but not get burned out about it." If Ash began to dislike gameplay, he would take a step back and assess why this was happening.

Clay said he can see problems early on due to his experience, which can adversely affect his enjoyment. "If I catch a problem early on, then I know it's going to be a

problem throughout. It's a problem that I know won't be fixed and that I'm going to deal with throughout. This makes it difficult for me to enjoy the experience because I'm just going to be focusing on these problems throughout."

While some individuals admitted that the tedium of work negatively affected their perception of games, some thought of it as a positive. Brock spoke of how his role as a games writer makes his enjoyment of games better since he is able to control the content that he is able to see. As a features writer, he can come into most games fresh without the baggage of prior knowledge of the game. However, having prior information of a game can make the experience of playing the game more enjoyable. He can recall information from game designers prior to a games release, which enhances his enjoyment of the final product.

James stated that working in video games has enhanced his passion for gaming. Working in this space, he has discovered more "amazing" games than he would before being a writer. "Sometimes I play some bad games, but mostly I play more amazing games than I ever would have without this job. It just makes me love games even more." His extensive experience in game effects his expectations about what a game is going to be like. "It's like when I watch a Tarantino movie I know what I'm getting into. When I play a UbiSoft game, I can expect it to have a tablet companion app. If I play an Activision game I can expect there to be a snap to sight mechanic and that I'll lie down a lot." That can affect the review process as he knows what to expect from certain game makers based on their past works.

Blaine said that he believed that his knowledge of games has actually enhanced his gaming experience. Knowing the intricacies of game development, makes him

appreciate the good things about a game's design, while being keenly aware of things that need to be worked on more. He mentioned that he has no problem picking up the controller again after a hard day at work, even when his work is playing more video games.

Playing a Game the Way it's Meant to be Played

Games are designed to be played in a specific way. When a game designer creates a role-playing game that lasts 50 hours, the game designer does not expect the player to play that game in a single sitting. However, the games writer may not have that luxury. Their career is based on getting information to their audience in a timely matter to be effective. If a games writer is not able to complete a review of a game in time for the game's release, then a reader may decide to look elsewhere for their information. Sometimes developers will make a game available for writers prior to the games release, but sometimes that is not an option. So a games writer may be forced to spend the next few days playing a game in long settings in order to write a competent review. This disconnect between the game's intent and the way they played games for review was a recurring subject for participants.

Chuck said "a movie usually tops out at three hours. A game is designed to last you 40 hours and you have to explore all of that content within a fixed amount of time." Dawn echoed this thought and pointed out that playing a game for review was not the same as playing a game for fun. In a review, you would not have the same amount of time to play the game as you would if you were playing on your own time. Also, a reviewer must investigate all play styles in order to adequately review the game. "I can't be the magic user that I always want to be because I gotta try being this melee character

instead. I'm not having as much fun as I would because so much choice is removed from the situations."

Cress saw the review process as a way to ruin games for the reviewer since the game was not designed for a reviewer. "You often have to work on crazy deadlines. You have to play games faster than you normally would. It's basically antithetical to the way a normal person would play games." He admitted that if he still had to review games he might not be involved in games journalism anymore.

Clay said that reviewing a game caused him to experiment more with the game mechanics. He would see what he could do and not do within the game to see if he could "break" it. "This is something I probably wouldn't try if I was just playing for fun, but since I have to do a thorough review I am more likely to push it."

How the Sausage is Made

Gary was very blunt in his assessment of how games writing had affected his gaming experience. He referred to it as "seeing how the sausage is made". This was what he referred to as being able to see and understand the fundamentals of game design based on his repeated use of similar games. Chuck would express the same experience in the same way as "seeing how the sausage is made." Norman spoke about how his critical abilities actually improve his gaming experience. He had a critical eye towards games prior to getting involved in games writing. As he says being able to "see behind the wallpaper" can improve the experience by being able to see and understand design decisions.

Erika said that her knowledge of the games industry means she can never look at games the same way again. "You see that opening studio logo, and then you realize that

this publisher bought this studio which is owned by that guy and you are like 'urgh' that guy."

For some reviewers, the knowledge of the games industry required that an adjustment must be made before playing for work. Misty mentioned that there was a "switch" that you needed as a reviewer. This would engage "critical reviewer mode" so she could do her job. But in a situation where she was playing for pleasure she was able to flip that switch off and enjoy herself. "Unless there is something horribly wrong with a game, I'm able to do that and have a good time." She thought that it was an important aspect of this job.

Games writing has the potential for several different effects on the writers as players. Games writing can have either a positive or negative effect on the player. It can make it difficult for the writer to experience the game as it is meant to be played. Whether that has either a negative or positive effect on the writers play experience seems to be debatable. According to the writers it seems games writing has its pros and cons on playing and enjoying a game. If games writers enter the field due to their enjoyment of the game, what causes them to lose or gain enjoyment? If we applied this question to journalism as a whole, the question as to why individuals enter journalism becomes that more interesting. If a journalist loses their interest in their subject area due to the daily grind of work, what effect does that have on their finished product? Games writing can offer interesting insight on journalism as a whole.

What Distinguishes Games Journalists from Games Players?

RQ3: How do video games writers, in their roles as professionals, differentiate themselves from the average video game player population? Do they believe that they

these differences have changed over the years? Do they believe these changes are important to the success of games writing?

For some participants there was difficulty in identifying what made them different from the average game player. Cress noted that it was probably no more than a matter of circumstance that allowed them to cover games. Gary noted that the only real difference is that one group wants to write about video games, and one doesn't.

Experience and education

When asked to discuss the role of education in games writer profession, the participants had varied answers. Gary noted that there are many more games writers now who are trained in journalism than there was in the past. These writers know ways to conduct best practices when gathering news. Norman spoke about how training in journalism can protect against ethical quandaries. "You have a gut instinct that says, ok this sounds sketchy. I don't want to do that." He also stated that working with editors is an advantage as well because they can help guide on what is acceptable and what is not in regard to ethics.

James said that as a games writer "your voice has to be one worth hearing" and that journalism training plays a big role in that. He noted that he went through a great deal of training to be able to be a competent writer. "Writing a good article is not just vomiting your stream of consciousness on a website like some people think it is." The writing must be compelling enough for people to want to read it.

Erika noted that she might not have been hired if not for academic training. Her training helped her look for news. "I am able to look at a press release and figure out what is PR bullshit and which part is actual news, quickly and that's awesome." Her

training has helped her to be able to conduct interviews, research, and write feature stories. "Journalism school is expensive," she said, but it has helped her be able to do her job.

Going beyond education, having experience in the field was cited many times as a contributing factor to good games journalism. Chuck had a degree, just not in journalism. He observed that most of what he learned about the job was more valuable than anything he has learned in a classroom.

James noted that some readers may have more experience in certain aspects of games than he did, but his experience as a writer becomes a differentiating factor. He also noted how experience makes the writer more aware of social issues and were more able articulate why these issues are important. However, when asked pointedly about the differences between gamers and games writers, he did not feel that there was a difference. Games writers are not usually on par with movie critics. He noted that with movies, often the public does not agree with the critic regarding the value of a film. A critic may hate a film and call it low brow, but the public may make it set box office records. When comparing games writers and gamers, he noted that there is a great deal of similarity between the view of the gamer and the writer. From that notion, he said that he thought that the difference would not be significant.

Clay said that with experience came integrity. Younger writers may be less likely to take a stand because they may be worried about offending a publisher or being criticized by the public. Experienced writers would be more likely to show integrity in their reporting. Experienced writers are also able to clearly articulate qualities of game. "You can play *Resident Evil 4* and come away saying that game kicked ass, but an

experienced reviewer can come away and say that the weapons were well balanced and articulate all these other game factors that made it a good game."

Brock noted that experience allows for the writer to take opinion out of their coverage. The writer is able to look beyond what they love and hate and instead look at the product itself. They then can give the game a chance without bringing preconceived notions into their coverage.

Ash discussed how experience can create an audience, which leads to an almost "chicken and the egg" scenario. He noted that he might not be able to speak with as much confidence as he did, if he did not already have a group of people who followed his opinion. However, if he was not confident in his opinion, he may not have attracted the audience and gained the experience that he already had.

Gary noted that he simply plays a little bit of everything and that he feels that it can give him a worthwhile perspective about writing about games and where they fit in the cultural landscape. He built this experience by taking on a lot of projects that other writers didn't want to take. It gave him a foot in the door, and a leg up on other writers in terms of knowledge and experience.

Ethics and Integrity

There is agreement among all participants that games journalists need to be accountable for the coverage they provide. Gary said that games writers should have a "regimented" system for accountability. He noted that there is an assumption that people who write about games only do it for the money and that they were "more prone to ethical slip-ups." He noted that concern was more appropriate for YouTube reviewers, as it was documented that Microsoft had paid reviewers for positive coverage. He believed

that YouTube reviewers could not be held to same standards as games writers. Gary said that it was important that he be "a worthwhile voice for his livelihood."

Dawn contrasted the ability of the public to comment on a topic as opposed to the games journalist. She discussed in terms of a person's Facebook wall. "You don't have to examine the different sides of something. You don't have to be fair. It's your frickin' Facebook wall; you get to say whatever you want. You can't do that as a games journalist. You have to look at both sides. You have to be fair. You have to be objective. Otherwise you just wrote a blog post."

James lamented the perception that games writers have some sort of advantage over games players. He spoke of the "great games conspiracy" which is the belief that games writers know about all of the secrets in the games industry and do not disclose them out of collusion. He called this "bullshit" saying that games writers are at the mercy of games publishers and what they are shown, just like the gamers. He called the idea that games writers were in cahoots the game industry ridiculous. If you are a "shill" for a game company, you will not last long.

Changes in games writing

The participants, whether long standing veterans or new writers, acknowledge that there has been a great deal of change in games writing. When asked if they believed that the differences in gamers and games writers had changed over the years all participants noted examples. Several participants noted that improvements in technology over the last several years made for a more connected culture in which gamers can directly contribute to the narrative. Whereas, magazine publishers were required to live on either the west coast or east coast, modern writers can review from home. This access means that there

can be difficulty in making a "professional" games writer's voice stands out from the "amateurs."

Grant spoke about how the role of games critics may be reduced in a more connected culture. He spoke about how a critic's opinion may differ from the public's opinion, which may differ from an individual's opinion. "A guy who eats at Denny's isn't going to look in the NY Times for dining reviews." The readers may be more interested in seeking out information from like-minded sources. Those "Denny's" customers are not Grant's target audience, and he would not try to write for them.

Wallace said that a games writer has the advantage of being able to breakdown the elements of a game. A games writer can make step by step, well organized writings. He was very adamant that there may be a blurring of lines between professionals and amateurs, but professionals are the most capable of writing something that others are interested in reading.

Misty said that there is a degree of skill and discipline that games journalists have that the average gamer wouldn't have. If a person wanted a personal opinion about a game from a friend, that would be fine, but a professional opinion from a professional source has more powerful influence on a reader. Professionals can more effectively convey the experience of the game, because they have more experience in doing that.

Blaine mentioned that a professional writer might pick up on a detail in the game that the amateur might miss out on. Amateur games writers may get lost in playing the game and forget to analyze the game. A professional can still enjoy a game, but they are careful to analyze and compare their experience to past games. A professional has a larger knowledge base and the dedication to the work that others may not have.

According to Dawn "of course it's changed. Technology has developed in such a way that anyone across the world is able to write a story. We don't even need to be in the same room to produce a podcast." Dawn pointed out how she was able to contribute to games writing in a way that was not possible when she was younger. Prior to the increased decentralization of games media, Dawn was limited to writing for more traditional media due to her geographic location. However, now she had no such limits.

Where differences became apparent was the question whether or not these changes were important to the success of games writing, the response was mixed. On one hand some participants believed that the decrease in differences between gamers and writers was a great thing. It made for a more equal exchange of ideas and opinions between writers and gamers. On the other hand, it makes it difficult to find a writer's work amongst the noise. Byron mentioned that it was "like screaming into the wind and hoping that someone hears you. Don't get me wrong – I think it's great that people are able to comment and provide immediate feedback, but at the same time, it can be hard to separate what we do from John Doe's Tumblr page about Minecraft."

Grant was happy for the added conversation. "It gives us a direct line to the dialogue that the audience is having about the game. They may point out things that we may overlook and I think that makes us better at what we do." Ash spoke of how the audience helps to know where to direct the dialogue and what topics to discuss. Byron pointed out that the real challenge came from making sure that what they had to say was set apart from the audience. Whether this came from the professionalism displayed by the writers, or the quality of their dialogue, what really mattered was whether theirs was "a voice worth hearing." This ultimately is what would make or break the business.

Access was one thing but being able to put forth a quality dialogue is what would equal success in games writing.

The participants seemed mixed about how these changes have affected games writing. There was an agreement that the landscape had changed, but whether this was good or bad was in doubt. In regard to the change, most thought that it was had brought games writing into more of a public focus and that the key to success would be to understand and adapt to these changes.

Outlook towards the industry

RQ4: How do video games writers perceive the recent changes that have occurred in the gaming press industry?

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, there is a degree of uncertainty regarding games journalism. Websites and publications have been closed down or restructured as part of business decisions; however, there is a great deal of optimism surrounding the industry. There have been more serious discussions about games in our culture, as well as an increase in the diversity of voices in this industry. Gary mentioned how there are more people showing more interest in games and this was "a very exciting time" for him. The respondents expressed different ideas about the state of games journalism. These varied from being extremely positive to positively grim. I posited the question as to whether it was easier or harder to be a games writer. What followed was a series of varied responses.

The negative

Clay was discouraged by the fact it was "so easy" to produce content online. There was no need for a writer to move up the ranks. The writer would not have the

same seasoning than one who starts out small and moves to bigger things. Clay was also concerned by the idea that rather than try to attract actual journalists to cover a game, a game maker may target someone who had just started a site and was doing it for free. "We can make them e-famous, and we wouldn't have to pay them."

Cress mentioned that there is more opportunity than ever to become a games writer. "That's the great strange lessons *[sic]* of the last ten years. As we democratize the ability to speak and have an opinion that means there is a lot more noise and it makes it harder to get a job." He said that with the media landscape overall scaling down, he stated that it is very easy to get publish, but much harder to get paid. He said that there are a lot of young people entering the industry every day. These young people are more than willing to take the place of a more experienced writer at less of a pay scale.

Leaving journalism for marketing. Cress said that in some cases that games writing may lean more towards quantity and less towards quality. In those cases, "it becomes hard for someone to want to stay in this career in the long run, when moving to PR or development can very easily add a zero to your paycheck."

Chuck echoed the trend of people being involved in games writing that move on to PR or development. He was fascinated by the fact that it seemed to be a progression of sort. He started running a website for Xbox fans. Many of the commenters on his site got involved in writing on their own websites. Those people who started as visitors on his site have moved on to working in game development. He didn't begrudge anyone needing to provide for their family, but he mentioned that once you leave games writing for a career in development it can be very hard to get back in. "Once you leave to work

for Disney Interactive, you can return to games writing, but you can never ethically write about another Disney game ever."

The positive

Despite expressing his concerns earlier, Clay stated that proper games journalism has only gotten better. There is a quality there that has gotten better and better as time has progressed. He was also happy with the fact that there was a diverse variety of voices that had not been represented before.

James noted that being able to work from home gives him a greater advantage as a games writer. Former limitations required people interested in games writing to live in the city of the publication. However, the decentralization of publications coupled with improved technology and enhanced communication, makes the games writers' job much easier and makes them easily able to accomplish their goal.

Byron was very optimistic about the future of games writing. He said that it may be because he was new at it, but he thought of it as an interesting career that will constantly provide interesting opportunities for him. He said that he wasn't sure what his long-term career plans were, but he hoped that the business continued to support him.

Norman said he thinks games journalism is doing very well both professionally and ethically. He said that most successful games journalists are transparent about where their relationships lie and are able maintain credibility with their readers. Norman also praised what he perceived as the increase in diversity in games journalism. In the past games journalists represented a homogenous lot of men; "now games journalists have far more women than they used to". Also, games journalists represent far more diversity in ethnicity, culture, and religion.

Brock saw games writing as being in a healthy state. "It's hard to put a grade on it, there is a lot of different things going on like all forms of media." He liked the trend in "long-form" stories that were larger, in-depth, investigative stories about individuals and groups that are involved in gaming. These articles have increased in development over recent years, to a point where one writer's article may inspire another writer to write a follow-up article. He also commented on how writers seem to underestimate the power of video in games journalism. While many people may decry the quality of reviews on YouTube, there is no denying the influence that it has on viewers and advertisers. "It ultimately comes down to business model as to the success of a video game site, and that affects the content provided on those sites."

Wallace saw games writing as being increasingly community-focused. "The audience that we serve expects to be able to respond." He thought the more successful writers were able to interact with its audience. He didn't think that larger media conglomerates would jump into the games coverage space. He thought that any new gaming sites would be independent and that the larger sites would continue to adapt and evolve in this workspace. He also mentioned the presence of "Let's Players" who created video content and mentioned, "quite frankly, it has the people I work for scared." He predicted that games writing would continue to be a mix of media as it evolves and progresses.

The uncertain

Dawn was optimistic about the progress of games journalism, but had some interesting concerns regarding its standards and practices. First, she commented that the real challenge in games journalism is "staying in business." Games journalism is

maturing. Running an article based website may not be as financially feasible as simply hosting a YouTube channel. She also expressed concern about how gaming sites researched articles. She mentioned that at a recent convention panel that the question was raised, "do you employ a fact checker?" Only two people at that panel raised their hands. While fact-checking may be a luxury to some, it was very important to the way she conducted her craft. "More attention is being paid to the actual quality of writing and getting things right. The readers can find more important things to talk about than 'Hey, this is a really cool preview – it's got a million guns in it and that's awesome.'"

Erika mentioned how social media has changed games writing. "With Twitter, writers are able to add their own side comments to communicate with readers… and trolls. And sometimes get into arguments with game developers online." This referred to a real-life incident in which game developer Phil Fish had a public argument with a games writer via Twitter. Erika thought that a lot of good things could come from using message boards and social media; however, she cautioned that a lot of bad things could happen if not used wisely.

Grant said that what has happened in games writing is indicative of the changes in journalism. "I miss print media." He likes to have that as physical proof of what he does, but he acknowledged that was not the way we consume media. He thought that journalism was going to be constantly disrupted in ways that cannot be predicted. "On one hand it's terrifying, but on the other hand it's very exciting." He said that it would be hard to predict how trends are going to go, but he knew that changes in how the public consumes media are linked to what will happen in the games writing industry.

Ash thought that it was sad that there weren't any print magazines of note anymore in games writing. "It's unfortunate that publishers don't support games magazines any more due to not being able to get any eyeballs there, or however gross way they objectify people as body parts." He said that the increase of video content and podcasts has had a profound effect on how people consume video game related content. Games writing is often read in the reader's own voice, but a video allows the creator to express their views through their personality. While there may low quality videos out there, he expected it to be a situation where "the cream rises to the top". He thinks that the interactivity is great for "games journalism" as it makes it more digestible for an audience that may have smaller and smaller attention spans.

Misty predicted that the trend would continue where games writing would move away from print and written content and more towards podcasts or video content. Like other writers, she saw it as the trend in media overall. "Lower attention spans mean that content needs to be easier to consume." She saw print games media as being a dead form, with written articles being in danger of being supplanted by web content. She felt that this content is a good supplement but hoped that it wouldn't take the place of the written word.

Blaine thinks that games journalism must adapt with the times. As a print journalist he acknowledged that some changes needed to be made. "We are quarterly now, we have to make longer more evergreen articles." They were able to provide supplemental materials through the web, podcasts, and online videos. "We are an instant gratification society. We need to be up to the minute." He saw it as an evolution and

something that needed to be changed. "Is there still room for print? Yes, but not in the same way as we are used to."

Video games have been in a period of great change. Some of these changes seem to be quite positive, which provides for unique opportunities in an interconnected world of games journalism. However, there is a growing concern about the adverse changes regarding the industry. The constricting of writing sources has made it increasingly difficult for games writers to make a successful career in this field. According to the participants, it seems that games writing is equal parts uncertainty and optimism, much like journalism in general.

GamerGate controversy

In mid-August of 2014, the games media took center stage in a controversy dubbed online as GamerGate. Developed under the guise of creating a forum for ethics in games journalism, the GamerGate controversy originated from an online post that targeted games designer Zoe Quinn. In the post Eron Gjoni, an ex-boyfriend of Quinn, published personal chat logs, emails, and texts between the two during the course of their relationship. Gjoni also targeted Quinn's relationship with Nathan Grayson, a journalist for gaming website *Kotaku*. Gjoni claimed that this relationship led to favorable reviews of Quinn's games, even though these allegations were proven to be false. Following the post, an online group that would eventually evolve into GamerGate targeted Quinn and her family for harassment. This harassment would go beyond hateful rhetoric on the internet, but progress to rape and death threats as well as the release of personal information.

The attacks soon extended to other people in the games and games journalism industry, often targeted at those who came to Quinn's defense. Game developer Phil Fish had his personal information hacked and posted as retaliation for defending Quinn. This led to Fish selling his company and leaving game development all together. Media critic Anita Sarkeesian, whose work specifically covers the depiction of women in video games, received rape and death threats from so called GamerGate members.

While GamerGate members claim to be legitimately concerned about ethics in games journalism, most seem to be using this as an opportunity to attack women involved in the gaming industry. The ensuing fallout from GamerGate has led to numerous discussions regarding misogyny in the games industry, online bullying and harassment, and ethics in games journalism. While this was never the focus of this study, I felt that it was important to attempt to address this issue with participants. Our earlier discussions regarding social responsibility seemed to necessitate the need to address this issue. I contacted each of the participants asking them for their comments regarding GamerGate by asking the following questions:

1. How has "GamerGate" affected your feelings regarding your responsibility towards your audience/readers?
2. We had previously discussed the differences between games writers as opposed to the average gamer player population. Has GamerGate changed this dynamic, or is something else occurring?
3. What is your current view of the state of the gaming press in light of "GamerGate"?

Many of them refused to comment. Most would not respond at all. The reasons for their refusal included concern over personal safety, as well as the fear that by

speaking about the issue that it would then legitimize the issue. Chuck called GamerGate "toxic" and thought that engaging in a discussion with its members was a "mistake".

Norman was quick to say how GamerGate had not changed his feeling towards the audience. Honesty and transparency was always a part of his reporting ethics. He was always concerned with avoiding impropriety; he just thought that GamerGate was raising awareness about ethics. However, he was quick to mention that best watchdogs for gaming journalists have been the journalists themselves. He said that most of the instances brought up by GamerGate are "trumped up or misunderstandings". He thinks that the games press is made up of good people and that the distrust that was raised has been unhealthy for the relationship between the writers and the readers. "It's difficult expressing that to an audience that already mistrusts you."

James took a different tone in his response to GamerGate. He said that he realized that his responsibility was to present the facts and not a responsibility to the audience. "There's no pleasing everyone." He said that most people didn't know what they wanted. He said that if members of an enthusiast press like games writing cannot be allowed to write from personal experience then they cannot be effective journalists. Moreover, he said that the writer's social experience was vital to the games writing experience.

What was more interesting was James's feelings regarding his own relationship with the audience. He used to be excited to share his experience with a person if he saw they had an interest in gaming ("Someone playing a 3ds on a train.") but now he was worried about it because what if that person was a GamerGater? He said it was totally acceptable that gamers may lose faith in a journalist when that journalist had done wrong,

but James seemed very upset that he and his friends “were attacked by a pack of rabid idiots.” He thought games writing was in great shape, that the journalists were able to regulate and influence themselves. He felt gamers were the real ones that needed to reflect on their ethics and ideals in order to learn from this experience.

The first part of Erika’s response to my inquiry was troubling to say the least. “I'll be honest – upon reading this request, my first instinct was to either delete the email or jump into an hours-long investigation of your credentials before answering. I'm constantly on the lookout for traps or disingenuous people seeking to twist my words on forums and social media. Luckily, whenever a GGer throws a trap our way, it's been fairly obvious. Plus, we've talked before. I'll withhold the background check.” I was unsure if this was a drawn-out joke or a legitimate concern, but since Erika is a woman, a frequent target of GamerGaters, I believed it might be the truth.

Erika was quick to point out that GamerGate had not changed her relationship with the audience since she wasn’t writing for “extremist trolls in the first place.” She believed that the movement represented a small subset of the gaming audience whereas her intended audience is “open to new ideas, quality writing, and intelligent conversation.” She wanted to say that GamerGate had not affected her view on gaming, but she felt that wasn’t truthful. “I'm paranoid about every conversation I have regarding the industry, and I don't tweet or write certain things that I know will make me a target – though it seems that simply being a woman with thoughts about gaming makes me a target anyway.”

She said that it has helped her and her colleagues become stronger and more professionally focused. She acknowledged that conversations about ethics were important, but she also believed that GamerGate was never concerned with ethics.

Results summary

Though diverse in terms of backgrounds, the writers had a few common themes. Breaking down the discussions with each participant, it is apparent that there are many different aspects and qualities of games writers that can relate directly with what we know about journalism.

RQ1: How do games writers view the place of social responsibility in the current environment of games writing?

In almost every instance, there were three ideals that can be examples of social responsibility in games writing;

1. Honesty
2. Serving the audience
3. Fostering community

While gamers do not represent the whole of society, the importance that games writers place on the gaming audience influences their work. These ideals reflect the idea that the gaming audience is a society unto itself and that the writers have a responsibility towards society moving forward in games journalism.

RQ2: How do video games writers believe that gaming for work is different from gaming for play? How do these differences affect the success of games writing?

Gaming for work definitely affected gaming for fun. Some participants said the work aspect enhanced their fun, while others said that it made it difficult to enjoy

gaming. There seemed to be no doubt that while the aspect of fun may be in doubt, it did not seem to negatively affect games writing. If anything, it seemed to be better for it, as it made the participants more able to have a critical and objective focus regarding the review process.

RQ3: How do video games writers, in their roles as professionals, differentiate themselves from the average video game player population? Do they believe that they these differences have changed over the years? Do they believe these changes are important to the success of games writing?

Several participants noted areas where games writers differed from the game players. Education level, experience, ethical ideals were all cited as what set writers apart from gamers. What was also agreed upon was how this divide was shrinking, and that current technology and communication norms made for a more interconnected landscape. Not only was it easier for the writers to reach the audience, but also the audience could reach back. As an earlier participant noted, it is much more challenging for a games writer to be heard against the cacophony of other voices available, but those who understand this and adapt will be best suited for what is to come.

RQ4: How do video games writers perceive the recent changes that have occurred in the gaming press industry?

Despite the changing landscape and the shrinking job opportunities, all participants seemed to be very positive about the state of the gaming press. Most acknowledged the changes being brought about by the shift to a more personality-focused product. While some acknowledged that they may not best be suited for this kind of format, all seemed to be positive about the state of things moving forward. Though they

may have been uncertain about their own future, they seem to be hopeful about the industry as a whole. The participants seemed to be concerned about their place in the future of games writing. However, they believed that there would still be a need for what they do, but there may not be a place for them in that future.

Chapter 7

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the current state of games writing as well as understand the decline and change of games writing from the perspective of those who work in that field. Of the 15 interviews conducted, each respondent had a variety of different ideas about the field of games writing/journalism. While games writing may be a niche form of entertainment journalism, the findings of this study yielded many interesting patterns that can better give us a better understanding of journalism as a whole.

Is it Journalism or is it Not?

Is games writing journalism? According to the participants, this is a difficult question to answer. The participants who thought of games writing as journalism usually had a background in journalism either educational or professional experience. There seemed to be a larger commentary about what separates journalism and entertainment journalism. *Super Mario* may not have the same social significance as a presidential election, but games coverage had the potential to be something more significant. Issues in society are reflected in game development, which is then reflected in games writing or games journalism. There seemed to be an emphasis placed on journalism having "concrete value" or something of significant importance. When video game writing goes beyond being game reviews, it was almost universally accepted as journalism.

No participants gave a definitive "no" to the idea of games journalism. Almost everyone agreed that games writing had the potential for journalism. Many had examples

of people who could be considered journalists or articles that could be considered journalism. There was almost a sense of third person effects at work, where a writer does not believe that they are practicing journalism, but believe that others are journalists. Third person effects is a term normally applied to the idea that an individual does not believe media affects them, but they believe it can a larger effect on others (Davison, 1983). While this interpretation is different from what was observed in this study, the principle is the same. "I'm not a journalist, but these other people are journalists." Whether they consider themselves journalists or not, if someone else considers them a journalist then they may be doing something journalistic.

Social Responsibility in Games Writing

Social responsibility as a theory is the idea of the journalist's responsibility to society as a whole (Siebert et al., 1963, Christians and Nordenstreng 2004). A journalist that subscribes to social responsibility is concerned about how their work affects the society they serve. What happens in games writing is something different, yet similar to social responsibility. The games writers interviewed for this study identified several ways in which what they do stems from a responsibility towards their audience, their society. While they may serve a niche audience, this audience represents their society. As was frequently echoed by all the participants, the audience was an important part of their existence as a games writer. Therefore, the audience was seen as being extremely important, which came with its own sense of responsibility. The social responsibility of games writing includes a need for honesty and transparency, and a desire to protect their audience.

What is present in the games writers' version of social responsibility is similar yet different from what social responsibility theory states. When we look at the five core responsibilities expressed in the Hutchins Commission report (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947), we see some elements of these values reflected in games writing (1. truthful accounting 2. forum for exchange 3. representative of audience 4. presentation of goals 5. full access to information). However, the broader societal element is not a focus – for example, being representative of the groups in society as a whole and presenting the goals and values of society. Some respondents expressed different interpretations of their responsibility to the audience. Truthfulness was always important. While a few were concerned with their relationship with the audiences, some purposely avoided audience interaction. Information access is complicated in the case of product embargoes, where writers cannot discuss video games prior to a specific date.

While games writing social responsibility is very different from the social responsibility of the press there is ethical responsibility present. These ethics are in line with existing ethical principles such as those present in the Society of Professional Journalists code (Society of Professional Journalists, 2019) and journalism ethics textbooks (Patterson and Wilkins, 2014, Plaisance 2014). Seek the truth and report about it. Minimize harm. Act independently. Be accountable and transparent. These are all ethical principles that are present in games writing.

Honesty and transparency.

A consistent term used throughout each interview was that of honesty. Regardless of whether the issue at hand was coverage of game releases, game

development, or some other game related field, honesty was important to all participants. Sources had to be properly cited and vetted so as to ensure the accuracy of a story.

Related to honesty is the idea of transparency. Every participant emphasized that it was important for games writers to be crystal clear on where they were getting their information and when any sort of potential conflicts of interest may arise. Instances where reviewers were flown to review events were mentioned as areas where transparency was key. Writers who participated in such events often had their travel and lodging paid for. In addition, food, drink, and free gifts may be included as well. In most cases, writers said they would avoid these events completely. If they did participate, they stressed the importance of informing their audience of what they may have received for their participation in the coverage.

Cress recounted a story involved a developer that was based in a European country. Had his site not accepted airfare and lodging from the developer, the story would not have been possible. He said that the compensation had no effect on his reporting but noted that he fully disclosed the developer's involvement in the travel arrangements. Cress preferred to avoid these situations all together, but he acknowledged that sometimes this can be difficult to do. He felt that this was an important part of transparency in games reporting.

The perception of honesty and transparency in games journalism has been a major source of discussion amongst people who work in games writing. Games writing came under intense scrutiny during an incident that occurred in 2007 at the gaming website *Gamespot*. Then editorial director, Jeff Gerstmann, was terminated from his position on this website. This was later revealed by Gerstmann to related to pressure from *Gamespot*

advertisers who were unhappy with reviews that their games had received on the website (Gerstmann, 2012). Gerstmann was joined by several other *Gamespot* editors who decided to leave their jobs after this incident and formed their own independent website *Giant Bomb*. Despite this controversy, in 2012 the *Giant Bomb* website was sold to CBS Interactive, and now Gertsmann and the *Giant Bomb* staff work for their previous employers. This incident was specifically referenced by Chuck as a reason for the need for honesty in games journalism.

Playing Games and Gaming as Work

The concept of video games being a part of a games writer's job proved to be an interesting aspect of the participants' responses. The effect of playing games for a job seemed to vary slightly among participants. They largely fell into three categories; there was no effect, it changed the way they felt about gaming, or it enhanced their gaming experience.

One of the participants that noted gaming for work had no effect on her enjoyment of gaming referred to entering a different state of mind when gaming for work. She referred to it as a switch that she'd use to go into critic mode. In this mode, fun isn't as important as critiquing and reviewing the game. While those that noted that their gaming experience was not affected by the job, some admitted that if they became overwhelmed with reviewing that they could see themselves getting fed up. This just did not happen to be their personal experience. While this is not the same as the so-called critic-switch, it is possible that there is something more at work here. Perhaps each of these participants had a "critic-switch" that helped them cope with gaming as a critic as opposed to a gamer. Frequent breaks and a regulated work rate may be how they cope

with the stress. Instead of it having no effect, it may instead be that they are able to regulate the stress in a way that they perceive as no effect.

For participants who expressed a change in their feelings regarding gaming expressed it as either a positive or a negative. Often, the participants would discuss the stress involved in games writing. These included deadlines, burnout, and other stressors one would see from a journalist. The games writer had other stressors to consider as well, such as the difficulty involved in completing a game while trying to meet a deadline, or the problem of not being able to abandon a game if they are not enjoying it. As noted earlier, one participant said that by the end of the work day that they didn't even want to look at another video game. This raises interesting questions about how the job affects the play for the games writer. Is it still play if they are not having a good time?

This may play into the third aspect noted in game play among the writers. The expressed idea that gaming for work enhanced their gaming experience. This idea mirrors ideas expressed by film scholars and other entertainment scholars. The critical eye of the writer gives them a special appreciation of the game. They look deeper, beyond the surface narrative and they may notice aspects about the game that the average player does not. Previous experience with other games may also enhance the experience, as they are able to apply their previous experience with similar games in new and unexpected ways.

Play theory (Stephenson, 1967) in relation to games writing is complicated. Stephenson discusses the guidelines of play as being voluntary, free of responsibilities and no sense of import. This seems to almost counter to the views expressed by the respondents. Many had some form of concern regarding a deadline, or reviewing a game

that wasn't fun, or not wanting to see another video game upon returning to work. In those instances rather than just be pure play, it becomes almost a role play of play. The writers try to imagine themselves in a situation where they are experiencing pure play. That is not to say that games writers do not experience play, but often it seemed a situation where the work aspect was more relaxed or situations where gaming occurred on their free time.

It appears gaming for work does has a notable effect on the games writer. Whether it increases or decreases appreciation of gaming and game play seems to be largely dependent on the individual. Like any job, it has the capacity to grind down on an individual and make them dislike gaming. However, it seems to have an equal capacity for making the gaming experience that more enjoyable.

What this results in is a kind of different version of play. The play as a profession does seem to be different from the play for fun experienced by games writers. How these differences present may be reliant on the individual and their experiences. A person with extensive experience playing video games may have a different experience than a casual gamer who doesn't play as often. The games writer is assigned a game and plays it for review. The games player sets aside free time to play games based on their desire and availability to play. The games writers are concerned with completing a review rather than having fun. This does not mean that the writers are not having fun. But it can make for a remarkably different gaming experience.

What Sets a Games Writer Apart from a Gamer?

This question proves to be a difficult one when asked. The participants waffled back and forth about what was different, with responses ranging from no differences to

many differences. Several participants said that there was a difference. Either it was an education, a set of ethics, or a different mindset. Others thought that there was no difference and that they simply had a difference in circumstance. These games writers thought of themselves as being similar to the gamers but differed only in profession. They chose to write about games as their profession and that was the only real difference that they cited.

Singer (2011) identified three recent changes to journalism due to the Internet: exercise of control, journalist practices, and the relationship between journalists and others. These are noted in the responses of the writers. In particular the relationship between the writer and others becomes the most contentious part. The writer can maintain control and journalistic practices, however they must concern themselves with their relationship with their audience. The writers maintain professionalism by remaining removed enough from the audience to think clearly, but close enough to understand the audience's perspective.

For many, education and skill were the deciding factors. Having a background in journalism is what made a games writer different. This varied based on whether the participants had studied journalism or if they simply had extensive experience in written prose.

This experience or even the perception of experience can do a lot affect the audience's perception of the writer and even their own self-perception. Audiences may be less concerned with the writers journalism and more interested in their ability to play the games that they are reviewing.

What has changed?

A Shift in Focus .

Many of the participants noted that there was a significant change in emphasis towards a visual component in games coverage. With an increase in video related game coverage there was a belief among many of the participants that this change would favor those who were able to perform via audio or video. Podcasts and video content have become increasingly popular and people who cover video games for a living have made significant gains in advertising revenue alone.

The question then becomes, can this be considered in the same category as games journalism, games writing, or something else entirely? While a website visitor can read an article written by a games journalist, would it just be easier to watch a quick five-minute video? These are the hypothetical questions that some of the participants had for themselves. Some participants were eager to discuss their contributions on podcasts or videos, but others such as Brock were concerned that they did not have the personality needed to be a performer. Ash admitted that much of his current career was based on his personality and performance as talent and not with his ability to write.

Consensus was mixed as to whether this form of coverage is on the same level as games writing or games journalism. Clay mentioned that he wished he could do the amount of business as PewDiePie and was quick to point out that while PewDiePie was not doing journalism, what he was doing was profitable. Byron pointed out the amount of work that can go into creating video content on YouTube and how many contributors do a lot of research for their videos.

What is not in debate among participants is that video coverage has influenced games writing on a whole. The fact that most people can stream game coverage via Twitch or YouTube with little expense makes a position as a freelancer on a website seem much less appealing. It can also make the written form of games coverage take on new meaning. Rather than writing a review that uses correct form and can be read easily on a website, it is much more likely that reviewers will be writing a script for a video, or at most shooting a long video and cutting it down to the "entertaining bits".

Relation to existing studies.

With limited previous literature regarding this subject area, it is difficult to draw comparisons. However, previously cited studies seem to have a relevant connection to the responses observed.

The Gamer as Journalist. The concern observed by most respondents is the belief that their success depends on their credibility. Hall (2003) spoke of how games journalists used ethics as a way to establish credibility with their audience. This belief was present in all interviews with the concern that audiences place great importance on the perceived honesty of the writers. By applying ethical standards, they believed that they were placing themselves beyond the average game player.

Zagal, Ladd, and Johnson (2009) analyzed game reviews in terms of them being journalism and discussion. The authors suggested that reviews often go farther than simple observations by including design suggestions and narrative interpretations. This seemed to be present during my interviews as the respondents were quick to point out that they tended to go deeper than simple observations regarding how a game was made.

The games writers also discussed how they are able place games through the narrative lens of modern social norms and use those to add context to their reviews.

Barkl (2011) discussed how digital publishing had changed the way game journalism functioned. Now there was an open form of communication between game makers, game players and game journalists. This was apparent during all interviews that all respondents were aware of how the relationship with their audience affected their writing and work.

Film critic studies. There are some factors from previously cited film critic literature that are present in the responses for this study. Eliashburg and Shugan (1997) identified critics as influencers and predictors. The influencer acts as an opinion leader, whereas the predictor simply represents the audience. In this situation, I observed a third-person effect in which respondents identified in a way that was consistent with a predictor, but listed others as influencers. This would suggest that the games writers may downplay the effect that they might have on the success of a game as well as the potential effect on future games.

Liu (2006) discussed how word of mouth movie reviews tended to be more effective motivators than professional movie reviews. This is an observation that is complicated to interpret based on this study. Many of the games writers tended to have a grounded approach to writing reviews. The question then may depend on how the audience interprets the review as opposed to a simple word of mouth recommendation. It may depend on how the audience relates to the reviewer, which was a common concern expressed by the respondents. However, the limited scope of this study makes it difficult to interpret those observations.

Plucker et al. (2009) examined the movie rating process between two groups of film critics (novice and expert) vs. college student reviewers. The researchers noted it was difficult to separate the groups and that there was a great deal of overlap. They did note the importance in expertise in reviewing, and this was a belief apparent in all interviews. Respondents believed that expertise lended credibility in how the audience read a review. If a review came from an expert perspective then it would seem credible.

Moon, Bergey, and Iacobucci (2010) looked for relationships between movie reviews and economic performance. Respondents largely downplayed the relationship between game reviews and economic performance. One respondent said "the next *Madden* game is going to make money regardless of what I have to say. But those aren't the type of gamers who read my reviews". The belief by respondents suggest that the if the game is going to make money, it will make money regardless of the reviews.

Chen, Liu and Zhang (2012) tied the perception of review quality to the quality of previous reviews. While this was a factor it was noted that this perception could be mitigated by effective advertising. These reviews were also more effective when released within the same release window as the movie reviewed. This seems to reflect the thoughts of the respondents. They were concerned about maintaining a consistency of quality. They acknowledged how timeliness of reviews was important. They also noted that their reviews amounted to little in the face of an effective ad campaign.

Sports journalism. Observations made in sports journalism were again reflected in the games writers' responses. Particularly whereas Banagan (2011) discussed the concerns of sports journalism placing an emphasis on profits and ratings so too are similar concerns observed in games writing. According to the study respondents, the

emphasis in the games media seems to be placed more on presentability and personality then writing ability and professional ethics.

Product reviews. While product reviews are not usually considered journalism, the insight of product reviews studies is reflected in the games writers' responses. As noted in Mudambi & Schuff (2010), detailed oriented reviews were much more effective than simple reviews. Zhu and Zhang (2010) noted that game reviews tended to be more influential when they covered lesser known games as opposed to AAA studio productions. This sentiment was recurring from respondent to respondent.

In a previous study Jong and Burgers (2013) noted that there were marked differences between consumer reviews and professional reviews. They noted that the professional reviews tended to be more detached then the consumer reviews which relied on the POV of the reviewer. This did not seem to be the case from most of the respondents as they often said that both of these aspects were present in their reviews. They noted the importance of being professional but also how it is important to give their own perspective on the game reviews.

Study Limitations

The most apparent limitation of this study is its small sample size. It was difficult to find many participants that would participate in the study. Since there is no real professional registry for games journalists, many respondents had to be gathered via word of mouth and snowball sampling. A future study would benefit from having a larger sample size.

I also believe that face to face interviews may have been a more beneficial way of interviewing rather than voiced Skype interviews. Non-verbal cues would have been helpful in understanding where to direct follow-up questions and conversations.

With this study focusing on games writers, it would be beneficial to ask the same questions of the on camera talent who review games. As identified earlier, there has been a much larger emphasis placed on audio and video based reviews and discussions as opposed to written material. Their observations could differ greatly from those of the writer.

Also games writers have greater options in regards to self-employment. Many writers turn to Patreon or other crowd funded services as a way to profit from their skills. These writers use money earned from the services to not only maintain their own websites, but also produce video content or publish books. This eschews earlier career paths that rely on employment from a corporate entity. These writers may have a completely different take on what games writing means to them as opposed to those employed by a parent corporation.

Conclusion

Games writing is a very interesting field of study when you consider the various factors that the games writer deals with on a regular basis. The question as to whether this can be considered journalism at all according to the respondents and observed evidence could be considered yes. The respondents in this study conduct themselves as journalists, despite not identifying as such. I believe that if a blind study was conducted in which respondents read the written works of other games writers they would say, “This is journalism!” This kind of third person identification is seen throughout the responses.

Social responsibility also seems to be in play here. The writers succeed or fail based off of the perception of the audience. So writers feel a need to be transparent and open about their experiences when reviewing games. Often writers may recuse themselves from reviewing a game if there is even the hint of a conflict of interests. Being open with the audience not only protects them but also strengthens their opinion of the writers and their product.

The games writers' experience as a gamer also has a profound effect on their identity. The push and pull of gaming on a deadline makes it difficult for the writer to continue to enjoy playing games. The way they consume the media is different from how the average gamer may consume it. The games writer then has to carefully balance those two identities when presenting their take on the subject. Respondents did not have a clear answer on the subject. A potential future topic for study may be to take into consideration the years of games writing experience the respondents have and how that relates to their enjoyment.

Games writers also recognize the changes that are occurring in their industry. There is less emphasis in writing and more in watching videos and listening to podcasts. This then becomes less about the structure of the word and more about the presentation of the product. The writers find themselves more concerned about their appearance and delivery than the actual writing itself. This has lead to a reevaluation among the writers about how they approach the product. In certain cases this could lead to an abandonment of their chosen field altogether.

Based on this author's observations of the study and data the following interpretations have been made. First of all: is it journalism? Based on earlier

observations regarding social responsibility, the following values and functions have been identified as being a part of journalism:

Values:

1. The press should provide a "truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning."
2. The press should provide "a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism."
3. The press should provide "a representative picture of the constituent groups in society."
4. The press is responsible for "the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society."
5. The press should provide "full access to the day's intelligence."

(Hutchins Commission, 1947)

Functions:

1. Service of the political system
2. Enlighten the public
3. Safeguarding the rights of the individual
4. Servicing the economic system
5. Providing entertainment
6. Maintaining its own financial self-sufficiency

(Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963).

With these criteria, we see elements that are present throughout that could be considered journalistic values and functions. The respondents valued the need for a

truthful exchange of information. They all encouraged an exchange of ideas with their audience. To the best of their ability they provided a representative picture of their audience. There is debate about whether they provide clarification of goals of society; however, they do provide a direct access to all the news available to them. As far as the values of a socially responsible journalist, they seem to hit that mark.

Looking at the functions of socially responsible journalism we see similar patterns despite the fact that their focus is narrower than society at large. While they don't service the political system, per se, they are an agent of the industry they cover and the consumers of media. This author would argue the political system in this instance, is in fact the video game industry. They enlighten the public by informing them of news they might otherwise not know about. They would consider themselves safeguards for their audience, by way of providing consumer protection. They by serving the industry also serve the economic system. They can provide entertainment. This author would frequently read reviews and watch gaming videos as a way to pass time without having a particular interest in what they are playing.

As far as maintaining their own self-sufficiency, this area is open for debate. There are few independent gaming sites or publications around today. At the time of these interviews, most of the respondents were confident in maintaining themselves in the games writing environment. With closures, layoffs, and other unforeseen hardships, it would be interesting to see if such independence still existed.

Overall, games writers appear to serve the functions of journalism, but is it journalism? Regardless of what the respondents said, this seems to be journalism. It may not meet all the criteria set forth by the Hutchins commission (1947) or Siebert (1963),

but it definitely shows elements of journalism. While game reviews might not have the same journalistic weight as a story about unethical business practices as a game developer, the elements are there.

Regarding the respondents' thoughts on enjoying games, this author made interesting observations. Often the enjoyment of playing games was tied to the structure of the respondents' work environment. Respondents with fluidity in scheduling and deadlines seemed to enjoy game playing more than respondents with a structured schedule with strict deadlines. Freelancers seemed to enjoy the play more than salaried employees with a daily schedule. Also choice in game play had an effect as well. Being asked to review games they enjoyed or being able to choose games from a pool of options led to more enjoyment. Experience played a part as well, with seasoned veterans of the game press expressing less enjoyment than respondents who were new to the field.

The outlook on the games press as whole also seemed to be reflected by the respondents' experience. While overall the respondents were optimistic, the veterans were observed as being less so. The terms of their employment also seemed to play a part. Freelancers were more optimistic than salary employees. Was this due to the fluid nature of a freelance writer? This was not addressed in the study, but could be useful in future research.

Finally, gender appeared to play a major role in the games writers' relationship with their audience. The three female respondents reported several hostile encounters with readers. One of the women reported death threats, rape threats and personal information breaches. She shrugged these off as not being indicative of her overall experience with

her audience. Meanwhile, the men in the study did not have the same issues. This gender war in games writing is an area that merits further study.

What does games journalism have to do with journalism overall? Journalism, now more than ever, faces a great deal of scrutiny and doubt. Many of the problems facing games journalism is present in journalism as a whole. The journalist's relationship with the audience can be contentious. The credibility and ethics of the journalist may not garner the attention of the audience as their presentation and appearance. The host of a show on Fox News may not have any journalism experience at all. Does that matter to the audience? While games journalism may not be taken as serious as mainstream journalism, it seems to offer an easily observed window into that world.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. What led you to pursue video games as a career path?
2. How long have you been involved in writing about video games?
3. What are your thoughts on the term video game journalism? Do you consider yourself a journalist? Why?
4. How do you think video game writing is different or similar to other forms of journalism?
5. What do you feel is your relationship with your readers/audience?
6. Do you feel a sense of obligation to them? Why?
7. How do you think your work directly affects your audience?
8. What is a journalist's responsibility to its readers?
9. What is your responsibility to your readers?
10. How do you determine what games you will write about and games you don't write about? Could you give me an example?
11. What effect do you think the coverage or lack of coverage have on interest regarding a video game?
12. What do you enjoy most about covering video games?
13. What are some of the most difficult aspects of being a video game journalist?
14. What role, if any, does advertisers have on the coverage you offer?
15. What do you see as the current state of video game writing?
16. Why do you write about games as opposed to other subjects?

17. How does being a games writer benefit you?
18. Do you enjoy being a part of the games media?
19. If you were not involved in games writing, what else would you do?
20. What kind of games do you play for fun?
21. Since gaming is part of your profession, what else do you do for fun?
22. Do you believe your video game preferences affect your coverage of video games?
23. How do you believe your job as a game journalist effects your enjoyment of video games?
24. How is gaming for work different from gaming for fun?
25. What kind of impact do you think you have on the purchasing decisions of video game players?
26. What would you consider to be good games writing as opposed to bad games writing?
27. What differentiates a games journalist from a game player?
28. If I were to write a Facebook post about my experience playing a video game, would that make me a games journalist?
29. Do you believe your status as a professional games journalist benefits your audience?
30. What would you consider to ethical games writing as opposed to unethical games writing?

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