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Constructing authentic esports spectatorship: An ethnography

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Abstract

Formally organised competitive video gaming, commonly known as esports, has seen a rapid rise in popularity over the past decade as a form of spectator entertainment. Thousands of fans pack grand stadia across the globe to watch their favourite esports teams and players compete for extravagant prize pools, while millions watch online remotely in their homes via livestreaming platforms like Twitch. Unlike conventional sports however, there is no inherent need for esports to take place in any particular physically-situated site like a stadium. The computerised nature of esports lends the practice a perceived placeless quality. No matter where an esports event is situated, be it in a stadium or networked across homes, the digital synthetic environments in which players' avatars compete remain the same as objective constructs of code and graphical assets. If the perspective of watching esports is largely the same across different sites by virtue of its inherent mediation, then why is esports spectated beyond the comfort of the home?

The aim of this thesis is to address this conundrum by exploring the experiences esports spectatorship in varying contexts. In particular, this thesis seeks to understand how experiences of esports spectatorship are influenced by and differ across various sites of spectatorship. This aim is achieved through an ethnographic methodology, where data is generated through embedded interactions and experiences with esports spectators at three distinct sites of esports spectatorship. Data generation methods including semi-structured interviews and various forms of participant observation are employed across the ethnographic fieldwork, while data analysis is largely conducted through reflexive thematic analysis and a thick description approach. Three studies are conducted, each looking at a separate site of esports spectatorship: the home, the stadium, and the esports bar.

Study 1 focuses on the experiences of domestic esports spectatorship. The findings of the study demonstrate that in the mundanity of the home, domestic spectators perform *laborious spectatorship* to authenticate and make spectacular their experiences of spectating esports. It also demonstrates that despite a perceived sense of autonomy, domestic spectators commonly encounter numerous compromising factors in their homes which often prevents them from constructing an ideal spectating experience.

Study 2 focuses on experiences of and motivations for esports spectatorship in stadia. It reveals that spectators seek to affirm their expectations of authentic esports by attending events held in stadia, thus establishing notions of esports authenticity. Besides seeking to partake in an authentic experience of esports spectatorship, those attending stadium-situated events seek to present themselves as authentic esports spectators. Aware of their status as props in the mediated spectacle of esports events broadcast to remote audiences, those spectating in stadia seek to present themselves in a perceived authentic manner to convince event organisers to host future esports events in Australia.

Study 3 focuses on the experiences of spectating esports in an esports bar, representing a site of public communal spectatorship between the stadium and the home. Despite being a public place, the bar is in many ways more homely than the home. Void of many compromising factors commonly found in domestic environments, spectators at the esports bar are free to exercise a greater degree of autonomy over the construction of authentic esports spectatorship experiences.

Taken together, the three studies reveal ways in which esports spectators construct authenticity in their experiences of spectatorship by creating a sense of placefulness. In doing so they establish a convention of esports authenticity for both those within and outside of the esports fandom. Different sites of spectatorship offer different tools, resources, and opportunities to construct experiences of esports spectatorship. Spectators choose accessible sites that best allow them to construct what they perceive an experience of esports spectatorship *ought to be*.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

- i. The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface.
- ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
- iii. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies, and appendices.

David Cumming

October 2020

Preface

The work presented in this thesis was conducted under the careful supervision of Dr. Martin Gibbs and Dr. Wally Smith. The collection of data, data analysis, and presentation of findings were conducted by me in their entirety.

Peer-reviewed publications featured in the thesis

Throughout the course of research pertaining to this thesis, some of my work has been published in peer-reviewed publications. Some content in this thesis is directly adapted closely from these publications, in accordance with The University of Melbourne guidelines for a Thesis with Publication.

Chapter 2 contains content adapted from the following extended abstract presented at the 2019 National Digital Games Research Association Australia Conference and published in its proceedings:

Cumming, D., Gibbs, M., & Smith, W. (2019). Between places: spectatorship at an Australia esports bar. In *Proceedings of DiGRAA 2019: What's Next?*, 4.

As affirmed by my coauthors in Appendix F, I contributed 80% of the content in this extended abstract, thus qualifying it for inclusion in a Thesis with Publication.

Chapter 3, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 contains content adapted from the following paper presented at the 2018 International Digital Games Research Association Conference and published in its proceedings:

Cumming, D. (2018). Understanding the experience of Australian eSports spectatorship. In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2018*, 15.

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Across the years spent producing this thesis I have received advice, support, and encouragement from numerous people. Without their input, this thesis would not look the way it does today and for that I am tremendously grateful.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my enormously patient and wise supervisory team of Martin Gibbs and Wally Smith. It was through their guidance that the set of loosely defined ideas and hypotheses I started with in 2016 were eventually transformed into the thesis laid out before you. Thank you, Martin and Wally, for working with me over these four years and steering my research in the right direction.

Further thanks go out to my advisory committee chairs of past and present, Rachel Boshua and Antonette Mendoza, for providing an outsider's perspective at my progress reviews.

It would be a disservice to not also acknowledge my PhD cohort friends for the helpful advice and insightful discussions we have shared throughout the years. In particular, our games and pop culture research group has been the sounding board that I have relied on to ensure that my thoughts and ideas actually make sense to other people. It is on this note that I would like to thank Jane Mavoia, Fraser Allison, Lucy Sparrow, Madeleine Antonellos, Brain McKitrick, Sophie Freeman and Josiah Lulham, for being a positive and encouraging presence throughout various stages of my doctoral candidature. I would also particularly like to thank Melissa Rogerson for cultivating this welcoming and inclusive community of games researchers at the University of Melbourne.

It is also important for me to broadly thank everyone at the Human-Computer Interaction group in the School of Computing and Information Systems that I have had the pleasure of being a part of. Having come from an undergraduate degree based in media studies, the group has played a fundamental role in introducing me to an entirely new field of research that I now consider myself a part of.

Special thanks to my partner Holly, who bravely volunteered to help proof-read this thesis. While you may have retracted your offer upon seeing the size of the document, your support and kindness has helped me stay positive as I powered through draft after draft.

Finally, I must thank Chui and Ian, my mother and father, for not only supporting me throughout my doctoral candidature, but also throughout my whole life. While I'm not certain you entirely understand what *exactly* it is I research, I am comforted by that fact that you are proud of me, regardless of the questionable life choices I make.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Context

The past decade has seen a dramatic rise in the popularity and viewership of esports. Short for ‘electronic sports’, esports¹ has no single definition, with various interpretations between fields and discourses. Nevertheless, most writers agree that esports is the competitive, organised and often professionalised play of videogames. In more practical terms, esports refers to competitive videogaming formally coordinated through leagues and tournaments, with players belonging to sponsored teams or organisations (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). Authors writing on the topic of esports often draw on the significance of spectators to the practice (T.L. Taylor², 2012). The most salient example of this is the necessity of an audience to consume esports content, thus driving its demand. It is undeniable that spectatorship has profoundly shaped esports since its emergence, influencing how esports events are staged, produced and composed (T.L. Taylor, 2012; Sjöblom, Macey and Hamari, 2018). Major esports tournaments like *Dota 2*'s (Valve Software, 2013) ‘The International’ boast multimillion-dollar prize pools and global viewership numbers rivalling those of conventional spectator sports (Xiao, 2020). Thus, the understanding adopted in this thesis views spectatorship as an essential element which distinguishes esports from other competitive gaming practices.

While news articles published in mainstream media outlets present esports as originating from the 2010's, this current surge of esports notoriety is only the most recent wave of esports. Attempts to popularise and professionalise competitive videogaming have come and gone multiple times in the past. The first wave of esports

¹ Reflecting esports' unclear definition and its status as a contraction of two previously existing words, the spelling of the term lacks standardisation. Across academic and non-academic discourse, ‘esports’, ‘e-sports’, ‘eSports’ and other variations are commonly used. For the sake of consistency, I adopt a fully lowercase unhyphenated spelling of esports in this thesis. My justification for this choice can be found in Appendix A. Nevertheless, when directly quoting literature using the term, I reflect the authors' chosen spelling style verbatim.

² There are two prominent, unrelated scholars sharing the last name ‘Taylor’ who research esports. For the sake of clarity, I make a distinction between them when citing their work in text. I do so in line with how others in the academic field of esports commonly refer to them; T.L. Taylor and Nick Taylor.

has been traced back to arcade scenes of the 1970's, where videogame companies held tournaments in arcades or convention centres. Rather than direct concurrent competition between players, these early forms of esports were predominantly based around reaching high scores (T.L. Taylor, 2012). The popularity of home consoles of the mid 1980's signalled the second wave of esports. Gaming companies like Nintendo hosted gameshow-like tournaments with live audiences, featuring competitors playing through a gauntlet of popular videogame titles. The emergence of PC games with local and online networking functionalities in the early 1990's like *DOOM* (id Software, 1993) and *Quake* (id Software, 1996) ushered a third wave of esports. LAN parties³ held at videogame conventions became host to some of the first large-scale esports tournaments with high-stake prizes. This third wave eventually made way for the fourth wave of esports in the late 1990's and early 2000's. The fourth wave of esports saw efforts to professionalise networked competitive gaming through organised leagues and the televising of matches through existing broadcast outlets like ESPN and MTV, albeit somewhat as a novelty.

The fifth and current wave of esports can be traced back to the early 2010's. Similar to the fourth wave, the fifth wave is heavily structured around formalised teams and organised leagues. The main characteristic which differentiates the current wave of esports from its predecessors is the use of online streaming platforms like Twitch to distribute esports content as opposed to television. T.L. Taylor (2018) attributes the combination of livestreaming platforms' abilities to reach broad international audiences, sophisticated global internet infrastructure, and wide-spread adoption of personal mobile devices to the staying power and sustained growth of this current wave of esports, overcoming issues relating to content distribution that caused previous waves to eventually wane and fade into obscurity. It is this current fifth wave which constitutes the contemporary form of esports researched in this thesis.

1.2 Problem

The attribution of contemporary esports' success to the reach provided by online streaming platforms demonstrates the importance of spectatorship. This perspective is largely reflected across academic literature regarding esports. This academic

³ According to Jansz and Martens (2005), LAN parties are social gaming events where gamers bring their personal computers to a situated place to play multiplayer games over a high-speed Local Area Network (LAN).

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research predominantly focuses on spectators of esports, detailing their demographics, viewership statistics, and spectatorship motivations as will be outlined in Chapter 3.5.2. However, this corpus lacks a nuanced understanding of *what* esports spectatorship looks like and the *experiences* of esports spectatorship. In particular, sites in which people spectate esports receive little consideration. As research from the more established field of sports media studies indicates, the spectatorship of the same sports match in different locations can produce starkly different experiences, which in turn may motivate attendance to certain sites of spectatorship. Outside of a few exceptions, existing research about esports commonly frames esports spectatorship as an activity performed at home on private screens or makes little explicit consideration for spectating site.

A reason as to why sites of spectatorship beyond the home receive relatively little attention in academic literature may relate to the perceived placelessness of esports. As a sport-like activity that takes place in a computerised system not inherently bound to any physical place, it is tempting to assume that experiences of spectating esports do not differ much between sites of spectatorship. With no “meatsport” (Johnson and Brock, 2019) to watch unmediated at the site of play, spectators at the stadium, the home, and elsewhere receive a near identical feed of the game. This perceived placelessness also has implications for esports authenticity. As will be explored in Chapter 8.5, Bale (1998), Baudrillard (1993), and Virilio (1991) theorise that an eventual achievement of absolute placelessness in conventional sports would strip it of its authenticity.

However, the research conducted and presented in this thesis found that experiences of spectating esports differ greatly across sites of spectatorship. Notably, these sites act as places in which esports fans construct and affirm a convention of esports authenticity. Esports spectators hold a place-making quality. Rather than working to recreate a lost sense of authenticity, esports spectators find themselves in a situation where they hold varying degrees of authority to construct esports authenticity. To do so, esports spectators work to authenticate spectatorship by drawing on notions of authenticity from elsewhere, particularly conventional sports spectatorship. Experiences of esports spectatorship are not defined by the act of watching itself, but rather by sensual elements which occupy the sites in which esports is watched. While characterised by a range of computerised and networked

practices, the spectatorship of esports occurs in situated environments, with spectators transforming them into authentic places of esports spectatorship. Ultimately, in this thesis I argue that the experience of spectating esports encompasses more than the act of watching. Esports spectators frame their spectatorship experiences with activities, rituals, and behaviours that are auxiliary to their viewership of esports content. These auxiliary elements work to authenticate experiences of esports spectatorship, transforming mundane media consumption into memorable, extraordinary events.

1.3 Aim and scope

The overall objective of this thesis is to explore how different sites of spectatorship influence experiences of spectating esports. Existing esports research has succeeded in developing an informed understanding of motivating factors behind esports spectatorship, spectator demographics and broadcasting platforms. While this existing work provides insights into *why* esports is spectated and *who* spectates esports, comparatively little is known about *how* esports is spectated and *what* esports spectatorship looks like; there exists room to further explore the ‘happenings’ which surround esports spectatorship. To cast light on what esports spectatorship looks like in practice, an overarching research question was developed to explore elements which characterise experiences of spectating esports:

Overarching research question: What are the qualities of esports spectatorship experiences?

To aid in its answering, the overarching research question was broken down into three sub-questions, each designed to focus on different factors contributing to experiences of esports spectatorship:

- ↳ RQ1: How do spectatorship sites influence experiences of esports spectatorship?
- ↳ RQ2: How do esports spectators construct experiences of esports spectatorship?
- ↳ RQ3: What do esports spectators value in experiences of esports spectatorship?

RQ1 relates to the necessity to consider how places factor into experiences of esports spectatorship. This need was identified after reviewing academic literature from fields relating to sports, sports spectatorship and sports media. In the context of televised football, Bale (1998) asserts that a single event can be experienced in three distinct settings. The first environment is the physical location where the match is 'live', like stadia. The second environment consists of private domestic locations (predominantly homes) where spectators can watch the broadcast of the match, either alone or with the company of a small group of friends and family. The third environment encompasses public communal places, like bars and sports clubs, where spectators can watch the match in the company of a large crowd of predominately anonymous yet like-minded fellow spectators. Bale asserts that these sites of spectatorship shape and differentiate spectator experiences. As a result, spectators seek out certain sites of spectatorship in the pursuit of specific spectator experiences.

RQ2 reflects the constructionist epistemology (Creswell, 2003) in which this research is embedded and guided by. I adhere to the constructionist perspective that meaning is constructed from subjective social realities co-created among individuals and groups. From this perspective, esports spectatorship is a socially constructed experience, co-created by spectators as well as event organisers. It is therefore essential to investigate how esports spectatorship is socially constructed in order to understand how it is experienced.

RQ3 expands on RQ2, exploring what spectators value when partaking in and constructing experiences of esports spectatorship. This research question builds on a popular trend in contemporary academic esports research noted in Chapter 3.5.2, which has seen the publication of much work focused on the exploration of motivations for esports spectatorship. While this existing research has succeeded in outlining sets of esports spectatorship motivations, there is further room to investigate valued qualities of esports spectatorship and how they manifest in the construction of esports spectating experiences. As discussed by Gnoth (1997) and Flucker and Turner (2000), such motivations frame desired, anticipated experiences. Rather than viewing esports spectatorship as preestablished experiences sought out by spectators, this thesis instead seeks to explore how spectators work to construct valued qualities into their experiences of esports spectatorship.

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In designing a research course to address the research questions, I adopted Bale's (1998) framework of spectatorship sites to design three studies. Each study addresses the research questions in the context of one of Bale's sites of spectatorship. Study 1 focuses on spectatorship in homes, Study 2 focuses on spectatorship in stadia, and Study 3 focuses on spectatorship in an esports bar to represent public communal places. Together, these studies were used to generate an overarching understanding of the experiences of esports spectatorship that considers the intricacies of spectating sites and the spectators which inhabit them.

Although each study made use of different data collection and analysis approaches, they were all conducted under the ethnographic tradition of social investigation. Thus, these studies sought to understand esports spectating experiences by investigating the cultures surrounding esports spectators from the inside. Reliance was placed on observations and interactions with esports spectators to understand the communities they are a part of. In doing so, I sought to comprehend esports spectatorship by understanding it from the perspective of esports spectators. In particular, I sought to understand esports spectators' values, desires and interpretations of esports spectatorship. In essence, I not only wanted to understand *what* esports spectatorship looks like and *what* it means to spectate esports from the point of view of esports spectators, but also what they believe esports spectatorship *ought to be*. As previously mentioned, this research is cemented in a constructionist epistemology, generating knowledge based on the lived experiences of esports spectators. It is on this basis that I employed an ethnographic methodology across the three studies presented in this thesis.

Based on the findings across the three studies, I found that experiences of esports spectatorship concerns more than the act of watching. The activities, rituals and behaviours which surround acts of watching esports are used to frame experiences of esports spectatorship. In doing so, esports spectators use these auxiliary elements to authenticate and make memorable their spectating experiences. Perceptions of what is 'authentic esports spectatorship' varies among spectators, drawing on esportsing, sporting and videogaming histories to inform their perceptions of this concept. In seeking to align their spectating experiences with their perceptions of authenticity, esports spectators make considerations for the sites in which they engage in spectatorship. While some spectators seek to be exposed to certain

elements present at a specific site in their pursuit of an authentic spectating experience, others attend certain sites that allow them to engage in behaviours and activities deemed essential to an authentic spectating experience. From these findings, I present esports spectatorship as grounded in the material places it occurs in, despite its perceived placeless identity.

1.5 Thesis overview

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 introduce the key concepts central to this thesis, existing academic work pertaining to esports, and research design. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present the findings of the three studies conducted to answer the research questions. Each of these chapters predominantly focuses on one of these studies. While Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present Studies 1, 2, and 3 respectively, it is important to note that the three studies were not conducted in this order. Chronologically, Study 2 was conducted first in 2017, followed by Study 3 in 2018, then Study 1 in 2019. The reasoning behind this nonchronological presentation can be found in Chapter 4. Chapter 8 synthesises the findings of the three studies to provide a nuanced account of the themes and qualities which characterise experiences of esports spectatorship. Finally, the thesis closes with Chapter 9, which presents concluding remarks to reiterate the key findings of the studies and discussion, as well as their significance and limitations.

Chapter 2 presents a review of two dominant concepts central to this thesis: spectatorship and authenticity. Together, they form the conceptual basis for many of the findings presented in later chapters. It was imperative to explore what it means to spectate, as the term is somewhat ambiguous with various definitions across disciplines and theoretical backgrounds. Furthermore, the term is often conflated with other concepts of similar connotations such as watching, viewing and gazing (Olin, 2003). Clearly defining spectatorship was important to distinguish the concept from other forms of *looking*. From a review of academic literature pertaining to spectatorship, I adopt an interpretation which views spectatorship as not only encompassing the act of watching, but also the lived experience of watching. As Oddey and White (2009) assert, “spectating is beyond simply watching.” Spectating experience as the ‘lived experience of watching’ thus pertains to the sensory elements which surround the spectator and the ways in which these elements affect the spectator as they watch. The concept of authenticity similarly suffers from an

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ambiguous and contested definition, warranting an investigative literature review of its own. Considering interpretations of authenticity from a variety of philosophical schools of thought including objectivism and postmodernism, I ultimately adopt a constructivist approach to authenticity which places emphasis on an individual's subjective lived experience in the construction of authenticity. Taken together, these two adopted interpretations of spectatorship and authenticity reflect the constructionist epistemology adhered to across this research.

Chapter 3 presents a review of existing academic literature pertaining to esports and esports spectatorship. In this chapter I identify the research gap this thesis seeks to fill. By exploring academic research regarding esports and the research approaches these works employ, I note a number of trends which leave notable gaps in the understanding of esports spectatorship experiences. Firstly, it became evident from the literature review that esports is often framed as derivative of competitive videogaming or sports. Although certainly informed and inspired by these two practices, esports is seldom considered as a distinct practice in academic research. Consequently, many research methodologies, measurement tools, and metrics employed to study esports are adapted from other disciplines, rather than approaches specifically designed with esports in mind. This is spurred by a now somewhat outdated notion that the academic corpus of esports literature is small and underdeveloped. It is on this basis that some researchers warrant the adaptation of existing research approaches from related fields (see Wagner, 2006; Cheung and Huang, 2011; Weiss and Schiele, 2013; Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017).

While this notion may have been true around ten years ago when academic research regarding contemporary esports had just started gaining traction (Reitman et al., 2020), the literature review presented in this chapter reveals a substantial and rich corpus of peer-reviewed esports research. Working to move away from notions of an undeveloped field of esports research, it was identified that the research design of this thesis needed to capture the intricacies unique esports as a distinct practice. This is a dimension that is often detailed as a limitation in existing esports studies based on adapted research approaches (see Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017; Pizzo et al., 2018). Additionally, the review identified that sites of spectatorship and their potential influences on esports spectatorship experiences receive relatively little consideration. An assumption which appeared across a number of articles construed

esports spectatorship as an activity engaged with on private screens in domestic environments. While spectators' dwellings are an undeniable typical site of esports spectatorship, studies (especially those directly involving spectators as research participants) which assume that esports is being spectated in the home overlook alternative, less common sites of spectatorship and their influences on the spectator experiences. As made evident by the review of spectatorship and authenticity in Chapter 2, a diverse understanding of various sites of spectatorship is paramount in exploring spectator experiences of esports.

Building on references to constructivism hinted at in previous chapters, Chapter 4 presents the research design. I introduce the interpretivist theoretical perspective that I have adopted in this thesis, comprising of a perspectivist idealist ontology as defined by Blaikie (2007) and a constructionist⁴ epistemology as defined by Creswell (2003). This overarching interpretivist theoretical perspective is expanded on, describing how it frames the research design. I then explain the rationale behind my choice of methodology: ethnography. I break down different approaches to ethnography, ranging from long-form *in-situ* methods considered 'classical' to contemporary 'rapid' approaches that seek to retain the descriptive depth iconic of ethnography while being relatively quick to conduct and analyse. I then detail the ethnographic data generation and analysis methods used across the three studies. These included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, thick description, thematic analysis and coding procedures adapted from a Grounded Theory approaches. While the use of words like 'experience' and 'place' throughout this thesis imply a phenomenological approach, I assert and explain in Chapter 4 how the work in this thesis is predominantly embedded in an ethnographic tradition.

Chapter 5 presents Study 1, which revolved around roughly 1 hour long semi-structured interviews with those who spectate esports in their homes. The interviews were guided by a list of questions pertaining to how esports spectatorship fit into the participants' daily lives, how they prepare for esports spectatorship, considerations they make for others in their household when they spectate esports, what they do while spectating esports, where in the home they spectate esports, and on which devices they spectate esports. Interviews were held in conference rooms at

⁴ The distinction between *constructivism* and *constructionism* is discussed in Chapter 4.2.3.

the University of Melbourne Parkville campus. Although a departure from ‘classical’ approaches to ethnography that are structured around long periods of *in-situ* fieldwork, the research design of this study worked to bring the site being researched into the conference room. To encourage further discussion, participants were asked to bring photographs of the areas they spectated esports in within their homes. These photographs acted as talking points throughout the interviews, helping to illustrate environmental factors which shaped participants’ esports spectatorship, and conversely how esports spectatorship shaped these domestic spaces. The photographs were particularly helpful at illuminating aspects of the participants’ spectatorship that they had not initially mentioned.

The findings that were generated from a thematic analysis of these interviews demonstrated that even in the mundane site of the home, esports fans still strive to authenticate and make memorable their spectating experiences. Notably, participants consistently referred to qualities of esports events held in stadia in their efforts to authenticate their domestic spectating experiences. However, participants’ endeavours to do so were often met with compromise concerning a variety of household obstacles. Domestic spectators often perceived themselves as holding a high level of autonomy over the construction of their spectator experiences, yet common household and social factors presented the home as a relatively restrictive site of esports spectatorship.

Chapter 6 presents Study 2. Composed as type of a “rapid ethnography” (Millen, 2000), the study was based around observations and semi-structured interviews conducted with esports spectators at two major 2017 esports tournaments held in Sydney. Participants were questioned about their motivations for attendance and their perceived experiences of spectatorship in the stadium environment. These data were subjected to a thematic analysis based on a three-step coding process adapted from Grounded Theory approaches. From this analysis, four main themes were found to have characterised the spectating motivations and experiences for attendees: entertainment, education, socialisation and active support. In essence, spectatorship at the site of play allowed patrons to engage in behaviours and rituals associated with conventional sports spectatorship and fandom. Through this engagement, patrons sought to legitimise their fandom and spectatorship of esports as a ‘real’

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sport. This legitimisation of esports consequently worked to authenticate participants' spectating experiences.

Chapter 7 presents Study 3, which sought to understand the experiences of spectating esports in public communal places between the stadium and the home. To do so, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted across five months during 2018 at a Melbourne esports bar. The approach employed in this study reflected that of a 'classical' approach to ethnography. During these five months I spent roughly three nights each week at the esports bar conducting observations, engaging in informal conversation with patrons, and participating in esports spectatorship. The findings of Study 3 demonstrated that much like spectators in domestic environments, patrons in the bar referred to the stadium in efforts to authenticate their remote spectatorship. However, spectators in the bar found more success in their efforts to recreate elements of the stadium than those in the home. Void of many factors of compromise found in the home and occupied predominantly with like-minded esports fans, the bar was in many aspects more homely than the home. The bar acted as an ideal place that would not only tolerate, but embrace the rambunctious behaviour that patrons perceived as an authentic quality of esports spectatorship, becoming a local and accessible 'next best thing' to being at the site of play.

Chapter 8 brings together the findings of Studies 1, 2, and 3 to provide a discussion exploring the major themes and ideas which were generated across the conducted research. I expand on ideas pertaining to the staging of esports spectatorship experiences, how different sites influence experiences of esports spectatorship, laborious motivations for spectatorship, the construction of esports authenticity, and implications of esports in a landscape of sameness. Throughout this discussion I also draw comparisons with existing academic work, highlighting instances in which the findings presented in this thesis affirm or clash with those previously published. Ultimately, it was found that esports spectators seek sites of spectatorship that will allow them to best construct and partake in a desired spectating experience. Authenticity was a common quality that was valued among spectators in their decisions to attend specific spectatorship sites. Drawing on established and broadly accepted notions of authenticity from conventional sports, esports spectators viewed aspects of stadium-situated spectatorship as authenticators for their spectator experiences. Those attending stadium-situated

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esports events sought to affirm these notions with first-hand experience, while others at home and the bar worked to recreate qualities of the stadium to authenticate their remote spectatorship. Across sites of spectatorship, some spectators sought to authenticate and legitimise esports to non-fans, performing forms of laborious spectatorship to communicate and affirm a convention of esports authenticity. In contrast to social theory of the 1990's (see Virilio 1991; Baudrillard, 1993; Bale, 1998) which anticipates the loss of authenticity in sports upon the achievement of placelessness, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that esports can be experienced as authentic despite its supposed placeless identity. Esports fans find themselves in a situation where they have the authority to construct what authenticity in esports is, enacting this power through their situated spectatorship practices.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis, summarising the key findings generated across the three studies and their contributions to the fields of Game and Media Studies. I then explore some limitations of my research and its methodological design, transitioning into a discussion of opportunities for future research that have become salient in light of this thesis. The chapter ends with a short summary of how this thesis achieved the central objective of the research course: to understand experiences of esports spectatorship across a varied landscape of spectatorship sites.

Chapter 2 – Spectatorship and authenticity

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented an overview of this thesis, outlining the research focus of the esports spectatorship experiences. It presented esports spectatorship as an interesting and novel field abundant with opportunities for research. Although it is tempting to begin by evaluating the growing body of academic research concerning esports, it is vital to first understand and explore the core concepts which frame esports in the context of this thesis. Specifically, it is essential to first understand spectatorship and authenticity, as these two concepts are crucial to understanding what it means to spectate esports.

This chapter offers a critical review of literature regarding these two core concepts. ‘Spectatorship’ is an ambiguous concept with various definitions and connotations across disciplines and theoretical perspectives. From this review, the concept of authenticity was found to be closely related to spectatorship. Thus, the second half of this chapter delves into the concept of authenticity and how it relates back to spectatorship. Ultimately, the discussion in this chapter sets the stage for exploring esports spectatorship in Chapter 3.

2.2 Spectatorship

The first step in understanding esports spectatorship is to understand what it means to spectate. The term ‘spectatorship’ can be hard to define as it is commonly used interchangeably with terms of various similar connotations such as watching, viewing, gazing and beholding (Olin, 2003). Although these forms of *looking on* are an undeniable aspect of spectatorship, the act of spectatorship encompasses more than just observation. Instead, spectatorship can be considered to arise out of an *encounter* between spectators and actors. As Fischer-Lichte (2016) describes, “whatever the actors do has an effect on the spectators, and whatever the spectators do has an effect on the actors and other spectators.” It is from this encounter and interaction between actor and spectator that a performance is produced. Consequently, spectatorship is an integral and active aspect of performance.

Here, Fischer-Lichte (2016) is discussing spectatorship in the context of live dramatic theatre. Discussion concerning spectatorship is not limited to this field and

appears in relation to a variety of contexts that involve an interaction between an onlooker and a performer, even if the two parties are not in the same physically situated location. Prominent examples beyond dramatic theatre include cinema and critical film studies, performance art, spectator sports, broadcast and internet studies, tourism, and digital games. Unsurprisingly, literature regarding esports spectatorship too has emerged in the recent years of esports' rapid rise to prominence. The following paragraphs will outline and synthesise the ways in which spectatorship is conceived and discussed across disciplines to establish a consistent interpretation of the concept in the context of this thesis. In short, this literature review has isolated a unifying and integral attribute across these varied disciplinary perspectives: spectatorship pertains to the experience of watching, rather than the act of watching itself (Oddey and White, 2009).

Having read and deconstructed definitions from a variety of fields ranging from critical film studies to sports entertainment, I adopt an understanding of spectatorship in this thesis that is distinct from the terms that it is commonly conflated with. As Mayne (1993, p. 1) asserts in relation to cinema:

“Spectatorship is not only the act of watching a film, but also the ways one takes pleasure in the experience, or not; the means by which watching movies becomes a passion, or a leisure-time activity like any other. Spectatorship refers to how film-going and the consumption of movies and their myths are symbolic activities, culturally significant events.”

Spectatorship is culturally situated practice. The ways in which individuals experience the act of watching are defined by the influences of underlying social and cultural values. Consequently, spectatorship is framed by such values held by the spectator. Film theorist Jean-Pierre Oudart (1997) envisions the cinematic spectator to be the “filmic subject.” In this interpretation, the spectator is not a passive observer of the filmic text, instead playing a key role akin to the “grammatical subject” of a sentence (Diawara, 1996). It is through the presence of a spectator and their perceptions of race, identity, gender, culture, and other concepts that a filmic text is prescribed meaning. Without it, the text is nothing but a “meaningless discursive fragment” (Diawara, 1996). Much like how a UX designer doesn't design

a user experience, but rather, designs *for* a user experience (Preece, Sharp and Rogers, 2015), a spectator experience can be designed for, but it is ultimately determined by the spectator and their own individual attitudes that construct the spectating experience.

So far, this chapter has discussed the importance of the spectator and their interpretation of the spectated text in the construction of the spectating experience. Another aspect to consider is the environment in which spectatorship takes place. According to apparatus theory, a derivative of Marxist film theory, the experience of spectatorship is constructed from the interplay of three components (Aaron, 2007):

- The Physical – the place in which the text is spectated by the spectator.
- The Technical – the mechanical portrayal of the spectated text (for example, through projection or on an electronic display).
- The Psychic – the psychological effects created by the spectating configuration of the Physical and the Technical in addition to the text being spectated.

In short, apparatus theory considers how the composition of the spectating environment affects the experience of spectatorship, placing an emphasis on both material conditions and social processes. The Physical and the Technical are the *apparatus* which place the spectator as the subject to the spectated text, laying out “the space of an ideal vision” (Baudry, 1974). By placing the spectator in the central and transcendent position of the subject, they are positioned to receive an ideologically organised series of visuals and noise that are composed in anticipation of them (Aaron, 2007). As mentioned previously however, it is ultimately up to the spectator as the subject to interpret this composition and construct meaning from their experience of spectatorship.

Okome (2007) discusses the significance of spectating sites in the consumption of Nollywood (Nigerian cinema) films in Nigeria’s capital, Lagos. Almost exclusively spectated in the open at “street sites” or in dingy, cramped “video parlours”, the spectatorship of Nollywood films in the Nigerian capital reflects a post-colonial lack of wealth among the average Nigerian that makes consumption prohibitive outside of these public communal places. A combination of the fluidity between sites of spectatorship and street life, as well as the content matter of many Nollywood films

being construed as “real stories” of Nigeria, invoke conversation among spectators regarding the pressing issues that matter to them. Not only is spectatorship of Nollywood in these sites defined by the act of watching, but also the critical introspection and debates that are invoked among spectators during and after the screenings.

Although apparatus theory was devised with cinema in mind, similar ways of thinking have been adopted in other fields of spectatorship. In particular, the composition of sporting venues has seen academic interest in efforts to understand experiences of spectating sports. Stadia are designed to guide the spectators’ gaze to the play on the pitch in certain ways for an intended spectating experience (Trumpbour, 2006). It is the environment alone at the stadium - the seating stands, the intimacy of being surrounded by enthusiastic fans, smells of food and drink, that is the mediating factor of the spectated sports match (Duncan and Brummett, 1987; Gaffney and Bale, 2004). Regardless of medium or physical location, the spectated text is always presented to the spectator through some organised format or context which influences the spectating experience. It is for this reason that mediation is integral to experiences of spectatorship (Duncan and Brummett, 1987). This aligns with the concept of *Gesamkuntswerk* – “the total artwork”, wherein “the artist has total command of a space and might use any artistic means, including architecture, music, dance and theatre, along with the visual arts, to create a synaesthetic environment” (Rosenthal and Hurd, 2003).

The concept of *Gesamkuntswerk* appears in Fairley and Tyler’s (2012) work regarding the spectatorship of Major League Baseball matches in a cinema. Unlike some sites of spectatorship where the compositional elements of the spectating site are coincidental, Fairley and Tyler describe a highly composed and considered environment in the cinema they researched. They describe the spectating experience as “reminiscent of a ballpark outside of a ballpark”, with the event organisers endeavouring to replicate environmental qualities indicative of the site of MLB play. Ushers wore team apparel, the smells of “game time” foods being served filled the venue, a one-day liquor licence was obtained to serve beer, and the cinema’s lights remained undimmed to replicate the sunlight of the day-time game. Even though the cinema was geographically near to the ballpark where the screened game was being played, 70% of their respondents reported that they believed the cinema to be the

better site to spectate at. There was a notion held by spectators that the composition of the cinema managed to recreate the pleasantries of the ballpark's atmosphere, while addressing some of its inherent limitations. Namely, the cinema circumvented the persistent issue being unable to see and hear the game up close at the ballpark. Spectators too played into the façade constructed at the cinema, wearing their own team apparel and behaving as if they were at the ballpark, rather than how they would when watching a film.

In Fairley and Tyler's (2012) case, they describe a site of spectatorship that had been specifically composed to appeal to the desires of a certain demographic of baseball fan. On the other hand, Bale (1998) describes a case in which a group of Danish soccer fans chose a specific site of spectatorship to enact a certain lost spectating experience. He describes a case of soccer spectatorship in a 'Fælled', a large space of common grazing land that was once the ancestral site of soccer play in Denmark; now a symbolic home of Danish football traditions. Foregoing attendance at the nearby national football stadium of Copenhagen to watch a forthcoming Denmark-Germany game, Bale describes how a vast crowd of fans chose instead to watch the game remotely on a large screen situated in the openness of the Fælled. Although mediated by the television camera, Bale suggests that the experience of spectating the Denmark-Germany game in the Fælled was perhaps more authentic than that of the stadium. He asserts that in recent years, spectatorship at the stadium had become "sanctified", having shifted to an all-seated layout with restrictions on alcohol consumption in an effort to reduce disorder. By spectating in the Fælled instead, the fans were free of the constraints of the sanctified stadium and were able to engage in the "carnival" of rituals traditionally associated with authentic Danish football spectatorship.

Bale's (1998) case demonstrates what he calls the "place-making" quality of spectators, being able to transform a place into a sporting place by invoking the cultural and historic essence of the sport through the performance of certain behaviours and rituals. Weed (2006) expands on Bale's claim, asserting that the main draw of sports spectatorship experiences in these contexts is the "collective enjoyment" created by the gathering of sports spectators. Based on an ethnography of soccer spectatorship in British pubs, Weed (2006; 2007; 2008) concludes that rather than seeking proximity to the match, sports spectators seek proximity to a

desired spectating experience. Weed's ethnography surrounded the remote spectatorship of the 2002 FIFA World Cup (which was held in stadia across Japan and South Korea) in British pubs. Unlike the spectators in Bale's and Fairley and Tyler's (2012) research, many of the soccer fans Weed encountered during his fieldwork could not spectate at the site of play even if they wanted to due to the vast geographical distance. Fans could have alternatively spectated the World Cup remotely from home, an arguably more convenient venue. Nevertheless, these fans endeavoured to attend pubs at 7am, well before any alcohol would be served, to watch the matches. Weed concluded that these football fans attended the pub to spectate the World Cup matches for a "shared communal experience", something that they could not get at home.

Central to the spectating experiences described in the above cases is the presence of other spectators and the rituals and behaviours they engage in. Returning to Fischer-Lichtes' (2016) idea that co-presence of spectators influences the spectating experiences of each individual, spectators should not be thought of as passive audience members, but rather as actors contributing to the construction of spectacle. This is perhaps evident to the extreme in the spectatorship of "badfilms" (Sconce, 2003); cult films valued for their "so bad it's good" quality. In a study regarding the spectatorship of notorious badfilm *The Room* (Wiseau, 2003), Foy (2012) justifies his attendance at a cinema screening of the film to conduct a "performance ethnography", rather than analysing the film and its paratexts from home. He asserts that the bizarre rituals that spectators engage in when spectating *The Room* in the presence of other cult fans at the cinema is paramount to the insincere, ironic spectatorship of the film. To watch a badfilm like *The Room* alone at home is to subject oneself to an arduous and boring 90 minutes. It is the situated antics of other spectators watching together that reanimates and recontextualises the filmic text into an enjoyable and valuable experience. Similarly, both Bale (1998) and Weed (2006) describe how the behaviours of other like-minded fans present at the Fællid and pubs contributed to an enjoyable and authentic atmosphere that surrounded the act of spectatorship.

To summarise, there are more elements beyond the watched spectacle that contribute to the experience of spectatorship. The experience of spectatorship can be thought of as akin to *Gesamkuntswerk*; a product of the synaesthetic environment in

which the act of watching is participated. The auxiliary elements that contribute to the construction of spectatorship experiences, such as architecture, sensory factors, iconography, and the behaviours of other spectators all have the potential to profoundly influence how an individual perceives a spectacle, whether intentional or incidental. There have also been noted endeavours to construct spectating experiences that embody a sense of authenticity across this review of literature surrounding spectatorship experience. The following section will expand on these points in greater detail to discuss how the concept of authenticity relates to the context of this thesis.

2.3 Authenticity

It has been widely noted that people seek authenticity broadly across a variety of offerings in life, ranging from services, tourism, and communication, as well as from experiences of spectatorship. Unsurprisingly, a common element that mediated sports spectacles attempt to capture is a sense of authenticity. Depending on the context of spectatorship, the relationship between mediation and authenticity can vastly vary, both in terms of method and interpretation. In the context of soccer, Bale (1998) describes three perspectives a single match can be watched, each pertaining to different sites of spectatorship. He describes the spectatorship of the “real” game at the stadium where the match is held and the remote spectatorship of the match’s broadcast at home. He also describes a third environment that is “conceptually (and geographically) some way between the stadium and home”, such as the previously mentioned Fælled or bars and pubs. Bale claims that these three types of spectating sites offer different experiences of spectatorship and therefore attract different kinds of spectators for varying reasons. In particular, Bale notes how each site of spectatorship appeals to different perceptions of authenticity.

It is important to note that in reflecting the constructionist ontology adopted in this thesis, I view of authenticity as a socially constructed concept; perceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity are relative to the individual (Schwandt, 1994; Wang, 1999; Urry, 2002; Fairely and Tyler, 2012). Thus, what is deemed to be ‘authentic’ can greatly vary among individuals, with a single subject having the potential to be perceived as authentic or inauthentic across individuals.

This perspective is prevalent in tourist experiences. In relation to commoditisation in tourism, Cohen (1988) writes of “staged authenticity”, where constructed mass tourist systems cater experiences to tourists’ expectations of authenticity. Although some tourists may perceive such experiences to be authentic, others may reject them as false representations of a destination and its culture. Peterson (1997) constructs a similar understanding through the action of “fabricating authenticity.” With the success of cultural products and industries hinging on an appearance of authenticity to audiences, Peterson and Anand (2004) argue that portrayals of authenticity are often consciously manufactured by organisational systems. In some cases, the construct of authenticity is entirely based in fiction.

For example, movie fans often make pilgrimage to public locations where films were shot. Although fictional, filmic locations are valued for being the sites where a film or certain scene was brought to life. In some cases, the filmic site becomes synonymous of the fictional world it was used to represent, becoming a real-world embodiment of the fiction it portrayed. For example, the scenic landscapes of New Zealand have become the site of pilgrimage for dedicated *Lord of the Rings* fans after Peter Jackson’s film trilogy adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien’s popular book series was shot in various locations across the country. In this sense, New Zealand has come to embody Tolkien’s high-fantasy Middle Earth (Jones and Smith, 2005), with Tourism New Zealand advertising tourist guides for locations that were shot to represent certain fictional locations in the *Lord of the Ring* novels. As Pocock (1992) describes, “the power of secondary sources in general forge expectations and bolster the urge for travel.”

In fabricating authenticity, societal cultural norms of the (in)authentic are purposefully tied to the subject of portrayal. Peterson (1997) uses the example of American country music to demonstrate this theory, describing how the fabrication of an exaggerated, somewhat artificial cultural heritage was paramount to the success of the contemporary country music industry. In particular, he describes how many traditions associated with country music in the USA were not historically a part of the genre’s heritage, but were actually recent conceptions based on contemporary cultural notions of history and identity that had already received broader acceptance as being authentic. Central to Peterson’s discussion of fabricated authenticity is the concept prominent in anthropological and historical studies of

“the invention of tradition.” Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) describe this concept as the use of “largely fictitious” histories in the establishment of a “continuity with a suitable historic past.” In doing so, cultural identities are consolidated and united, thus legitimising the subjects, parties, and institutions they belong to. Ultimately, Peterson argues that the fabrication of authenticity through the invention of tradition is largely performed for commercial reasons and is key for the success of cultural products and their producers.

The act of fabricating authenticity has been widely criticised. Boorstin (1964) considers manufactured experiences of mass tourism as “pseudo-events”, criticising the consequent cultural commoditisation. For Boorstin, acts of fabricated ‘authenticity’ are not authentic for they are contrived. He asserts that because of the commoditised mass tourism industry, the average tourist “seldom likes the authentic ... he prefers his own provincial expectations”. Boorstin’s interpretation of authenticity represents an objectivist approach, one of three approaches to authenticity outlined by Wang (1999) alongside constructivist and postmodern approaches. Under an objectivist approach, authenticity is quantifiable and measured in relation to originality. While manufactured tourist attractions are often fabrications and commonly outshine the source ‘original’, Boorstin asserts that they cannot be authentic for they are not the original, even if tourists are unable to see through the façade.

Similarly, MacCannell (1973) suggests that although an individual may seek out an authentic experience and perceive their experience to be authentic, they fall victim to fabricated authenticity and are tricked into partaking in an inauthentic experience. He draws on Goffman’s (1959) concepts of the “front region” and the “back region” to illustrate this point. Originating from dramaturgy, Goffman’s front and back regions refer to the front and backstage of theatre, the former being the place where actors perform to the audience and the latter being the place where the actor can drop their act and be out of character. Goffman proposes that contemporary society has developed a front stage, where societal norms dictate an expected presentation of one’s self to adhere to. He also proposes a companion backstage exists, where individuals can drop the façades they purport in the front stage and be their ‘true’ selves.

MacCannell (1973) proposes that due to the shallowness of contemporary, industrialised life, individuals perceive their lives to be inauthentic and seek authenticity from experiences that exist beyond the boundaries of the 'ordinary'; a back region to their front region. This manifests in a variety of ways, such as desires to experience more primitive societies, 'natural' environments, or bygone eras of simpler times. Each of these examples harken to a sense of originality from which contemporary society has evolved, eventually growing debased and inauthentic. However, in seeking entry to a back region, individuals are at risk of actually entering "into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation" (MacCannell, 1973). Both MacCannell and Boorstin's objectivist approaches to authenticity place importance on the originality of the experience, rather than the individual's subjective perception of the experience as authentic.

On the contrary, constructivist approaches value the individual's subjective perceptions when identifying authenticity. It is on this basis that Bruner (1994) argues against the objectivist notion of authenticity as only pertaining to the "original, as opposed to the copy." Bruner asserts that there are three other understandings of authenticity based on an ethnographic study conducted on the New Salem Historic Site, an interactive museum and reconstruction of the village that Abraham Lincoln lived in during the 1830s before rising to prominence through his legal and political career. The first two meanings that Bruner describes hinge not on the nature of the original, but that of the reproduction. Firstly, Bruner speaks of "authentic reproduction." While oxymoronic from an objectivist perspective, Bruner describes the "historical verisimilitude" of New Salem, noting efforts to make the historic site believably accurate to visitors, achieving "mimetic credibility".

Secondly, Bruner (1994) describes a form of authenticity as "complete and immaculate simulation" through a hypothetical New Salem that is a historically accurate recreation of the village true to how it was in the 1830's. While both concern the reproduction of New Salem of the 1830s, these meanings differ in that the first works to appeal to how a person from the 1990's would expect an 1830's New Salem to be like, while the second works to recreate New Salem in a way that would be considered accurate and genuine to a resident of the town in the 1830's. Bruner further describes how authenticity produced mainly through memetic credibility recreated New Salem for visitors. New Salem was designed to appeal to what visitors

imagined the village was like in the 1830's based on their contemporary sensibilities. Houses were made to look aged and weathered, despite the fact that they would have been new in the 1830's. Lincoln's influence on the village was also exaggerated, as he was an unremarkable resident when living there prior to his political career. Higher standards of cleanliness and maintenance than what would have been in place in the 1830's were also adopted to align with modern suburban standards of what a good and orderly town looks like. In essence, people seeking authenticity desire to experience the 'real' as opposed to the fake or ingenuous. From a constructionist perspective, the notion of 'real' is constructed by each individual, regardless of what the objective original might be.

The final meaning of authenticity that Bruner (1994) discusses does not concern either originality or genuineness, but rather authority or "who has the authority to authenticate." According to the State of Illinois, there is only one legitimate recreation of 1830's New Salem, that being New Salem Historic Site. Through the power that the State of Illinois holds, the reproduction of New Salem is authorised as legitimate and therefore authentic. The power to authenticate is a persistent consideration, defining the representations and constructs that New Salem purports. Authority can come from multiple places; although staff at the reproduced village claim to rely on the authority of historians to decide how to portray 1830's New Salem, Wallace (1981) supposes that the funding that the State of Illinois provides for the attraction may steer representations to mirror preferences of the state government. What Bruner (1994; 1993) demonstrates here is that producers of experiences are often not a homogeneous group, but rather a collection of competing voices seeking to be "the authority to decide which version of history will be accepted as the correct or authentic one." This approach to authenticity highlights that subjective interpretations of authenticity do not arise from the untainted minds of individuals, but are rather informed by the assemblages of stimuli, information, contexts, and assertions which shapes one's perceptions.

The third approach to authenticity that Wang (1999) outlines is one embedded in postmodern theories. While a single postmodern approach to authenticity is not as identifiable as with objectivist and constructivist approaches due to the diversity present in postmodern perspectives (Hollinshead, 1997), Wang asserts that postmodernists tend to approach the concept of authenticity by deconstructing it.

While both the original and the reproduction can be authentic based on the perceptions of individuals in a constructivist approach, the postmodern perspective questions whether a boundary exists between the copy and the original at all. Furthermore, some postmodern approaches question whether such a boundary matters in perceptions of authenticity.

Hyperreality is a quintessential postmodern concept which relates closely to this perspective of authenticity. According to Baudrillard (1994), hyperreality pertains to representation without an original, “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality.” Hyperreality extends beyond simply disguising the fake as real or combining replications with reality. Rather, it is the production of signifiers or symbols that represents something non-existent. Eco (1986) presents Disneyland as a prominent example of hyperreality. As a product of imagination, Disneyland is not based on an original from which it can be compared or referred to. It is therefore fruitless to debate whether Disneyland is fake or real, for there is no original for it to be a fake of. That is not to say the Disneyland itself can be classified as an original either, as Disneyland is designed to be a representation, one of something that does not exist. The ambiguities of hyperreality regarding the demarcation between reality and fiction, or in other words representation and original, presents a conundrum when defining authenticity through an objectivist or constructivist lens.

Expanding on the concept of hyperreality, Baudrillard (1994) writes of simulacrum, a concept borrowed from Plato who uses the term in two ways in his *Sophist*. First, Plato describes simulacra as an accurate or recreation of the original. Secondly, he refers to simulacra as the intentional misrepresentation to make the reproduction appear genuine to the original. In demonstrating the later, he draws on practices of sculptors which produce statues of distorted proportions that would look correct from the perspective of viewers on the ground looking up. This Platonic interpretation of simulacrum neatly reflects constructivist notions of authenticity, both concerning perceptions of genuineness rather than objective originality. However, Baudrillard adapts the term to describe a copy without an original, or a copy based on an original that no longer exists. Without an original to refer to, a Baudrillard’s simulacra becomes “the truth” in itself, entering the hyperreal.

Baudrillard (1994) believes simulacrum to be the most advanced stage of representation on a four-stage scale. At the first stage is the faithful copy, which attempts to be an accurate representation of the original as a “reflection of profound reality”. The second stage describes the unfaithful copy, one that does not accurately represent reality, but rather presents a perversion of reality. Whereas Baudrillard describes faithful copies as good, he describes unfaithful copies as embodying an “evil appearance” as an “order of maleficence.” While a faithful representation of reality is not portrayed through such denatured representations, abstract notions of the reality from which it struggles to portray are implied through its existence. Whereas the second stage describes as obscuration of reality, the third stage describes an obscuration of an absent reality. In the third stage, the construct establishes the pretence of a faithful copy, but lacks an original to be referred to. The signifiers of the construct appear to represent an original, but any images or signs that are claimed to be representative are arbitrary and lack any relation. The fourth stage is of simulacrum and describes a complete lack of relation to reality. The key difference between the third and fourth stages is the notion of pretence. Whereas representation in the third stage pretends to be a faithful copy while being aware that it is not, simulacrum in the fourth stage lays a sincere claim to reality despite being based on similar claims made by other signifiers that it simply reflects. Baudrillard claims that at this stage of simulacrum, the pretence of reality is irrelevant as the lives of individuals are artificial to the extent that any reference to reality is based in this artificiality.

In addition, Baudrillard (1994) describes three “orders of simulacra” that emerged from the Renaissance to contemporary times. In these orders, he describes the relationship between the original and the copy and how it evolved over time. He first describes the emergence of counterfeits of the premodern era; reproductions in the simplest sense which symbolise the genesis of the concept of representation and therefore the concept of the original. The second order refers to forms of production that emerged during the industrial era. The rise of mass production allowed for the infinite and consistent reproduction of a single item, erasing much of the variability and uniqueness in manufacturing methods of earlier eras and thus devaluing the genuineness of the original. Finally, Baudrillard speaks of the simulation of the third order, which encompasses contemporary life and society. Essentially, Baudrillard

asserts that those of the postmodern era live in a simulation “by the mode of referendum precisely because there is no longer any referential.” The only referent to reality is made simply in relation to other claims of reality; the “metaphysics of the code”. In the simulation, the distinction between fake and real, reproduction and original, inauthentic and authentic, are “too blunt to capture the subtleties” of the condition.

Wang (1999) points out a consistent theme justifying the imitation in postmodern interpretations of authenticity. Rather than simply pursuing authenticity for the sake of authentic experience, Wang suggests that subjects of the postmodern condition seek out what Cohen (1995) describes as “a playful search for enjoyment.” Often, what could be considered authentic from an objectivist sense can be an unpleasant experience. As Ritzer and Liska (1997) put it, scavenging for food in the forest may be an authentic yet difficult and likely unenjoyable experience for most used to living major cities of a developed country. Many engage in the romanticism of cooking and eating by the campfire, “as long as it is a simulated one on the lawn of the hotel” (Ritzer and Liska, 1997). In this sense, the search of authenticity becomes involved in the search for what Brown (1996) describes as “genuine fakes.” In this pursuit, individuals seek to be convinced of authenticity through the experience of representation, representing how ‘real’ it is (McCrone, Morris and Kiely, 1995). Through this lens, authenticity and originality are “matters of technique” (McCrone, Morris and Kieley, 1995), where efforts are directed to make the inauthentic appear more authentic.

Wang (1999) illustrates this point with an example of pre-recorded bird songs being played in parks. The consistency and reliability of the recorded bird songs circumvents the necessity of having actual birds present and relying on them to actually sing, becoming more authentic than what is ‘real’ or ‘natural’, thus becoming hyperreal. It is on a similar note that Ritzer and Liska (1997) discusses in contemporary times, many are after what an objectivist would consider as inauthenticity, rather than authenticity. For a postmodernist, the objectivist notion of the authenticity of the original is removed. As Wang (1999) concludes, “constructivists are reluctant to dig a tomb for ‘authenticity’ and they try to rescue the term by revising its meanings; postmodernists have buried it”.

Having outlined the three main approaches to authenticity as described in the literature, I will now discuss the approach that has been adopted in this thesis. It is unsurprising that a constructivist approach to authenticity has been chosen in line with the constructionist epistemology adopted across research as outlined in Chapter 4.2.3. It can be said that a constructivist approach to authenticity exists as a moderate between the two extremes of objectivism and postmodernism. For an objectivist, the original is better than copy, whereas for a postmodernist, the copy has become better than the original. From a constructivist perspective, both the original and the copy have the potential to be authentic, hinging on whether the experience aligns with what the individual consider to be authentic. To affirm the adoption of a constructivist approach to authenticity in this thesis, I return to spectatorship.

As previously noted, spectatorship pertains not only to the act of watching, but the lived experience of watching. Spectators seek out experiences that align with their expectations and values, and producers of spectacle will typically design experiences to cater to the values of spectators. Of importance in this understanding of spectatorship is the emphasis placed on subjectivity. Different spectators may seek out and watch the same text but partake in vastly distinct experiences. This in itself is already a way of thinking that aligns closely with constructivist authenticity. It also contrasts a purely objectivist approach to authenticity, which stipulates an exclusivity between authenticity and originality, disregarding the subjective perceptions and experiences had by individuals. In this sense, authentic spectatorship pertains not to prescriptive notions of inherent originality and genuineness, but rather to the processes with which individuals construct and make sense of subjects as (in)authentic through the social interactions, cultural contexts, knowledge, politics, and other influences which shape their perspectives (Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Restivo and Croissant, 2008).

Bale's (1998) and Fairley and Tyler's (2012) examples of sports spectatorship at the Fælled and the cinema illustrates this perspective well. In each of these cases, spectators forewent spectatorship at the easily accessible site of play to instead spectate at a remote location that offered an experience which better aligned with what the spectators believed to be authentic spectatorship. However, these two examples can also be used to illustrate a postmodern approach to authenticity. Spectatorship at the Fælled and cinema present a copy that has become more 'real'

than the original, arguably crossing into the hyperreal. In Bale's case, spectatorship of the Germany-Denmark match in the Fælled illustrates a copy of an original that no longer exists. The original in the case was the rowdy, drunken experience of spectatorship at the stadium that was essentially removed from existence with the transition to strictly controlled, sanctified stadia. Although such an experience can no longer be had, the representation and reproduction of it persists through spectator efforts at the Fælled, the copy now becoming the 'real.'

In Fairley and Tyler's (2012) case, the copy was produced to be more real than the original. Through careful composition and the affordances of technologies present at the cinema to screen the live baseball matches, a spectator experience which acted akin to a genuine fake was staged for. Although many authenticators of the ballpark such as its sounds, smells, iconography, and aesthetics were present in the cinema, spectators did not need to squint at the match from a distance as they would at the site of play. Rather, the cinema projection and sound system offered a high-fidelity perspective of the match. In the hyperreal sense, the experience of spectatorship in the cinema had become more real and therefore more authentic than that at the ballpark. This perspective relates closely to what Wenner (1998, p.4) terms as "mediasport"; the idea that contemporary professional sport is produced solely for the sake of being televised and can no longer be separated from televisual mediation. As will be discussed in Chapter 3.5.2, physically present spectators in the stadium are invited to the venue not to be able to view the spectacle, but rather to be a part of it for remote spectators to consume.

While these examples may illustrate a postmodernist approaches to authenticity, I still propose that constructivism is still an appropriate and useful frame with which to understand the concept. In approaching this discussion, a return will be made to Bruner's (1994) ethnography of New Salem and the critiques he makes of postmodernist authenticity. Much like the cases of spectatorship described by Bale (1998) and Fairley and Tyler (2012), Bruner's example of New Salem Historic Site can also easily be construed as a prime example of postmodern authenticity, being a highly refined, idealised production that purports authenticity through hyperreal representation. Bruner views this postmodern perspective as one that is pessimistic, framing copies and reproductions as deceitful and reinforcing a "false consciousness" of reality. Bruner instead vouches for a more optimistic constructivist understanding

of reproduction. He argues that such postmodern perspectives do not account for the meanings that individuals impart into reproductions like New Salem Historic Site. In particular, he notes how postmodernists disregard the mythic properties of reproductions, with copies seen as being only referential to themselves. Although perhaps an inaccurate reproduction of New Salem as it was in the 1830's, it is hard to argue that New Salem Historic Site was not an accurate representation of an "Illinois origin myth". As Bruner elaborates:

“Many tourists to New Salem view the village with a sense of nostalgia for a vanished past, for an imagined time when life was more natural, purer, and simpler – in effect a Midwest equivalent of the Garden of Eden. Many see in New Salem the image of early pioneer life in the prairies, a return to the first settlers in central Illinois.”

Bale's (1998) case of the Fælled can also be seen in a similar light. Rather than simply a reproduction of an original that no longer exists, spectatorship at the Fælled can be seen as a reflection of a "vanished past" (Brunner, 1994), embodying not only the lost spectatorship experience of the stadium alone, but the mythic origin of football spectatorship in Denmark. Fairley and Tyler's (2012) case of cinema baseball spectatorship can also be interpreted in a similar manner. Rather than a hyperreal, convenient reproduction of spectatorship at the site of play without the unpleasantness of the actual ballpark, spectatorship of baseball at the cinema can be thought to represent the mythic origin of baseball. Rather than representations of an actual past, myths are based on contemporary sensibilities. With contemporary mediasport (Wenner, 1998) placing emphasis on high-fidelity sports broadcast and the presence of large-format screens at sporting events, the potential struggle of watching the match at the ballpark is no longer an element that is considered a part of the mythic origin of baseball spectatorship for contemporary fans. This relates closely to another point that is central to Bruner's (1994) critique of postmodern authenticity.

Rather than originals being products situated in the past and copies being of the present, Bruner (1998) proposes that both copy and original are constructed in the present. He argues that meanings associated with experiences are generative, being developed through interaction and social context rather than being prescribed.

Meanings may arise that were initially unexpected by the individual, making connections with what they see and feel. By making these connections, a representation may have an ‘original’ attributed to it. Bruner describes that “sometimes an object is constructed in the contemporary era and then an older form is somehow ‘discovered’ as a hypothetical original to add historic depth and legitimacy”. Meaning is attributed to experiences through connections to aspects of individuals’ lives and meaningful histories. Through this process comes the legitimisation of the experience, and from that authenticity.

In summary, Bruner (1994) complicates the relationship between originals and copies to critique postmodern approaches to authenticity. He proposes that not only are experiences subjective in a constructivist sense, but so too are notions of originality. Authenticity is generated from the meanings that individuals impart onto experiences through the attribution of a subjective and flexible original. It is on this basis that Bruner’s version of constructivist authenticity was adopted to understand spectatorship in esports. Wang’s (1999) concept of existential authenticity has also informed the approach to authenticity adopted in this thesis, which builds on constructivist notions outlined by Bruner. Wang’s existential approach introduces a temporal element to perceptions of authenticity, placing importance on the state of “Being” in the moment. Like constructivist authenticity from which it is derived, existential authenticity is based around the subjective experience the individual. However, rather than concerning whether the individual perceives the experience itself to be real, existential authenticity centres around whether the individual feels ‘real’ while partaking in the experience; their ‘authentic selves.’

Daniel’s (1996) work on Cuban rumba dancing demonstrates this sense of true self. Although the incorporation of modern techniques distances contemporary rumba from its traditional styles, those engaging in the dance still receive escape from their daily lives, entering a state of “spiritual and aesthetic nourishment.” Here, the conundrum of the accuracy or originality of rumba style is irrelevant, for the dancer partaking in the experience of the dance has developed an existential sense of their authentic self in the moment. This further emphasises the importance of the subjective experience in perceiving authenticity. For an onlooker educated in the traditional style of rumba, the dance may be perceived as inauthentic. However, the

dancer nevertheless sees themselves as partaking in an authentic experience of ‘doing’ rumba.

This desire to seek an authentic self from extraordinary experiences implies that individuals are their inauthentic selves under regular conditions. This calls back MacCannell’s (1973) objectivist perspective of authenticity and the concepts of front and back regions. Both Wang (1999) and MacCannell assert that the constructed and socially hierarchical nature of contemporary society imbues a sense of inauthenticity in everyday life contexts like the workplace. From this inauthenticity of life, individuals seek out experiences which break down of the social norms which bound them. While MacCannell positions this pursuit of authenticity to the inherent and objective authenticity of the experience, Wang positions it as the pursuit of being able to be one’s authentic self by partaking in the experience. In essence, the former describes the experience as the authentic goal, while the later describes the experience as a tool with which to self-realise authenticity.

Returning again to spectatorship, Weed’s (2006) ethnography of spectatorship of the soccer world cup in British pubs demonstrates a form of existential authenticity. In attending the pub to watch the matches, patrons engaged in what Weed describes as a “shared communal experience”, symbolising a formation of *communitas*, a concept that Wang (1999) associates with a type of inter-personal existential authenticity. First coined by Turner (1969), *communitas* refers to a sense of comradeship felt among individuals who share a common experience set in a context set beyond regular time and life; liminal experiences where predefined social statuses and relationships are replaced with a with a flattened social hierarchy (Celsi et al., 1993). Often, the experience is considered sacred or special by its participants, and thus “the individual enters a transcending community of camaraderie” (Hopkinson and Pujari, 1999). Turner’s initial conception of *communitas* relates liminality to pilgrimage. Embarking on a pilgrimage places the individual in a liminal state “between two statuses”. In his earlier work, Turner (1969) relates this state to those participating in rites of passage, while in later work (1979) he relates it to religious pilgrimage. In both scenarios, participants are stripped of their existing stature and enter a transitional state between their previous self and the identity they will emerge with following the completion of the liminal task. Celsi (1992) writes of a group of inexperienced mountain climbers who embark on a “once in a lifetime” climb,

emerging as experienced and transformed by the bonds they had established. Although each climber partook in the climb for varying reasons, the “spell of the mountain” united them on their pilgrimage.

However, it is important to note that not all transformative experiences of spontaneous *communitas* fall under Turner’s (1969) definition of liminal. In his work, ‘liminal’ becomes a term to describe such experiences which occur in a society as a mandatory rite which resolves a personal crisis. Yet, the characteristics of liminal experiences, such as the formation of *communitas*, have been observed in experiences that are neither mandatory nor conclude with the resolution of a personal crisis. Creating a distinction between these two similar experiences, Turner (1974) coins the term “liminoid” to cover experiences with liminal characteristics that are voluntary and exclude the resolution of a personal crisis. Also integral to Turner’s concept of liminoidality is the recurring notion of the inauthentic self under modernity. Turner suggests that liminoid experiences are more prevalent in contemporary industrial societies where emphasis is placed on individualism, rather than community and ritual commitment of archaic agrarian societies. The industrial revolution separated work from other aspects of an individual’s life, creating periods between work and free time in which liminoid experiences can exist. In this sense, the liminal are an integrated aspect of a society, whereas the liminoid offer a recess from society, placing its participants in a situation removed from the social norms that they would normally be subjected to. Sporting events are often cited as examples of liminoid experiences (Rowe, 2008), offering a leisurely time and space removed from regular life for both spectators and players and often cultivating a communal element driven by a shared collective experience, as in the case of Weed’s (2008) ethnography.

Wang (1999) ties the concept of *communitas* to authenticity through the “pure” interpersonal relationships that individuals form while partaking in liminal and liminoid experiences. Not only does one feel as their authentic self in a situation of *communitas*, but the interactions had with others also expressing their true selves are also authentic. Individuals are able to “ease themselves of the pressures stemming from inauthentic social hierarchy and status distinctions ... they approach one another in a natural, friendly, and authentic way” (Wang, 1999). Bruner (1995) notes how bonds made in the spontaneity of *communitas* can extend beyond the

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moment, observing how those returning from a packaged cruise trip continued to keep in contact with friends they had made during the liminoid state of the cruise. On this basis, existential authenticity is not only derived from partaking in an experience to be one's authentic self, but also by sharing and enjoying the same experience in tandem with like-minded others (Urry, 2002; Wang, 1999).

In conclusion, the approach to authenticity adopted in this thesis to understand the experiences of esports spectatorship has been largely informed by the constructivist and existential approaches. As will be detailed in the following chapter, the historical origins of esports is somewhat unclear, existing largely as a convergence of videogaming and spectator sports practices. Consequently, what authenticity in esports looks like is often ambiguous, complicating what it means to spectate esports. To help develop an understanding of authenticity in esports, a constructivist approach to authenticity is apt as it focuses on the subjective experiences of esports spectators and the meanings they attribute to their spectatorship. Wang (1999) and Bruner (1994) reflect on the historic perspective of authenticity as a determined point of origin in time. They both contest this notion, arguing that a point of origin is not an appropriate way of thinking about authenticity, as nothing is static and change constantly happens. On this note, Wang closes on the thought that the “restless and infinite retreat of now will eventually make anything that has taken place in the world authentic.” Although what authenticity in esports spectatorship looks like now may be unclear, it will be imperative to observe how the flow of time shapes perceptions of esports authenticity from what may have at first been seen as inauthentic.

Chapter 3 – Esports literature and research

3.1 Introduction

With the approaches towards spectatorship and authenticity established in Chapter 2, this chapter will provide a critical review of existing academic literature that has been written on the topic of esports and esports spectatorship. The literature review will establish the current state of the academic esports corpus, thus guiding the research design of this thesis.

The review begins with a background on the development of esports, detailing how the spectatorship of videogaming in arcades of the 1970's and 1980's eventually evolved into the organised and professional esports spectacles of the 2010's and early 2020s. Next, an overview is provided detailing how the topic of esports has been approached by researchers, exploring the ways scholars from different disciplinary fields engage in esports research and how they characterise esports. This is followed by an exploration of esports definitions, in which interpretations of 'esports' as a term are consolidated and considered to clarify a consistent understanding for use in this thesis. Academic literature written on esports spectatorship is then reviewed to identify consistent themes across the corpus. Finally, I provide a critical analysis these works and identify common limitations and opportunities for further research. In particular, it is noted how esports spectatorship research currently lacks scope beyond perceived typical forms of online domestic spectatorship, and that research predominately adapts measurement tools and instruments from adjacent fields, rather than methods designed specifically for an esports context.

The chapter concludes by presenting the research questions of this thesis. In doing so, they are outlined in close relation to the observations made in this literature review, detailing how existing perspectives of esports spectatorship and opportunities for research have informed their inception.

3.2 From spectating competitive gaming to esports

Although esports has brought videogame spectatorship into the limelight, it did not conceive the act of watching videogame play for leisure. The spectatorship of others' play has long been an integral aspect of videogaming practices, contrary to the popular belief of gaming being a mostly solitary activity (Seo and Jung, 2016). As

T.L. Taylor (2012) describes in *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*, competitive gaming existed long before internet-facilitated networked multiplayer videogames became popular, emerging before players could even directly play against each other on the same videogame system. She asserts that competitive gaming became popularised in the arcades of the late 1970's and early 1980's, where players would compete for high scores on game cabinets. Surrounding this nascent form of competitive videogame play was videogame spectatorship. T.L. Taylor describes how on-lookers gathered around arcade cabinets watching a lone player striving for a high score transformed play into performance and spectacle. While not directly interacting with the videogame, spectators derive a distinct experience of the ludic text through the mediated inputs and actions of the player (Newman, 2002).

Spectatorship introduced a new interactional frame with which to experience videogaming (Lin and Sun, 2011). Through the mediation of the game by the inputs and decisions executed by the player, the spectator receives a unique and intimate experience of the game, despite not playing it themselves. Spectatorship in this sense does not only position the spectator as co-present, but also as a co-player. Spectators give advice to the player based on their own personal play while learning new knowledge from their spectatorship to implement when it is their turn to play. Not only did the spectatorship of videogame play introduce a new way to experience videogaming, but it also augmented the experience of playing games. T.L. Taylor (2012) describes the anxiety and pressure of playing at an arcade cabinet while those waiting to play watch on:

“You watched moves, sometimes marvelling at skill or smiling at your own better abilities in comparison. As you took your own turn at the machine, moving from spectator to player, you would often feel eyes on you and either up your game or falter. While the high score screen would temporally anchor these competitive moments they were powerfully enacted and embodied in copresence of players”

With elements of performance and competition present across videogame spectatorship in arcades, other scholars also trace the origins of esports to the arcade scenes of the 1970's and 1980's. Besides T.L. Taylor (2012), van Ditmarsch (2013)

speaks of the arcade origins of esports, noting how the public nature of the arcade facilitated spectatorship in a co-present form prior to the networked play and broadcasting of modern esports. He also notes that the essential mediation of modern esports was inherited from spectatorship of arcade videogame play. Videogames exist in a digital environment and are necessarily mediated and composed in order to be spectated. At the arcade, this was done by the player through personal play, while in modern esports this is mostly done by a formal production team headed by a director. Van Ditmarsch describes esports in relation to its mediated nature as “integrated with media instead of interrelated.” In this way esports can be seen as extending from the mediasport (Wenner, 1998) that dominates the contemporary landscape of professional sports.

Another aspect of the arcade that is reflected in modern esports is the tracking of standings. Although high scores were contained in the individual arcade machines on which they were achieved, scores were spread between individuals and player communities by word of mouth or magazines that would publish high scores submitted by players (van Ditmarsch, 2013). Although not spectatorship in itself, this sharing of high scores during the arcade era represents a tracking of results that connected players and communities into a loose proto-league, expanding competition beyond the self-contained site of play. By sharing and tracking high scores in this manner, further interest was generated by players and spectators able to keep up to date with the latest standings. In doing so they became engaged in emergent narratives of competition, heightening the stakes of spectated play.

This competitive play would eventually spread from the arcades to the television studio in the early-to-mid-1980's. Television shows like *Starcade* (JM Production Company, 1982) in the United States for the first time offered the spectacle of competitive videogaming to those not co-present at the site of play, taking the form of a televised game show where contests competed against each other in arcade games in front a live studio audience (T.L. Taylor, 2012; Li, 2016). These early videogaming-related game shows can be viewed as the first clear ancestors of modern esports as a broadcast media spectacle. These recorded game shows also introduced the ability for spectatorship of competitive videogame play to occur beyond the actual time of play (T.L. Taylor, 2012); an important aspect of contemporary esports.

Despite the transformation of competitive gaming into spectacle during the arcade craze of the 1970's and 1980's, this interest regressed somewhat following the introduction and adoption of home consoles as the dominant way to play videogames starting in the late 1980's and early 1990's (T.L. Taylor, 2012). Home consoles brought the experience of playing games from the public arcades into the private space of the home. Consequently, the competitive spectacle of videogame play became increasingly private (van Ditmarsch, 2013), compounded by the short life of the videogaming game shows that had since been cancelled by this time. *Starcade* (JM Production Company, 1982), arguably the most prominent of the emergent genre, was cancelled in 1984 roughly two years after its first episode aired. Nevertheless, a desire still existed for the broadcast spectacle of competitive videogaming, with home console producers Nintendo and Atari hosting televised tournaments and competitions (T.L. Taylor, 2012).

While the spectacle of competitive videogaming was initially derived from the comparison of recorded performances rather than direct player versus player competition, this would change with the emergence of fighting games in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In particular, Capcom's (1991) *Street Fighter II* is often attributed with popularising competitive player versus player play and consequently spectatorship of direct competition between competitors (Loguidice and Barton, 2012; Phan, 2020); the typical and dominant format of contemporary esports. Rather than competing for high scores, in *Street Fighter II* each player selects a playable character to fight as against their opponent. This creates a live and noticeable contrast between the performance of each player. Furthermore, these performances of the players are reactive to each other (Billings and Hou, 2019). The win condition also has a more direct tie to the competitive performance, rather than actions accruing arbitrary amounts of points. When a character lands a blow on the opposing character, damage is taken and their health bar visually depletes (Snavelly, 2014).

Eventually, the rise of PC gaming and the internet in the late 1990's and early 2000's marked the beginnings of networked and online competitive gaming (T.L. Taylor, 2012); a fundamental aspect of contemporary, platformised esports which relies on and is captured by organisation-controlled services, hardware, software, and infrastructure (Partin, 2020; Zhao and Lin, 2021). Titles like iD Software's *Doom* (1993) and *Quake* (1996), in conjunction with the spread in adoption of dial-up

internet, offered players a new way to compete directly against others without needing to be co-present (Snavely, 2014; Li, 2016). T.L. Taylor argues that the popularity of these titles created passionate fan communities which drove the demand for organised competitive videogaming scenes. This eventually led to the establishment of Quakecon in 1996, an annual and originally volunteer-run event held in Texas which drew thousands of fans seeking to participate in competitive play over a large-scale local area network. Community led events like Quakecon set the precedence for similar events professionally organised by gaming industry figures.

A famous early example was the Red Annihilation tournament hosted at the E3 Expo in 1997. This tournament can be considered the one of the first contemporary esports tournaments, being a carefully composed event featuring the play of the best *Quake* (iD Software, 2996) players as spectacle as they competed for a high-value prize, in this case a 1987 Ferrari belonging id Software co-founder and *Quake* lead programmer John Carmack. Furthermore, this event helped foster the East versus West coast rivalry still present in US esports culture (King and Borland, 2003). The tournament's winner Dennis "Thresh" Fong would later become one of the first sponsored competitive gamers and is often considered the first famous esports professional, being likened as "the Michael Jordon of *Quake*" (Laird, 2000).

An important aspect to note is that the history of videogame and esports spectatorship portrayed in literature is mostly presented from Western, often North American-centric perspective. Although these retellings are generic enough to be somewhat generalisable broadly, it is imperative to understand that the practices of spectating esports developed differently across other regions. This issue is also broadly present across gaming literature. Therrien (2019) explains that the often Western and US-centric gaming narratives eclipses the gaming histories of other cultures. For example, he describes how the US-centric 'Sega versus. Nintendo' console rivalry of the 1990's left other consoles of the era popular in other regions largely forgotten and unaccounted for in academic literature. Consequently, esports developed, and continues to develop, in different ways across regional contexts.

South Korea is often seen has having a notably unique regional esports history, where the spectatorship of competitive videogaming rose to prominence earlier than

in the West (Snavely, 2014). As Huhh (2008) discusses, this was largely due to a large internet-café culture (known as ‘PC Bangs’ in South Korea) in the 1990’s and early 2000’s, stemming from relative rarity of domestic internet connections with speeds faster than dial-up. PC Bangs achieved two things for the development of South Korean esports. Firstly, they offered patrons the opportunity to play certain games that would normally require an individual owner to pay a monthly subscription fee, thus exposing more people to such titles. Secondly, they invited spectatorship from onlookers and other patrons present in a PC Bang (Whang, 2003; T.L. Taylor, 2012) in similar manner to the arcade (T.L. Taylor, 2012). Another element attributed to the early rise and adoption of esports as spectator entertainment in the region was the support provided by the South Korean government and their classification of esports as a ‘sport.’ Many South Korean sporting entities have ties to the nation’s sporting bodies. For example, in 2000 the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism approval the foundation of the Korea e-Sports Association (Burk, 2013), which has since become a member of the Korean Olympic Committee. T.L. Taylor (2012) discusses that because of this acceptance by government bodies and open mindedness of emergent videogaming technologies and practices in South Korea, the evolution of esports in the region was accelerated. Jin (2010) notes how the ready inclination for television networks to broadcast esports further accelerated esports’ growth in South Korea, in contrast to traditional media gatekeepers of North America where gaming taboos are more prominent.

3.3 Research approaches to esports

A common claim, almost an excuse, made by authors is that the academic field of esports research is in its infancy and not much on the topic has been written. While this may have been true for those researching esports in the early-to-mid-2010’s, as of 2020 the topic of esports has received a substantial amount research interest for almost a decade. Recent reviews into academic esports literature have revealed that while thriving, the corpus is highly fragmented across a number of disciplines. This disciplinary spread may explain why the academic esports corpus continues to be perceived as underdeveloped; authors may simply focus on what has been written on esports in their discipline and remain unaware of work done by others.

Nevertheless, two recent papers have begun to consolidate the fragmented field of esports research. Reitman et al. (2020) provide one of the first published reviews of esports literature. They trace the first notable surge in esports research interest to 2012, where the amount of published academic esports literature roughly doubled. Unsurprisingly, a number of seminal esports texts were published during this year, including T.L. Taylor's (2012) *Raising the Stakes* and Witkowski's (2012) "On the digital playing field." Interest continued to grow in 2013, followed by a sudden decline in 2014. Growth picked up again in 2015 and has steadily continued since.

Post 2015, Reitman et al. (2020) observe that no single research field dominates esports literature, although ultimately media studies leads in total publications throughout the entirety of the sampled time period, accounting for almost a quarter of the corpus. Overall, they reveal a corpus of 150 academic publications regarding esports published prior to March 2018 across seven distinct fields: business, sports science, cognitive science, informatics, law, media studies, and sociology. Esports as a concept invites such interdisciplinary interest. Although a form of entertainment spectacle from a media studies perspective, the inherent computer-mediation of the esports in terms of both its play and broadcast draws interest from information technology fields, particularly human-computer interaction (Freeman and Wohn, 2017). Interest from sports studies fields have also has been consistent over the past decade, with esports existing as a novel form of alternative or 'new' sport. Recently, auxiliary gambling and betting industries have developed around esports spectatorship, which in conjunction with persistent notions of videogaming being an addictive activity has drawn the attention of addiction and behavioural studies (Choi, Hums and Bum, 2018; Macey and Hamari, 2018).

While Reitman et al. (2020) provide a broad overview of the esports corpus, the growing presence of esports literature in certain fields has enticed more discipline-focused reviews. Bányai et al. (2019) provide a review of psychology-related esports research from a gambling studies perspective, from which a corpus of eight texts was produced. They identify three main research topics across this corpus: becoming an esports player, characteristics of esports players, and motivations of esports spectators. Their discussion of esports spectatorship motivations centres around work published from 2010 pertaining to the spectatorship of contemporary esports in undefined, domestic, or stadium environments. Although this gives Bányai et al.

a strong understanding of esports and videogame spectatorship as it exists today, their methodology divergences from a broader consensus affirmed across other esports literature regarding the origin of competitive videogaming. Choosing to sample literature from 2000 onwards, they assert that competitive videogaming only occurred after online network play became commonplace, which they attribute to happening around the turn of the millennium. Presented without supporting evidence, Bányai et al.'s claim clashes with those made by seminal texts detailed in Section 3.2 which explore the history of esports, competitive videogaming, and videogaming in general.

3.4 Esporting themes

3.4.1 What is esports?

Much like 'sports', 'esports' is a term of various interconnected connotations. Over time, esports has been characterised by a number of different themes. The earliest discussions of esports appeared in the mid-2000's, coinciding with the popularisation of online networked competitive multiplayer gaming. The emergence of this novel form of play attracted the attention of scholars in fields related to conventional sports, who recognised sport-like qualities in online competitive videogaming. Although this early work originating from sports disciplines highlight sporting elements present in esports and competitive gaming, they ultimately characterise esports by its technological nature.

In essence, these early definitions not only stress the computerised nature of esports, but also its sporting characteristics, portraying esports as form of digitised sport. Hemphill's (2005) article "Cybersport" in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* provides what can be considered as the earliest description of esports, despite the term being absent in his discussion of whether videogames and computer simulations can be considered a type of sport. He describes sport-like competitive activities played through videogames as "alternative sport realities" which "electronically extended athletes in digitally represented sporting worlds." Articles of this era originating from sports disciplines frame esports as a phenomenon that will contribute to the further development of sports and the sporting industry, rather than a practice that will grow successful by its own virtues. Xi's (2005) "Present situation and strategies of esports games in China" in *Zhejiang Sport Science* reflects

this perspective, suggesting that nurturing esports will help “propel the sports industry forward and lead the traditional entertainment into a new developing stage.”

Although Xi (2005) is the first to use ‘esports’ in academic writing, Wagner (2006) provides the first explicit definition of the term in “On the Scientific Relevance of eSports.” Published in the *Proceedings of the 2006 International Conference on Internet Computing*, Wagner’s publication also marks the first discussion of esports in an academic information technology outlet. Similar to the framing of esports in early texts published in sporting outlets, Wagner’s definition stresses the technological elements that facilitate the sports-like activities and characteristics of esports. He describes esports as an “as an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies.” Wagner diverges from the writings of Hemphill (2005) and Xi (2005), discussing esports with a looser connection to sport, instead focusing on the youth cultures that surrounded esports in the mid-2000’s, the intricacies of esports as independent from sports, and the academic potential surrounding esports research. He proposes and consequently sets the precedence for the research of esports as an independent practice and field.

The characterisation of esports as form of digitised sport has remained consistent and is reflected in contemporary work. Hamari and Sjöblom’s (2017) initial definition aligns with those of Hemphill (2005) and Wagner (2006) from over a decade ago, presenting a technology-platform oriented description of esports as “a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the eSports system are mediated by human-computer interfaces.” Interestingly, these definitions so far have not made a direct connection to videogames, instead taking a broader stance based on electronic or computerised systems. This greatly extends the criteria of what can be considered as esports. Under this understanding, systems like electronic darts could be considered an esports. However, Hamari and Sjöblom elaborate that in practice the types of systems that facilitate esports are almost exclusively videogames, constituting the entirety of the contemporary esports landscape. This stance is further affirmed across researchers, with no examples of non-videogame based

esports appearing in existing academic publications. This has led the term to be more commonly used as a descriptor of the competitive and organised play of videogames.

Organisation is one key characteristic which distinguishes esports from forms of leisurely or casual competitive videogaming, where play is engaged in for the sake of entertainment and recreation (Ma et al., 2013). Esports often crosses into the realm of serious leisure, where a normally leisurely activity is engaged with for other reasons, commonly becoming more laborious (Stebbins, 1992). This interpretation of esports was popularised by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) in their article “What is eSports and why do people watch it?”, which has become a widely cited text used to define esports by authors in both game studies and broadly across other non-gaming fields of research. While the technological nature of esports generally defines its normative definitions, other characteristics are emphasised differently across authors and the contexts in which they write.

Hallmann and Giel (2018) focus on the formal organisational elements that structure the practice of esports in their use of the term. In their writings on whether esports should be considered a sport, they debate that organisational structures such as leagues, regulators, teams, players, and formalised rulesets distinguishes esports from competitive gaming. On this basis they argue that esports fits an essential criterion of the International Olympic Committee’s sporting classification, which stipulates the existence of representative organisational bodies.

Other uses of the term place emphasis on the specific videogame titles played in an organised and competitive context. Much like how cricket, soccer, and swimming are each considered individual and distinct sports, videogame titles like *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016), *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (Valve Software, 2012) and *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) can each be considered different esports. Much like conventional sports, different families or genres of esports exists. Common examples include first-person shooters (FPS), multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAs), real-time strategy games (RTS), battle royale (BR), digital collectable card games (DCCG), and fighting games (Gibbs et al., 2018). Videogame titles in each family share commonalities in game mechanics and often share a set of transferable skills between titles. Some titles are similar enough to be considered akin to codes in conventional sports. Like how rugby league and rugby union are two

divergent codes of rugby football, *League of Legends* and *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) can be considered two related codes, both being designed as spiritual successors to the original Defence of the Ancients mod for *Warcraft III* (Blizzard, 2002). As with conventional sports, it is important to acknowledge the great diversity of games played as esports. While ‘esports’ is often used as a broad overarching term for organised competitive videogaming produced as a spectacle, esports does not exist as a homogeneous entity but rather involves a wide range of dissimilar videogames.

Esports has also been used to refer to the careers and professions surrounding organised competitive videogaming. In his work on identifying changes in the esports identity and professionalisation, Seo (2016) links esports with Stebbins (1992) concept of “serious leisure”, which pertains to “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centred on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge and experience”. Based on Stebbins’ serious leisure, Seo proposes that the professionalisation present in contemporary esports is the greatest factor distinguishing it from competitive gaming, transforming videogame play from leisure into labour. This does not only pertain to the players participating in organised competitive play, but also event organisers, league coordinators, production teams, commentators, coaches, web developers, and other professionals who help produce and maintain the spectacle of esports and the operation the esports industry (Seo, 2016). Much like other professional athletes, professional esports players are susceptible to career-related dilemmas such as burnout, injury, retirement, work-life imbalances, difficulties entering the industry, and post-career considerations (Salo, 2017).

Similarly, esports can also refer to the industry which surrounds it. This perspective is most commonly present in business and law studies, where focus is placed on the respective industrial or legal complexities that surround esports rather than the practice of organised competitive videogaming itself. In “Time to be grown-ups about videogaming: the rising eSports industry and the need for regulation”, Hollist (2015) focuses on how the unique industrial composition of esports exploits professional players, thus positioning the industry of esports as central to its identity.

Finally, esports also pertains to spectatorship in the same sense as spectator sports (T.L. Taylor, 2012). Authors writing on the topic of esports as spectatorship often emphasise the importance of spectatorship to esports' continued development. The most salient example of this is the necessity of an audience to consume esports content and thus drive its demand. Burroughs and Rama (2015) presents this perspective in "The eSports Trojan Horse: Twitch and Streaming Futures" published in the *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, where they discuss how the growth of esports is driven by the maturation and normalisation of online livestreaming platforms like Twitch. These emergent platforms bypass traditional media gatekeepers like television networks, being able to broadcast to broad global audiences directly and conveniently. The sizeable viewership numbers that major esports events attract are often used as a metric in academic literature to demonstrate the growth and success of esports (Southern, 2017; Jenny et al., 2018; Sher et al., 2018).

Comparisons are often made between the viewership numbers of conventional sports and esports, with researchers keen to highlight that some esports events have begun to eclipse the viewership of major sporting events and other forms of conventional media spectacle (Mangeloja, 2019). This framing of esports often coincides with themes of industry and business, which sees spectators as necessary consumers to drive forward the esports industry and the revenue it generates. Central to these framings of esports as spectatorship are spectating motivations. In endeavouring to understand why people spectate esports, researchers expect to uncover the specific elements which propel esports to popularity (Shaw et al., 2019; Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017; Neus et al., 2020).

A less apparent but still important aspect relating to the theme of spectatorship in esports is the influences spectators have on the play and production of esports as a spectacle. This ties back to T.L. Taylor's (2012) observations of on-lookers transforming videogame play into performance. Esports producers must consider the desires and sensibilities of spectators when creating esports content, thus influencing the way that an esports event is staged and produced. Seo (2013) argues that esports is an example of an experience economy; a type of emergent market first outlined by Pine and Gilmore (1998) which centres around the selling of "memorable and personal experiences" rather than goods or services. Seo demonstrates that

much like other contemporary forms of entertainment spectacle, esports centres around the creation and marketing of a memorable spectator experience. He also attributes the labour of creating esports experiences to videogame developers, who create the titles which act as “working tools for staging eSports performances” (Seo, 2013). Furthermore, the presence of spectators has the potential to affect the play of esports, ranging from the nervousness of playing for an audience of millions to the purposeful engagement in boastful, confident play styles as a way to “play to the camera” (Nick Taylor, 2016a).

It is apparent from these varied and diverse framings that a single cohesive field of esports research does not exist. Rather, the corpus of esports research has received contributions from a variety of distinct disciplines, each imparting their own perspectives and ways of thinking into their interpretations of esports. This becomes further evident when realising that few research outlets dedicated to esports exist. First hosted in 2018, The University of California Irvine’s annual Esports Conference is the only peer-reviewed research outlet as of 2020 that is solely dedicated to the academic pursuit of esports research. Because of this somewhat fractured research field, a single consensus of what esports is has not been reached, with each discipline instead maintaining their own interpretations. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity in this thesis a consistent definition of the term needs to be established and adhered to. In determining the definition to be used in this thesis, a start was made in identifying the core similarities between the previously outlined interpretations of esports.

The most consistent theme of esports is its convergence of information technology and sport-like qualities. This is not only consistent across disciplines, but also across time, being the core aspects of Hemphill’s (2005) and Wagner’s (2006) early definitions and have continued to appear in most contemporary interpretations. However, this also accurately describes competitive multiplayer videogaming, being a form of competitive play enabled through the computerised system of a videogame. Further scoping of the esports definition is therefore needed. Some (see T.L. Taylor, 2012; Seo, 2016) attribute the organisational bodies that structure esports as the key characteristic that separates the practice from competitive gaming. In this sense, competitive gaming can be considered unorganised or spontaneous. Conversely for esports, authors write of the scheduling, training, contracts, and logistics that go into

the smooth management of esports tournaments and teams. In terms of ascertaining a definition, the formally organised elements of esports are enough to distinguish it from competitive gaming.

While this may be an appropriate base definition, like the authors before me I too will introduce other elements to define esports as informed by my theoretical and disciplinary background. Namely, the definition of esports adopted in this thesis also stresses the importance of spectatorship and industry. It is undeniable that spectatorship has profoundly shaped esports across its existence, influencing how esports is staged, produced, and structured (T.L. Taylor, 2012; Sjöblom et al., 2018). Furthermore, without spectators esports likely would not have achieved the level of popularity it has enjoyed over the past decade.

Esports has become a lucrative business. Although esports can theoretically exist without a surrounding industry, as of 2020 the esports industry is greatly intertwined with its practices. Governing bodies that exist in the esports industry largely drive the direction that the esports moves towards. The esports industry has been described akin to the “Wild West,” with numerous stakeholders both native and foreign to esports vying for influence (Chao, 2017). The most apparent evidence of this is the sportification of esports, which has been largely used as a way to professionalise the practice by appropriating broadly accepted signifiers of professionalism and legitimacy from conventional sports (Heere, 2018). This will be explored further in Section 3.5.2.

This sense of professionalism is also integral to understanding esports. Although amateur and ‘semi-professional’ esports has received research interest (see García-Lanzo and Chamarro, 2018; Freeman and Wohn, 2019), Freeman and Wohn (2017) describe that across all levels of play, esports usually has a professional atmosphere. They explain that esports emphasises what T.L. Taylor (2012) describes as a “pro culture”, embodying a desire of understanding, strategy, and mechanics that surpasses that of casual leisurely play. The existence and growing visibility of career esports professionals, who in some cases achieve the status of celebrity (Mainieri et al., 2017), further solidifies this perspective and shifts interpretations of esports further away from simple competitive videogaming (Establés, Guerrero-Pico and Contreras-Espinosa, 2019).

To summarise, when esports is referred to in this thesis, it is done so in relation to organised and competitive videogaming, which has become surrounded by and strongly influenced by elements of professionalism, industry, and spectatorship. Specifically, it has become evident through the writings of T.L. Taylor (2012) and Nick Taylor (2016a) that spectatorship has become the primary driver of esports' popularity and direction. Furthermore, contemporary esports as it currently stands cannot exist without spectatorship; esports today is an industry and business that relies on revenue streams generated by spectator engagement. Without spectators present as an audience for advertisers and sponsors, merchandise, and ticket sales, esports would not be able to persist. Alternatively, the business of esports centres around delivering esports content to spectators, which in turn influences ways that esports is produced and how esportsing careers are managed. *It is for these reasons that the interpretation of esports in this thesis considers spectatorship to be the essential element which separates it from other competitive gaming practices.* This thesis understands how esports spectatorship is experienced through this framing as a form of media entertainment spectacle. Thus, the discussions of esports throughout each chapter will place an emphasis on its relationship with spectatorship.

3.4.2 Sports and esports

Another important aspect of esports to consider before moving forward is where the practice stands in relation to sporting activities that are not performed within the computerised system of a videogame. Tackling this question is not a straightforward process, as the term 'sport' itself is loosely defined in academic literature with no clear consensus on what is or is not (Perks, 1999). Consequently, much debate exists regarding whether or not esports can be considered a sport. Some proponents argue that there is no discernible difference between esports and sports and that the two should be considered as the same (Kane and Spradley, 2017). This contrasts a common opposing argument which asserts that esports lacks an essential physicality that is inherent to sports (Parry, 2019). Others take a stance situated between these two perspectives, instead asserting that while esports and sports are distinct, they share enough essential similarities to be treated and approached in similar manners (Jenny et al., 2017). Despite the lack of consensus over what demarcates esports from

sports (or if such a distinction needs to exist), a consistent distinguisher between the two must be established for the sake of clarity in this thesis.

Instead of thinking of esports as ‘electronic sports’, perhaps it can be more aptly considered a form of electronically mediated sport. However, this idea of electronic sports mediation has become a rising discussion point in sports scholarship. Particularly in terms of sports spectatorship, electronic and computerised technologies have come to dominate the domain, with writers discussing how sports has become increasingly reliant on electronic and computerised systems in terms of broadcast (Bale, 1998), analysis, and coaching (Cushion et al., 2012). Large format screens feature in stadia give close-up and high-definition views of sports spectacle, while slow motion and instant replays provide spectators with great levels of detail (Bale, 1998). Furthermore, with the rise of social media, online platforms like Twitter have proved integral to the consumption of sports content, in some cases displacing conventional sports broadcasting (Hull and Lewis, 2014). It would therefore be inaccurate to suggest that the electronic mediation of sporting activities is exclusive to esports (Witkowski, 2012). A different approach to this discussion is needed. Returning to Hemphill’s writings in *Cybersport* (2005) and his later writings (2015), esports can be considered a type of sport that is “electronically extended.” Here, Hemphill characterises esports not through electronic mediation, but rather through the need for players to extend themselves into a separate virtual game space that they themselves cannot physically enter, but in which their actions manifest and have consequences. Nick Taylor (2020) argues that the computerisation of the game space matters even less in light of the datafication of sports analytics, transforming athletes into moving ‘dots on a screen’ to be optimised, much like player avatars on a minimap in the context of esports.

Hilvoorde and Pot (2016) speak similarly of esports in terms of displacement (Tamboer, 1992). They compare esports to snooker and billiards, two activities considered by some to be sports which centre around the players’ use of tools to displace objects in a field of play that they themselves are unable to enter. Whereas the inability to enter to the play space in snooker and billiards is enforced by their rules, in esports it is impossible for the player to physically enter the play space. Due to the inherent computerisation of esports, human-computer interface devices like keyboards, mice, and gamepads are the tools which players must use to displace

objects in the unenterable play space to achieve objectives. Hillvoorde and Pot's conceptualisation of electronic displacement is currently unique to esports. Thus, the perspective of esports as an "electronically extended" type of sport (Hemphill, 2005; 2015) stands as a more appropriate characterisation than 'electronically mediated.'

Although a clear distinction has been made between esports and sports that are not electronically extended, a term for these other types of sports nevertheless needs to be determined. In particular, a term needs to be established that contrasts the electronically extended characteristics that define esports. A commonly used binary is that of esports and physical sports. Users of this term draw on the virtuality associated with the electronic and computerised identity of esports, characterising the practice as one that is sedentary and requires little physical activity to perform in comparison to other sports. However, others argue that esports is a physically embodied practice, regardless of its electronically extended nature (Hilvoorde and Pot, 2016; Ekdahl and Ravn, 2019). While largely focused on fine motor skills, authors have noted that esports is nonetheless an embodied practice that is played in situated locations and requires the composition and training of the body (T.L. Taylor, 2012; McCutcheon, Hitchens and Crachen, 2017). As the line between 'real' and 'virtual' becomes increasingly ambiguous (Rogers, 2009 pp.6-5), distinguishing between physical and virtual becomes a decreasingly convincing endeavour.

Another binary used is esports and traditional sports. However, this approach raises questions regarding what culture this alleged 'tradition' belongs to. Sports are too diverse to be characterised under a single unifying tradition (Perks, 1999). Furthermore, the notion of 'traditional sports' implies that esports lacks or is incapable of having tradition of its own. Another common distinguisher used is esports and mainstream sports. Although perhaps appropriate in earlier periods of esports' history when it was a niche of "digital youth culture" (Wagner, 2006), esports has since spread further into the mainstream, with esports coverage featuring on mainstream news and sports outlets like ESPN, overcoming previous hesitation and contention (Keiper et al., 2017). While still a relatively niche interest, esports continues to gain mainstream traction and recognition by those outside of the videogaming community.

A distinguisher of esports and conventional sports is a more appropriate approach, as it is derived by the very apparent and referable debate concerning esports in relation to sports, rather than unclear notions of physicality and tradition. Both sides of the debate portray esports as practice that is new, previously unseen, and radical in comparison to what already exists in the sporting domain. In this sense, esports is presented as an unconventional sport, which encapsulates the essence of this debate; whether esports and sports can exist in the same domain when esports unconventionally challenges notions of what ‘sports’ is. It is through this construct of conventional sports that esports is made unconventional in comparison. The term conventional sports also clearly establish these types of non-electronically extended sports as the *status quo*. This is important to make clear in relation to esports, as the practice constantly refers to conventional forms of sport as a template to shape itself (Borowy and Jin, 2013). The use of ‘conventional’ over ‘traditional’ also reflects the temporality of what defines sport. Tradition refers to customs that have been passed through generations, whereas convention refers to what people believe to be common at a specific time. As Simon (2000) notes, what is considered conventional in sports has evolved over time. By using the term ‘conventional’, one is also ascertaining that this is what conventional sports was at the time of writing, rather than a tradition which has existed for an undefined period of time. In doing so, potential future readers are notified that at the time of writing, esports was not considered conventional in relation to sports.

An alternative approach to the predicament of distinguishing esports and conventional sports would be to entirely disassociate the two from each other. The term ‘esports’ invites comparisons with ‘sports’, while other videogaming practices which have sport-like characteristics like speedrunning⁵ have not been the subject of similar debates. There is an argument to be made that one should disregard the comparisons that the nomenclature of ‘esports’ invites and to frame the practice as separate from sports. While this may have been an appropriate approach during esports’ infancy in the 1970’s and 1980’s, it is undeniable that the boundary-work conducted around esports and sports has come to fundamentally affect contemporary

⁵ According to Scully-Blaker (2016), speedrunning is “the practice of completing a videogame as quickly as possible without the use of cheats or cheat devices as well as the community of players that unite around this sort of play”.

esports. The theory of boundary-work pertains to the ways in which science is distinguished from other forms of intellectual activities (Gieryn, 1983). The concept has also been applied to other fields where the demarcation between concepts is often negotiated, such as in games studies (Copier, 2003; Carter and Gibbs, 2016). In its original context, boundary-work has been performed to negotiate the contentious debate of what distinguishes science from “pseudo-sciences” (Zehr, 2000). Likewise, the debates surrounding the demarcation of esports and other ‘alternative sports’ like darts, chess, and rock climbing from conventional sports offer an analogue of boundary-work within the context of this thesis.

There exist political dimensions to the debate surrounding esports’ status as a sport which extends beyond the simple desire for a clear distinction. For example, such debates affect whether professional esports players are eligible for professional athlete visas to compete internationally (Brannon, 2018) and whether esports organisations are eligible for government sports funding (Cunningham et al., 2018). By being closely associated with conventional sports, esports is able to borrow broad notions of authority and legitimacy. Conversely, some conventional sporting organisations, such as the International Olympics Committee, have sought to distance themselves from esports to avoid association with the violent imagery that some major esports titles feature (Orlando and Parry, 2018). It is through these debates that the esports industry works to shape itself in response to how conventional sporting organisations react. It is therefore important to consider the boundary work which surrounds the debate of esports’ legitimacy as a sport in understanding how esports has evolved into its contemporary iteration.

3.4.3 The perceived placelessness of esports

Amidst news reports of esports thriving during the COVID-19 pandemic, the notion of esports as a ‘placeless’ practice is particularly prevalent. Such assertions are often made when comparing esports to conventional sports, noting that esports’ ability to be played ‘anywhere, anytime’ has allowed esports events to continue through online formats (Rosenblatt, 2021). In contrast, conventional sports organisations have turned to esports to maintain brand exposure while athletes and spectators are unable to travel and congregate at stadia (Ke and Wagner, 2020). This perceived placelessness of esports and videogaming more broadly has come to be seen as a sort of solution or remedy for the restrictions imposed to fight

the pandemic. For example, the World Health Organisation has backed the games industry's *#PlayApartTogether* campaign as a way to stop the spread of COVID-19 (Amin, Griffiths, and Dsouza, 2020), standing in stark contrast to the organisation's formal classification of a gaming disorder in 2018 (World Health Organisation, 2018).

This placeless characterisation of esports largely stems from the digital, networked, and computerised technologies which enables its play, production, and spectatorship. These technologies are in turn largely perceived as placeless; teleworking platforms allow labour and knowledge generation to occur beyond a centralised workplace (Wellman et al., 1996), while data stored 'in the cloud' can be accessed on various devices in various places (Arpaci, 2016). Such perspectives however often overlook the infrastructure behind these seemingly placeless technologies, which as material and geographically situated constructs inevitably introduce elements of placefulness (Parks and Starosielski, 2015). For example, factors of efficiency and resource availability are considered when choosing the location of data centres, ultimately impacting the ease of which certain individuals are able to make use of them (Holt and Vonderau, 2015). As Parks (2005) notes, the lack of infrastructure in certain areas like rural Australia excludes certain groups from accessing seemingly placeless, universal technologies and services, often with political and postcolonial underpinnings. Ultimately, the infrastructure which enables seemingly ever-present internet connectivity and telecommunications are situated in relatively few concentrated locations (Pickren, 2016), existing as "distinct spaces of network equipment embedded within the landscape" (Wiig, 2013). Such factors of infrastructure accessibility and geographical place have inevitably played key roles in the evolution of contemporary esports and continue to do so.

Looking back to the origins of esports reveals a history heavily entrenched in material place. As mentioned in Section 3.2, esports originated from the competitive gaming activities found in arcades of the 1970s and 1980s, prior to the prominence of home videogame consoles and online networked play (Taylor, 2012). At this point in time prospective players were required to travel and attend arcades if they were to play videogames. As videogames became domesticated through the newly achieved affordability and acceptance of videogame consoles as household

consumer goods, gaming transitioned into a domestic activity (Nicoll, 2015). Still lacking online networked play at the outset, friends began traveling to others' homes as opposed to the arcade to partake in cooperative and competitive play, as well as the spectatorship of play (Taylor, 2012). The distribution networks of home consoles dictated which people in which geographical regions were able to game; certain consoles were not sold in some countries for various reasons, excluding entire nations of people from the often US-centric gaming histories which now dominate academic games research (Therrien, 2019).

As Candy (2010) notes, the emergence of online networked play as a popular way to partake in competitive videogaming introduced another infrastructural dimension of place to gaming and early esports. While the rise of the internet in many ways overcame geographical barriers, it nevertheless imposed new sets of restrictions. With the speed and stability of internet infrastructure enjoyed by the privileged in first-world nations, it is often easy to forget that the rollout and adoption of the internet was not a seamless or instantaneous process, with different nations and regions progressing at different rates. Even today, vast inequalities exist regarding global infrastructure (van Dijk, 2013). For example, the deployment of South Korea's early broadband internet infrastructure profoundly influenced competitive gaming culture in the country and ultimately placed South Korea as a leader in esports industry, business, and performance. As Huhh (2008) asserts, PC Bangs stood as an affordable and accessible way to play competitive games over a broadband internet connection when dial-up was still the dominant domestic connection method at the time, while also providing the powerful computer hardware to do so. While South Koreans are now able to affordably attain high-speed internet connections from home, the historic establishment of PC Bangs as gaming places has cemented the venues in contemporary contexts as important social and cultural sites of competitive play (Jin and Karhulahti, 2019).

While online networked games have in many ways diminished the impact of geographic place on social gaming practices, they have in other ways further exacerbated the desire, and in some cases need, for players to be regionally collocated for competitive play (Candy, 2012). Namely, many competitive games played as esports require low latency connections to enable a fair and serviceable experience of competitive play; something that is most easily remedied by playing

with nearby players on local servers (Feng and Feng, 2003). In addition to being difficult to play in, Candy depicts playing fast-paced games like *Counter-Strike* (Valve Software, 2000) in a high latency environment as an agonising, “visceral” experience for all players involved. He describes how in the process of building teams and organising matches, players make conscious efforts to publicly advertise their regionality to prospective teammates and opponents to ensure a low-latency competitive environment. In this way, the infrastructural affordances of geographic places exert great influence over who plays with and against who. Such desires for low latency competitive environments justify the continued prominence of LAN gaming events for both professional and grassroots esports. While LAN events have played foundational roles in the legitimisation and organisation of esports on a cultural level (Taylor and Witkowski, 2010; Taylor, 2012), they also introduce another dimension of place to competitive gaming practices by inviting players, and therefore spectators, to travel for both a social and competitively optimal environment.

In addition, Feng and Feng (2003) note that game servers are generally concentrated around regions with large player bases, placing the majority of game servers in the northern hemisphere. However, they also note that roughly 45% of the *Counter-Strike* (Valve Software, 2000) server traffic they analysed came from players overseas. They hypothesise numerous reasons for this observation, including a shortage of servers outside of North America and Europe, and in-game server selection mechanisms which may fail to consistently connect players to nearby servers. Either way, Feng and Feng’s findings demonstrate that those who live outside of regions with large player bases and local servers are often at a disadvantage and must compromise their player experience in order to compete. It is important to note however that Feng and Feng’s study was published in 2003 and likely no longer completely represents the contemporary distribution of game servers in light of videogaming’s continued uptake as a hobby and serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992) pursuit, as well as broad developments in global internet infrastructure and efforts to bridge the “digital divide” (Ortiz, 2010). Nevertheless, Feng and Feng’s study reflects the northern centrality of contemporary esports, with the majority of major events, leagues, and tournaments taking place across North America, Europe, and East Asia. As I have noted elsewhere (Cumming,

2021), Australian esports players and other professionals like commentators often move to the northern hemisphere to progress their careers, viewing the limited opportunities, infrastructure, and competition within Australia as lacklustre and a ceiling on their potential growth.

From a research perspective, Kirschenbaum (2008) asserts that it is tempting for scholars studying digital media to be fixated on what Montfort (2004) describes as *screen essentialism*; the assumption that what is seen on a screen is all that needs to be considered. In many ways the placeless perception of esports purported in pandemic-era news reports are screen essentialist, for they largely focus on esports' persistent audio-visual presence on streaming platforms while often overlooking the economic and cultural losses caused by the many major esports events and conventions that were cancelled in response to restrictions on public gatherings (Fakazli, 2020). Such notions have in recent years been challenged by materialist approaches to media studies. As Bollmer (2015) argues, users and audiences should be understood as a part of the material technological infrastructures they use, rather than as external operators. In this way he asserts that scholars should look beyond what is simply present on screen and consider how the materiality of infrastructure and place shape the ways that digital media is engaged with. While the work presented in this thesis does not claim to strictly adhere to the doctrines of materialist media studies, it nevertheless acknowledges a need to look beyond esports' screen presence and further explore the material places in which esports spectatorship occurs, as well as the placeful practices which frame experiences of esports spectatorship.

3.5 Esports spectatorship

3.5.1 Early esports spectatorship: Barcrafts

While the term 'esports' appeared in academic literature from as early as 2006 (Wagner, 2006), appearances of what could be considered as contemporary esports spectatorship appeared roughly 6 years later in 2012. These early articles make no mention of the term 'esports' or of spectatorship, but rather describe a series of events called Barcrafts: organised gatherings of fans in bar (or other restaurant-type venue) environments for the spectatorship of live or pre-recorded competitive *StarCraft II* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010) matches over internet-protocol

television (Kow and Young, 2013). Although Barcrafts predate the rise of esports that occurred in the mid 2010's, they can nevertheless be considered a form of esports spectatorship under the definition outlined in previous paragraphs. As such, they offer a foundational understanding of esports spectatorship as it started to gain academic interest.

Barcrafts take place in general purpose bars, rather than bars dedicated to the spectatorship of esports. Additionally, Barcraft events are organised and intermittent, in contrast to spectatorship at conceptually similar sports bars where spectatorship may take place any time during the bar's opening hours without prior planning or coordination. Although Barcrafts have a moderate presence in literature relating to esports and competitive gaming, most are simply passing mentions that are rarely elaborated on. Nevertheless, this small corpus surrounding Barcrafts currently offers the most comprehensive understandings of esports spectatorship in places between the stadium and the home. In the term's first mention in academic literature, Scholz (2012) briefly explores Barcrafts as an emergent mode of *StarCraft II* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010) broadcast. Scholz discusses that Barcrafts remedy the decline of in-person competitive gaming events following the fall of the LAN party movement and the rise of online gaming (Vogelgesang, 2003, cited in Scholz, 2012). In this sense, Scholz asserts that the competitive *StarCraft II* scene benefits from Barcrafts in two ways. Firstly, game's developers and esports organisers benefit from a greater number of fans celebrating *StarCraft II*. For spectators, Barcrafts offer an easily accessible alternative local venue to watch major *StarCraft II* tournaments with like-minded fans. Kow, Young and Tekinbaş (2014) expand on this assessment, asserting that the gathering of fans and friends to a situated place to spectate *StarCraft II* helps provide a support network for players living in the same geographical area. The passion and communication demonstrated at Barcrafts and the need for them to be formally organised are characteristics suggested by Groen (2013) as being "the key to enter the [*StarCraft II*] community."

These descriptions portray Barcrafts as offering an opportunity for *StarCraft II* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010) community members to interact in person following the professionalisation of esports, which saw grassroots community endeavours replaced with professionalised productions held in stadia. Similarly, Barcrafts are also viewed as often replicating some sort of existing spectating experience, rather

than striving to produce an original, novel experience of its own (Champlin, 2019). Ultimately, Barcrafts are portrayed as performing an essential function within the *StarCraft II* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010) community by nurturing a sense of cohesion among members through its accessibility and situated nature; they are social affairs that are engaged with for reasons beyond solely watching. This observation permeates throughout literature regarding esports spectatorship more broadly. Based on a study of esports spectators at the site of play and on video sharing platforms, Cheung and Huang (2011) describe community interaction as a defining aspect of esports spectatorship, Cheung and Huang's study is relatively old in relation to the timeline of contemporary esports, being conducted early in the rise of esports and prior to the widespread adoption of online livestreaming platforms as the typical and dominant outlet for esports spectatorship. Nevertheless, their findings persist and are reflected in more recent research into esports spectatorship that tend to focus on esports spectatorship on livestreaming platforms.

As a consequence of livestreaming platforms' rise to prominence as the typical way to spectate esports, esports spectatorship has come to be characterised in recent academic literature as largely engaged with on personal devices in domestic environments. Nevertheless, a smaller corpus of literature concerning esports spectatorship outside of domestic contexts exist, predominately focusing on spectatorship at the site of play in places like stadia or convention centres (see Nick Taylor, 2016b; Szablewicz, 2016; Lee, 2019; Sjöblom et al., 2018). Outside of the site of play and the home, there are few publications which consider alternative contexts of spectatorship, most of which concern Barcrafts.

3.5.2 Spectatorship trends and spectator motivations

There exist two main areas of focus in the expanding academic corpus of esports spectatorship research: motivations and behaviours of esports spectatorship, and the evolution of esports spectatorship trends. Van Ditmarsch (2013) examines how esports spectators are often also players of esports and producers of esports content. He argues that spectating modes in popular esports titles like *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) and streaming platforms like Twitch allow players to broadcast their play, thus becoming content producers. Based on this observation, van Ditmarsch asserts that the lines that separates esports fans, players, and content

producers are blurred, with a single individual often engaging in two or more of these activities.

This contrasts Nick Taylor's (2016b) argument that the line between esports spectators and players has become increasingly defined. Based on his experiences at two physically-situated Major League Gaming (MLG) esports events held in 2008 and 2012, he observed a shift from a model of participation which saw attendees as both players and spectators to one which saw attendees act solely as spectators. At the 2008 event, the demarcation between spectator and player was ambiguous. Attendees at the event were commonly there not only to spectate, but to also partake in the tournament as competitors, their labour thus working to constitute the actual competitive spectacle of the event. In the 2012 event however, Nick Taylor notes how a clear distinction between player and spectator was made. Players were portrayed as specialised professionals who competed at the event for the enjoyment of an audience of spectators, who attended the event only to spectate. Here, the labour of the audience was more akin to those of conventional media spectacles, being targets for sponsors and advertisers.

Nick Taylor's (2016b) observations continue to persist, with major esports events structured and composed like conventional sporting events. Professional players are showcased on an elevated stage to massive audiences watching online or co-present at the site of play. He argues that the professionalisation and economic potential of esports has driven this shift, making the 'work' of the audience less about participating in play and more about watching showcased skilful play while engaging in the consumption of shopping, food, and advertising. This marks one of the first times a media that has typically been synonymous with the concept of participatory consumption has evolved to resemble passive forms of engagement (Nick Taylor, 2016b). It is worth noting that Nick Taylor looked exclusively at physically attended esports events while van Ditmarsch (2013) predominately looked at events spectated remotely online, leaving the possibility for both conclusions to be correct in their respective contexts. Regardless, it complicates the trend noted in writings of convergence (Jenkins, 2006) which typically sees transitions from passive to participatory consumption of media.

These findings presented by Nick Taylor (2016b) highlight a trend identified by researchers that esports is becoming increasingly sportified. Heere (2018) outlines two approaches of sportification:

1. To “view, organize or regulate a non-sport activity in such a way that it resembles a sport and allows a fair, pleasurable, and safe environment for individuals to compete and cooperate, and compare their performances to each other, and future and past performances.”
2. To “add a sport component to an existing activity in order to make it more attract to its audiences.”

Through the process of sportification, broadly perceived positive aspects of sport are evoked and capitalised upon to promote a familiar sense of popularity, engagement, entertainment, and excitement in a non-sporting activity (Lopez-Gonzalez and Griffiths, 2018). In the case of esports, this has manifested in the growing prevalence of city-based franchised teams, organisational structures, support facilities, professional networks for players, and the play of matches and tournaments in conventional sporting venues like stadia (Karhulahti, 2017; Heere, 2018). Sportification relies on established, widely accepted imagery and values of sports. Through sportification, esports has adopted the aesthetics and iconography of conventional sports, and consequently the histories and meanings associated with them. It is speculated that the widespread sportification of esports was induced by the adoption of management strategies from conventional sporting industries (Cunningham et al., 2018), although no evidence has linked the two definitively. Others point towards earlier eras in determining when esports first was sportified. Kerttula (2020) observes that televised competitive videogaming tournaments of the 1980’s embody many sportified elements. While Kerttula questions whether the sportification seen in contemporary esports is a direct continuation of that observed in these early tournaments, he concludes that conventional sports broadcasting has long been an attractive reference used in the creation of spectacle across esports’ history.

Taylor, Jenson and de Castell (2009) describe how the addition of conventional sporting elements to esports helped legitimise the practice, but also inadvertently fashioned esports as a hypermasculine practice. As esports becomes increasingly

sportified, its identity and core values also change. As Nick Taylor (2016b) observed, the grassroots, community driven formats of esports events of the late 2000's have since been largely replaced by highly professionalised and composed spectacle events. The identity of the esports player has also changed. Originally a role of leisure or serious leisure, now leading esports players are considered professionals in the sense that they pursue esports as a career, dedicating themselves full time at the highest level and earning a living through their profession.

As the standards for success grow in relation to the professionalisation of esports, so too does the barrier for entry, requiring more time investment in order to remain competitive against other contenders. Those who are able to become esports professionals often become public figures, attaining the status of celebrity among spectators and fans. Unlike conventional sports, esports fandom is more driven by admiration of individual players than of teams. Karakus (2015) notes that esports fans often follow a team purely because their favourite player is on it, and once that player moves to another team, fans will mostly follow them rather than staying with the they departed. Although there exists similar examples of personality-driven fandom in conventional sports, this phenomenon is more pronounced in esports (Karakus, 2015).

The sportification of esports has amplified the similarities the practice shares with conventional sports, inviting further comparisons between their spectatorship. Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) and Pizzo et al. (2018) observe that much like in conventional sports, aggressive playstyles and behaviours are preferred by esports spectators and correlate with spectator attendance. Their findings converge with those of Lee and Schoenstedt (2011) and Weiss and Schiele (2013), which found that competition, escapism, and challenge were all major motivators for esports spectatorship. Cheung and Huang (2011) found that suspense, particularly derived from the spectator knowing tactical information the player does not, is a quality present across enjoyable experiences of both esports and conventional sports spectatorship. This “information asymmetry” allows spectators partake in the construction of the match's narrative, allowing them to create predictions and enjoy a feeling of suspense and fulfilment.

However, a key difference between conventional sports and esports exists in relation to the role of players and spectators. Rambusch, Taylor and Susi (2017) assert that in comparison to conventional sports, more esports fans also play the esports titles they spectate. In their comparison between motivations of esports and sports spectatorship, Lee and Schoenstedt (2011) find that the spectatorship motivations of competition, peer pressure and skill building for actual play were statistically higher in esports spectatorship than in conventional sports spectatorship, reflecting the idea that esports spectators often play the esports titles they watch. Additionally, the concept of esports acting as a surrogate for playing is reflected in the literature, with a lack of time or adequate gaming equipment being cited as the impetus for this substitution (Goncharov, 2018; Naraine and Wear, 2019 p.86) For those who do not have the time or resources available to play a certain game, esports offers opportunities for vicarious participation and satisfaction (Qian et al., 2019).

In these cases, the spectator usually has some sort of prior knowledge of the game, ranging from having previously played the game regularly and having stopped due to other commitments, or being surrounded by others in their friend groups who engage in the play or spectatorship of the game. This contributes to a perspective across esports literature that most spectators hold at least a moderate level of understanding of an esports title prior to spectating it. Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) suggest that due to the complexity and rapid pace of prominent esports titles, a greater amount of knowledge is needed in order to admire and sufficiently understand the spectacle of competitive play. Hilvoorde and Pot (2016) additionally propose that a strong degree of “digital literacy” (Martin, 2008) is required to appreciate the skilfulness of esports; in this case a form of *gaming literacy* (Zimmerman, 2009) pertaining to the esports title watched. Unlike in conventional sports where the embodied actions of athletes are easy to relate to one’s own body and bodily movements, embodied movements in esports are performed on a micro level and are usually not the focus of attention. Instead, the focus of esports spectacle is placed in the virtual playing space of the game that is extended into by the players. Although someone with an understanding of the esports title may be able to recognise skilfulness through the captured in-game actions of players, it is much less evident to those not as well versed.

The notion of esports being complex and hard to understand from a spectator perspective has been an area of interest in recent academic human-computer interaction research. Projects have seen the development of tools to make esports spectatorship easier and more accessible for novices. For example, Charleer et al. (2018) developed a real-time dashboard to support esports spectatorship based on 788 survey responses. The dashboard was designed to alleviate the notably high cognitive load of esports spectatorship by presenting “real-time visualisations of relevant game-play metrics.” From their evaluation of the dashboard they found that while some spectators found utility in its ability to clearly direct them to important moments in the match, others found the visualisations distracting and added further mental processing. Kim et al. (2018) explore the use of virtual reality technologies for esports spectatorship, a medium that could grant esports fans greater autonomy over their spectatorship by bypassing much of the practice’s seemingly inherent mediation, granting the spectator their own personal lens to view the virtual game space.

Besides similarities to conventional sports spectatorship, Shaw (2013, as cited in Shaw et al., 2019 p.79) observes similarities between esports spectatorship and the engagement in internet-related activities. This point is later elaborated on by Shaw et al. (2019) who suggest that esports spectatorship bridges “the gap between videogame fandom and traditional sports.” In particular they suggest that there may be auxiliary aspects present at physically-situated, live esports events that may motivate attendance beyond the act of watching. They point towards the presence of cosplayers at major esports events as a potential reason to attend for those wanting to see their favourite videogame characters acted out in reality. As Antonellos, Nansen and Gibbs (2020) describe, cosplay is popular among many videogaming and popular-culture communities that “now exist in interconnected physical and digital spaces of practice.” Cosplay has been noted as having a strong presence at esports events, whether it be fans attendings in costume out of passion (Shaw et al., 2019 p.79) or professional cosplayers commissioned by event organisers as a part of an event’s staging (Schorr, 2017). As Kaukiainen (2018) describes, cosplay at gaming and esports events contributes to the building of a desirable atmosphere and adds value to the event for attendees. This observation closely relates to the staging of sports spectator experiences described in Chapter 2.2, in which the composition of

auxiliary elements surrounding the act of watching enhances the spectator experience.

While esports events are often staged for the sake of the spectator experience, other research has noted cases where esports events have been staged for other reasons. Drawing on experiences of attending various esports events as an academic, T.L. Taylor (2012) suggests that the construction of a crowd is an integral aspect of esports events, rather than just the presence of an audience. She recalls an emphasis made by the floor management of a large esports competition on shifting around audience members to create the illusion of a partisan division between fans and sense of a larger crowd.

Szablewicz's (2016) work on live esports spectacles in China shows a comparable experience at a Chinese esports tournament. In this case, Szablewicz argues that crowd manipulation was used to dispel the negative image of esports in Chinese culture by portraying esports as a healthy and socially acceptable form of videogaming. In one experience, Szablewicz describes how the enthusiastic, cheering crowd at a stadium-situated esports event was only present during the opening and closing ceremony. This was done for the sake of the audiences spectating remotely, who the event's organisers anticipated would respond positively to the imagery of a packed stadium. In this sense, the event that took place in the stadium from which the broadcast was produced had become merely representational, while the mediated experience of remote spectatorship had become that to be "directly lived" (Szablewicz, 2016). This aligns with what Nick Taylor (2016b) describes as the "audiencing" of esports spectators. Drawing on Bratich's (2008) work, Nick Taylor details how esports organisations seek to transform spectators into audiences by directing their "affective labor" of spectatorship towards desired objectives. Under traditional models of commercial media, this affective labor usually takes the form of being exposed to sponsors and advertising (Fuchs, 2015). In Szablewicz's case, the spectators in the stadium were 'audienced' to act as props in the mediated broadcast of the event streamed to remote spectators.

3.5.3 Data in esports spectatorship

As in conventional sports, the tracking and presentation of data is key aspect of esports spectatorship. These data are often derived from sets of 'Key Performance

Indicators' (KPIs) which track player performance against a number of metrics. These KPIs are then either translated visually in the form of graphs or tables for the spectator to view, or are used by commentators as an additional resource with which to craft a narrative of the match (Kokkinakis et al., 2020). For example, Block et al. (2018) illustrates the usefulness of the 'Net Worth' KPI in *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013), which indicates the total value of gold that a player's 'hero' avatar has accumulated during the match. As *Dota 2* has no direct analogue for a 'score' that one may be accustomed to in conventional sports like soccer, KPIs like 'Net Worth' offer insight into which team or player holds an advantage in a match (Kokkinakis et al., 2020). Furthermore, the analysis of KPIs across matches are useful for contextualising performance in current and upcoming competitive play. For example, Egliston's (2019) work on esports broadcast expertise notes how the 'Pick Rate' and 'Win Rate' of certain playable heroes in professional competitive *Dota 2* demonstrate "shifts in play techniques", which signal changes in "the rhythms of play" in across amateur players. Specifically, he notes a rhythmic shift of play after the professional use of an unconventional hero focused on a more aggressive playstyle, making resource-gather related KPIs less indicative of performance.

Despite their benefits, there exists some limitations surrounding the current use of KPIs in the mediation of esports spectacle. Block et al. (2018) elaborates that while KPIs broadly work well to quantify performance, their generalisability often creates ambiguities when seeking more specific or contextual information. Returning to the example of *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013), Block et al. explains that due to the varied objectives and playstyles of the over 100 heroes present in the game, 'Net Worth' is not indicative of strong performance for every hero in all situations. While some heroes produce value in their ability to generate gold, others derive value from their team-support or scouting strengths.

3.5.4 Limitations in esports spectator research

Much of the research concerning esports spectatorship motivations affirm consistent findings and are based in similar methodologies. Unsurprisingly, many also share similar limitations. A common shortcoming exists in the samples of many esports studies which place an emphasis on mostly enthusiast esports spectators to infer the motivations of esports spectators more broadly. This is both by design and indirectly as a result of self-selecting sampling methods. Cheung and Huang (2011) generate

different categories of esports spectators ranging from the marginally interested and less knowledgeable to the dedicated and experienced fan. However, their methods only draw from and examine comments from online esports discussion forums, which are mostly populated with enthusiast esports followers. Similarly, Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) concede that their self-selected recruitment methods mainly attracted participants already interested and actively engaged with esports. On a similar note, Weiss and Schiele's (2013) survey sourced its participants at a physically attended esports event. Furthermore, they used motivations related to videogame play to measure spectatorship, rather than motivations directly related to spectating. As Lee and Schoenstedt's (2011) study actively sought to compare the consumption motivations of only experienced esports and conventional sports fans, participants with little or no spectatorship experience were excluded from their data set.

Another limitation shared across existing research on esports spectatorship motivations is the use of measurement scales and metrics that were not designed with esports in mind. This relates to the increasingly outdated notion that esports field of research is not well developed, acting as a justification for the adaption of pre-existing instruments. Wagner (2006) was the first proponent for such an approach, suggesting that methodologies and approaches native to sports science could be appropriated for "eSports science" to help accelerate the building of a knowledgebase surrounding esports and establish a separate field of research for the practice. Cheung and Huang (2011) later lent further credibility to this approach, observing that sports and esports share similar spectating motivations. They compare their findings of a Grounded Theory-based analysis of online comments relating to *StarCraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 1998) esports with the findings of Trail, Fink and Anderson (2003), who used a questionnaire based on their previously developed (2000) Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) to identify spectatorship motivations of conventional sports fans. Cheung and Huang identified that spectators of *StarCraft* esports shared the same motivational factors of aesthetics, achievement, drama, escape, knowledge, physical skills and sociality that Trail et al. (2003) identified in relation to conventional sports spectatorship. Although appropriate for the time, authors almost a decade later still largely rely on adapted measurement instruments.

Following Cheung and Huang's (2011) comparison of sports and esports spectatorship motivations, numerous widely cited academic publications have made use of measurement instruments from adjacent fields. For example, Weiss and Schiele (2013) measure the consumer needs of esports by applying Uses and Gratifications theory across ten interviews with European esports industry experts and 360 esports fans. Although they infer motivations for spectating esports from their analysis, as mentioned previously they do so based on a set of motivational categories pertaining the play of videogames rather than videogame spectatorship. In Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) use Cheung and Huang's observations as the basis for their own employment of the MSSC to measure esports spectatorship motivations. Following the popularisation of their article, subsequent research often refers to Hamari and Sjöblom's methodology as a framework for measuring motivations for esports spectatorship (see Pizzo et al., 2018; Sjöblom et al., 2019).

Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) employed a slightly modified MSSC to measure motivations of esports spectatorship. Their alterations were not done as a way to adjust the scale for the context of esports, but were rather done so in accordance with updated guidelines suggested by Fink, Trail and Anderson (2002) and Trail (2012), which saw the rephrasing of the escape subscale, the removal of the family subscale, the addition of a novelty subscale, and the addition of a 'enjoyment of aggression' subscale. However, they acknowledge that that the scale may not have captured aspects of esports spectatorship that potentially differ greatly from conventional sports. They cite the flow effect size of their findings as a potential indicator of this possibility and conclude that a more granular, qualitative approach may be appropriate to capture the complexities unique to esports.

Pizzo et al. (2018) employ a similar approach to compare spectator motivations of esports and conventional sports using a scale based on 15 motivational factors taken from the MSSC and Sport Interest Inventory (SII) (Funk, Mahony and Nakazawa, 2001). In choosing this approach, they intended to highlight similarities across a broad range of consistent motives between the two forms of spectatorship, acknowledging that it would likely not be able to capture the full spectrum of spectator motivations. Like Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), they explicitly speculate that some esports-specific factors may not have been captured using their instruments and note statistical insignificance in some of their results. They suggest

that future research should place focus on exploring spectatorship motivations unique to esports.

In response to the limitations of these adapted methods, recent studies have started developing and making use of measurement instruments intended for the context of esports. Qian et al. (2019) presents the development of a purpose-built scale to measure online esports spectatorship motivations. Mirroring the reflections Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), they argue that existing empirical research on esports spectatorship “has failed to consider the unique digital, immersive, and interactive nature of the esport spectating environment.” They also further highlight the unsuitability of sport motivation scales like the SII and the MSSC to measure esports spectator motivators, citing the statistical insignificance that emerged in some of the results presented by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) and Pizzo et al. (2018). They employed a mixed-methods approach to develop, test, and evaluate the Motivation Scale for Esports Spectatorship (MSES). Using a Grounded Theory-based approach framed by Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) and Uses and Gratification Theory (Ruggiero, 2000), Qian et al. identified 10 motives for online esports spectatorship from 8 interviews and 207 survey responses. Using these motives as basis for the MSES, they tested their newly created apparatus through an online survey receiving 1309 responses.

While the majority of motivating factors in the MSES were similar to the sports spectator motives found in the MSSE and SII, they identified two motives unique to online esports spectatorship: ‘vicarious sensation’ and ‘skill improvement’. The former refers to “a strong sense of immersion and involvement that make people feel they are actually playing the game by watching others play.” Although similar experiences have been noted in conventional sports spectatorship, Qian et al. (2019) argue that this is sensation is stronger in online esports spectatorship as it is commonly spectated from the same perspective that it is played from. They argue that ability to spectate from the exact perspective of the player, particularly in first-person shooter games, creates a more vivid and immersive spectator experience that is unable to be had in most forms of conventional sports spectatorship. Likewise, they argue that the motive of skill improvement is more pronounced in esports and differs fundamentally to similar motives in conventional sports spectatorship, as

many esports spectators also actively play the titles they spectate and seek to improve by learning from spectated professional play (Seo and Jung, 2016).

Qian et al. (2019) also note how motives with counterparts in the MSSE and SII differed in perspective. They observe that skill appreciation in online esports spectatorship does not relate to athleticism, physicality, or physical attractiveness as it would in conventional sports. Rather, skill appreciation pertained to mechanical understanding, tactics, hand-eye coordination, and dexterity, aligning with findings produced by Seo (2016). Qian et al. use this reconceptualisation to refute Hamari and Sjöblom's (2017) MSSE-based findings which found that social interaction is not a strong motivator for esports spectatorship, despite social functions being present in many esports spectating interfaces and platforms. While socialisation in the conventional sports context of the MSSE and SII relates to in-person forms of socialisation, Qian et al. found that elements of socialisation and communality are sought through online platforms when spectating esports online. Qian et al. are not the only authors to make this observation, with Shaw et al. (2019, pp.81) highlighting similar social dimensions of esports spectatorship. Ford et al. (2017) also finds that live-chat functionality built into the spectator interface of Twitch came to define experiences of esports spectatorship on the platform, creating a sense of intermediate communality and acting as an online analogue for cheering among a crowd. Musabirov et al. (2018) also found that social elements are valued in experiences of esports spectatorship. They note how online chatrooms allow esports spectators to engage in the types of cheering and spontaneous conversations normally found in stadia or sports bars.

3.6 Research questions

Across the previous three chapters I have detailed the key concepts crucial to this thesis. Chapter 2 clarified what it means to spectate, outlining how the concept pertains to the experience of watching, rather than the act of watching itself. Chapter 3 then described how authenticity factors into spectatorship and how different schools of thought approach the concept. In this chapter, existing literature on the topics of esports and esports spectatorship was explored to identify areas that would benefit from further academic investigation. This chapter has defined esports, described how it evolved from early forms of competitive, presented the landscape of esports research, and identified existing approaches to esports spectatorship

research and their associated limitations. In essence, existing literature has worked to develop an understanding of esports as a concept and *why* it is spectated. However, there is still much to be understood about *how* esports is spectated and *what* esports spectatorship looks like in practice. To further illuminate these areas, the following overarching research question was developed:

Overarching research question: What are the qualities of esports spectatorship experiences?

To facilitate the answering of this question, three sub-questions were developed, each informed by one of three key areas of interest.

Firstly, existing esports spectatorship research tends to have an implicit focus on individualistic, domestic forms of spectatorship. Even when the mode of spectatorship is not explicitly mentioned in a piece of work, it is commonly implied to be through online platforms spectated on personal devices in the spectator's home. Online domestic spectatorship has become the dominate mode represented the literature. While this reflects the near-certain truth that the majority of esports spectatorship occurs in domestic environments on private screens, there is room to expand our understanding of esports spectator experiences to other sites. The sites of esports play, such as stadia and convention centres, are the most evident places of esports spectatorship beyond the home that has seen some focused academic investigation. While research regarding esports spectatorship beyond the home does exist, how different sites influence experiences of esports spectatorship receives comparatively little attention in comparison to spectator motivations.

As a result, existing research presents a sense a uniformity across esports spectatorship. As established in Chapter 2, spectatorship encompasses the experience of watching, which can be influenced by environmental factors. Simple elements like spectating device, seating position, surrounding iconography, and presence of other people have the potential to influence experiences of esports spectatorship. It was on this basis that a fundamental objective of this research should be to explore the experiences of esports spectatorship across a variety of spectating sites, comparing their similarities and differences. Thus, the following sub-question was proposed:

RQ1: How do spectatorship sites influence experiences of esports spectatorship?

RQ1 in particular played a pivotal role the research design of this thesis. In seeking to explore the experiences of esports spectatorship across various sites, the research course was designed around three ethnographic studies, each exploring the experiences of spectating esports at a different site of spectatorship. The three sites of spectatorship covered by the studies were based on those outlined by Bale (1996) in relation to soccer. He asserts that a single event can be experienced in three distinct settings. The first site is the physical location where the event is “live”, like stadia. The second site consists of the private domestic locations, like homes, where spectators can watch the broadcast of the event either alone or with the company of a small group of friends and family. The third site consists of public communal places like bars and sports clubs, where spectators can spectate in the company numerous, predominately anonymous fellow spectators. Bale claims that these environments offer contrasting experiences of spectatorship, and therefore attracting different spectators for varying reasons.

Bale’s framework establishes a single event can be experienced different across sites of spectatorship, their characteristics and affordances influencing the construction of spectating experiences in unique ways. The following sub-question seeks to explore how experiences of esports spectatorship are constructed by spectators across different sites:

RQ2: How do esports spectators construct experiences of esports spectatorship?

RQ2 also reflects the constructionist epistemology (Creswell, 2003, p 36) that has been adopted in this thesis, which views meaning and knowledge as socially co-constructed by individuals and the groups they reside in. This constructionist epistemology informs how the construction of esports spectator experiences are interpreted across the three studies. The perspectives of event organisers have occupied the attention of previous research exploring the construction of esports spectatorship experiences (see Nick Taylor, 2016b; Jenny et al., 2018; Dilek, 2019). However, there is room to explore the role that spectators themselves play in the construction of these experiences. Sports scholars including Bale (1996) and Weed

(2006; 2007; 2008) have found that spectators play a central role in the construction of conventional sports spectator experiences, working with their contextual surroundings to craft valued characteristics into their spectatorship. RQ2 embraces this opportunity to look beyond experiences of esports spectatorship as largely constructed by event organisers.

RQ2 ties in closely with RQ3, which seeks to investigate what esports spectators value in experiences of esports spectatorship and how they work to construct valued qualities into their spectatorship.

RQ3: What do esports spectators value in experiences of esports spectatorship?

As previously mentioned, much existing research on esports spectatorship has focused on spectator motivations. While this has developed comprehensive sets of factors which motivate esports spectatorship, research has yet to explore what these motivations embody. Spectatorship motivations can be thought of as framing what spectators anticipate and value in their spectating experiences (Gnoth, 1997; Fluker and Turner, 2000). RQ3 seeks to understand what qualities are valued in spectators' constructed experiences of spectatorship.

This research also indirectly assists in broadening the scope and range of representation in the academic esports corpus. Firstly, most existing research either views esports as a derivative of videogaming or sports, adapting methods and measurement instruments from these fields. This is a limitation noted by some authors of such research such as Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) and Pizzo et al. (2018). Although its origin can be traced back videogaming and sporting practices, as product of convergence (Jenkins, 2006) esports has built on its constituents and evolved into a unique practice with its own characteristics. To understand esports as it currently exists, a research approach that caters to its novel intricacies is needed.

Secondly, there is a current dominance of Western, specifically US-centric research in the academic esports corpus. Although authors often refer to South Korea, Japan and, China as key esportsing regions outside of the West, many more regions go unaccounted. Esports is not constrained to the US, Europe and South-East Asia; it has become a global practice enjoyed by millions worldwide. For a more comprehensive and representational understanding of esports spectatorship, greater

Chapter 3 – Esports literature and research

regional representation is required. With the research of this thesis situated in an Australian context, its findings help address this imbalance.

Chapter 4 – Research approach

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods, methodology, and research perspectives adopted in this thesis. As will be described in the following paragraphs, three studies were developed to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 2. These three studies were conducted under the ethnographic tradition of social investigation. Thus, the studies presented in this thesis investigate cultures surrounding esports spectatorship from the inside, relying on observations and interactions with spectators to understand the communities that they are a part of.

The ethnographic tradition has roots in sociological and anthropological research of the early 20th century, focusing on groups differing from the ‘norm’ of western society such as prostitutes, gamblers, and ‘primitives’ in far off lands (Button, 2000). Although intended to understand the drastic differences between these outsider communities and conventional society, over time it became evident that ethnographic studies succeeded at making apparent the ordinary and mundane similarities shared between these groups and those that western researchers belonged to. Contemporary work conducted in spirit of the ethnographic tradition spans across many disciplines beyond sociology and anthropology, including engineering, design, human-computer interaction, and game studies (Button, 2000). Unsurprisingly, the dissemination of the ethnographic tradition beyond its sociological and anthropological origins has led to divergences in ethnographic methods and methodologies (Knoblauch, 2005).

While a classical ethnographer may consider these derivative, often hastened forms of ‘ethnography’ as incorrectly labelled and positioned outside of the tradition, others argue that no one single way of conducting ethnographic research exists. The latter’s perspective argues that the ethnographic tradition is less defined by the specific tenets of classic ethnography, and more so by common elements applied across the range of ethnographic approaches (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004). These include the use of fieldwork conducted in the naturalistic settings, rich descriptions of social groups and their members, and an effort to understand such groups from the perspective of their members. Furthermore, Anderson (1997) argues that an “analytic mentality is central to the ethnographic tradition. An ethnographer should thus not only present

a literal retelling of the observations and interactions generated during research, but should also consider their presence and role as a researcher when interpreting these account

The studies presented in this thesis employ different takes on the ethnographic tradition. They represent range of approaches which illustrate modern forms of “rapid” (Button, 2000) or “quick” (Hughes et al., 1995) ethnography and a form more reminiscent of classical ethnography. These studies also represent the journey I underwent as a first-time ethnographer as I came to understand what it means to ‘do ethnography.’ Chronologically, Study 2 was conducted first in 2017, marking my first experience of conducting research within the ethnographic tradition. Seeking to understand motivations for spectating esports in stadia, Study 2 was designed akin to a rapid ethnography as described by Button, wherein I conducted fieldwork and semi-structured interviews over a total of five days split between two major esports events held in Sydney during 2017.

The use of rapid ethnographic methods in Study 2 were chosen due to the limited amount of time that could be spend in the field; the events only lasted five days in total. Conversely, Study 3 was next conducted in 2018 and took place in a Melbourne esports bar; a site of greater permeance and accessibility which allowed for a longer course of fieldwork more reminiscent of a classical ethnography. Building on my experiences of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Study 2, I conducted roughly five months of immersive fieldwork at the esports bar to understand the experiences of spectating esports in sites geographically and conceptually between the stadium and the home. Study 1 was the last to be conducted, taking place in 2019. This study did not involve fieldwork like Study 2 and 3, consisting of roughly one hour long semi-structured interviews with individuals who spectate esports in their homes. Nevertheless, this study was still conducted under the ethnographic tradition and worked to bring to bring the field of the home into the interview room. Participants were asked to bring photographs of the areas within their homes where spectate esports, working to illustrate their lived experiences of domestic esports spectatorship. Ultimately, the research presented in this thesis has made use of a range of research approaches that can be characterised as ethnographic.

Chapter 4 – Research approach

As noted in the previous two paragraphs, the studies of this thesis are not presented in chronological order. The rationale behind choice relates to presentation of ideas. Simply, the studies are presented in a way which best explains the overarching findings generated across them. Study 1’s exploration of esports spectatorship in the home provided insights into how esports fans perceived the experience of spectatorship at the stadium. In particular, the findings generated in Study 1 found that domestic esports spectators viewed the experiences of spectating esports at the stadium as authentic and sought to replicate characteristics of being in the stadium to authenticate their domestic spectatorship. Nevertheless, domestic spectators were often met with a variety of household obstacles when working to construct a sense of authenticity in their domestic spectatorship, having to make compromises.

With the stadium established as a perceived authentic site of esports spectatorship, Study 1 is followed by Study 2, transitioning from domestic spectators’ perceptions of the stadium to the experience of actually being there, allowing for a direct comparison between two. This transition also builds on perceptions of esports authenticity established in Study 1, exploring how spectatorship at the stadium was constructed as authentic both for those spectating in the stadium and those spectating remotely. This positioned the esports bar researched in Study 3 as a good way to conclude the presentation of research, exploring an interesting site which combined many aspects of the stadium and the home. While a remote site of spectatorship like the home, the bar was also a communal site like the stadium. By presenting Study 3 last, foundational observations made in Study 1 and 2 were built upon. In doing so, Study 3 explored how the bar was in many ways more homely than the home, offering spectators a greater degree of autonomy to authenticate their spectatorship through the replication of characteristics indicative of the stadium.

Table 1 Presented order of studies in comparison to chronological order of conduction.

Study	1	2	3
Presented order	First	Second	Third
Chapter	5	6	7
Chronological order	Third	First	Second
Year conducted	2019	2017	2018

The next section of this chapter outlines the ontological and epistemological perspectives adopted across the three studies and explains how they relate to the ethnographic tradition. I then I expand in detail my methodological implementation of ethnography across the three studies, wherein criticisms of ethnography are considered. Methods employed to generate data under this methodological implementation of ethnography is then described, as well as the methods employed to analyse these data. Description of the three studies' research designs are then detailed. Finally, the chapter concludes with reflections of my role as a researcher in the ethnographic fieldwork across the studies.

4.2 Theoretical perspective and ethnography

4.2.1 Ethnography as methodology

Although some consider ethnography a method, in this thesis I firmly view ethnography as a methodology. The term 'ethnography' has become polysemous in recent years, its constituent elements difficult to definitively identify. For example, the academic discipline of human-computer interaction during the 2000's saw the emergence of 'new' ethnographic approaches following the transition of computers from the workplace to the home, thus introducing a new dominant research field. As Crabtree et al. (2009) describe, the ethnographic study of *computers and culture* rather than *computers and work* created "an entirely different order of ethnographic study" to those previously employed, derived from different and occasionally competing sets of epistemological perspectives.

While some describe ethnography as "an approach" that relies on observation and some degree of "integration into the society being studied" (Bell, 1993, p. 10), others suggest that ethnography is a method to be used in broader methodologies (Kramer and Adams, 2017). *Case study*, *participant observation*, and *fieldwork* are all terms that are commonly generalised as ethnography or ethnographic methods. While it is undeniable that these research approaches feature prominently in contemporary ethnographic research, they are not inherently ethnographic and are used widely in other research strategies. Rather, these approaches become ethnographic when employed under the direction of an ethnographic way of knowing; a desire to understand the experience of what groups of individuals do through the investigation of cultures in their genuine contexts. It is for this reason that

ethnography is considered a methodology in this thesis. As Whitehead (2004, p.3) explains “ethnography is more than simply methods,” having “ontological and epistemological properties.” These are the underlying theoretical perspectives which direct and define how understanding is constructed in a methodology, rather than methods alone. The following section outlines the theoretical perspective that underscores the interpretation of ethnography as a methodology adopted in this thesis and employed across the three studies.

4.2.2 Perspective idealist ontology

The research presented in this thesis is embedded in an approach to reality that has been characterised by Blaikie (2007, p. 16) as having an idealist ontology. In essence, reality under an idealist ontology is constructed by our own perceptions of what is real and what is not. At a glance, an idealist ontology shares similarities with a cautious realist ontology, which posits the existence of an external reality that can only be imperfectly interpreted through our inherent human lens (Blaikie, 2007, p. 15). Both ontologies view reality as experienced by humans as a social construct. However, idealism is distinguished from realism in that it views the notion of an external world itself as a socially constructed concept. Atheistic idealists in particular adhere to this perspective of reality closely, denying the existence or relevancy of an external world. Alternatively, Blaikie (2007, p. 17) describes perspective idealism, which views “constructions of reality as just different ways of perceiving and making sense of an external world.” Although a departure from the ‘pure’ tenets of idealism held by the atheistic school of thought, perspective idealism still pertains to the perception of ideas as reality. Whereas a realist places emphasis on understanding reality through subjective human interpretations of an external world, a perspective idealist places emphasis on understanding interpretations of ‘real’ as constructed in individuals’ perceptions of an external world (Blaikie, 2007, p. 14-17).

My understanding of esports spectatorship is informed this perspective idealist ontology. I understand esports, alongside other forms of live entertainment, as a single spectacle that can be experienced across a variety of contexts in different ways. Thus, while an esports event may be produced once, the experiences of spectating that event are many and vary depending on context. Although a realist ontology may have been an appropriate way to approach esports spectatorship in this way, a

perspective idealist ontology was ultimately settled upon. This ontological perspective was chosen as this research not only seeks to understand how the subjective experiences of esports spectatorship differs across contexts, but also how esports spectators construe their spectating experiences as ‘real’ or not. In this case, constructs of ‘real’ relate to authenticity in esports spectatorship. As mentioned in Chapter 2 the concept of authenticity is closely related to ideas of genuineness and ‘the real’ as opposed to ‘the fake’. In seeking to understand how valued senses of authenticity are constructed by esports spectators, this thesis seeks to understand constructs of ‘real’ as perceived in their experiences of spectatorship.

4.2.3 Constructionist epistemology

A theoretical perspective is formed when an ontology is combined with an epistemology (Creswell, 2003, p. 6). Whereas ontology relates to the nature of reality, epistemology describes the theory of knowledge that the researcher adopts. Thus, the way a researcher constructs and understands knowledge is reflected by the tenets which define their chosen epistemology. By formally adhering to an epistemology, the researcher’s work can be verified in comparison to the epistemology’s constituent doctrines. Essentially, ontology describes how the researcher understands “what is,” while epistemology describes how the researcher understands “how we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). In tandem as a theoretical perspective, ontology and epistemology illuminate the philosophical stance and associated assumptions of the researcher and their research. Consequently, a theoretical perspective details the underlying philosophical stance of a methodology and offers context regarding its construction of logic (Crotty, 1998, p. 66).

Throughout the course of this research I have adopted a constructionist epistemology. Under constructionism, the world is understood through subjective meanings associated with objects and experiences. Central to this epistemology is the significance of social context in the development behaviours and rituals. Constructionists understand that social contexts incubate the social phenomena that behaviours and rituals originate from (Creswell, 2003, p 36.). Thus, a constructionist recognises not only that meanings and knowledge are generated from the co-created social realities of individuals or groups, but also from the interactions that the researcher has with participants. In essence, the interactions that people have with the world they interpret work to construct meanings. Aligning with idealist ontology,

constructionism understands that it is impossible for an individual to directly observe an ‘objective’ external reality (if such a thing even exists), for we as human beings observe our world through a lens clouded by our underlying ideas, concepts, past experiences, and existing knowledge (Blaikie, 2007, p. 17). The idea of a single objective truth is devalued under constructionism, while varied subjective interpretations are valued and considered insightful.

This value placed on the multiplicity of perspectives reflects constructionism’s four central tenets as outlined by Creswell (2003, p. 6):

1. An emphasis on understanding.
2. The recognition and value of the varied perspectives and meanings held by research participants.
3. The recognition that knowledge and meaning are socially and historically constructed.
4. An emphasis on generating theory.

At this point it is also important to clarify the distinction between *constructionism* and *constructivism*. Although similar (both conceptually and etymologically) and sometimes used interchangeably, the key differences between the two lies in their focus. While a *constructivist* focuses on how an individual engages with and makes sense of objects in the world, a *constructionist* focuses on the contextual cultures and subcultures we belong to and impart us with meanings (Crotty, 1998, p. 79). Simply, *constructivism* focuses on the filtered interpretations of the world, while *constructionism* focuses on the filter itself and the influences which constitute it. Nevertheless, in describing constructionism in the previous paragraph, literature concerning both *constructionism* and *constructivism* has been drawn on. While these concepts differ in their focus, they share the same core tenets and ontological alignment. The choice has been made to adhere to a *constructionist* epistemology over a *constructivist* epistemology as this thesis is not only interested in the experiences of spectating esports, but also the underlying factors which influence spectating experiences. The spectatorship is an activity strongly associated with esports and broader videogaming cultures and subcultures. In adopting a constructionist epistemology, I was able to understand experiences of esports spectatorship in the cultural contexts they exist in.

It is important to note that while *constructionism* and *constructivism* are similar yet distinct concepts, they both belong to the social constructivist theory of knowledge, which posits that knowledge is produced by humans through social and culture construction (Amineh and Asl, 2015). This is important to note, as in Chapter 2 it was asserted that a *constructivist* approach to authenticity was adopted in this thesis, and Section 4.2.5 will describe in detail the adaption of *constructivist* Grounded Theory methods in the development of data analysis procedures used to generate findings across the three studies. Although these concepts and approaches are not explicitly *constructionist*, they nevertheless reside closely within the same theory of knowledge and largely share many essential epistemological tenets. It is on this basis that I view *constructivist* theories and approaches as appropriate to draw on while being adhering to a *constructionist* epistemology.

4.2.4 Interpretivist theoretical perspective

The theoretical perspective formed from an idealist ontology and a constructionist epistemology is one that is inherently interpretivist. According to Neuman (2006, p. 87), interpretivism is a social research approach which “emphasises meaningful social action, socially constructed meaning, and values relativism.” Often relying on qualitative methods, interpretivist research places importance on the perspective of individuals and the meanings they create through their interactions with the world. An emphasis is placed on understanding the participant and their local, unique social context. Consequently, the validity of interpretivist research is not measured in statistical metrics. Rather, validity can be understood as the construction of knowledge that is authentic to the researcher’s accounts and subjects’ worldviews (Lankoski and Björk, 2015, p. 2). Ethnography is often described as interpretivist, for it is guided by the interpretivist desire to understand “what individuals intend when they do certain things” (O’Reilly, 2008, p. 120). Under interpretivism, understanding is not intended to generate knowledge of the word through objective inferences. Rather, to understand is to interpret while remaining “sensitive to cultural values and the relevance of meaning for actions” (O’Reilly, 2008, 120). This manifests across ethnographic methodologies through endeavours to closely familiarise oneself with the subjects being researched to understand the perspectives and reasonings behind their actions.

4.3 Methodological application of ethnography

4.3.1 Ethnographic research strategy and concepts

With the theoretical perspective established, this section will describe in greater detail the methodological approach to ethnography adopted in this research. A methodology can be considered an “overall research strategy” (Mason, 1996, p. 19). In this sense, it describes the underlying theories of understanding which inform the use of certain methods in a research course. Ethnography is a methodology that predominately concerns itself with the study of groups and people in uncontrived settings. It strives to understand not simply from observation, but also participation; an ethnographer conducts research to understand why individuals do something and how they experience the act of doing. Ethnographers understand meaning as generated from social interactions between groups of individuals and the contexts these interactions occur in. In this sense, ethnography is highly constructionist. Such a methodology is apt for the research topic of this thesis, as it seeks to understand the lived experiences of spectating esports by research esports fans. It not only explores how esports fans spectate esports across a variety of contexts, but also the experiences of their spectatorship in these contexts. Ethnography is an appropriate methodology in this regard, it focuses on the experience of interacting with a technology, rather than the technology itself (Dourish, 2014). Participant observation is a common method employed across ethnographic methodologies to construct rich narratives from the perspectives and meanings of social actors (Bevir and Rhodes, 2002, p. 10).

Gobo (2008) asserts that there are four key components that comprise a methodology. He describes the “range of solutions” and the “procedural steps,” two components commonly considered as constituting a methodology. The latter refers to the “systematic sequence of procedural steps” that the researcher follows once adopting a certain methodology, while the former refers to the “tricks of the trade” (Becker, 2008); improvised procedures not formally detailed in textbooks that are developed through experience and shared among fellow researchers. He also describes two other, more theoretical concepts which underscore a methodology: “cognitive modes” and “theories of scientific knowledge”.

A central (yet not exclusive) cognitive mode drives every knowledge-gathering act. Whether it be *listening* to the radio or *reading* a news article, we rely on our senses to derive meanings from our interactions with the world. Methodologies are no exception, as they are essentially strategies to gather and generate knowledge. Ethnographic research heavily relies on the cognitive mode of observation as its fundamental source of data. Central to ethnography is the observation of subjects and their interactions within uncontrived contexts. While other cognitive modes like questioning (interviewing participants) and watching (spectating sports) supplement the information generated from observation, it is often argued that the misalignment of what people claim they do and what they actually do solidifies observation as a particularly useful cognitive mode of ethnography (Mulkey and Gilbert, 1983).

Behind each methodology lies a collection of concepts which reflect its adopter's stance on how scientific knowledge is generated. This largely relates to ontology and epistemology as detailed in Section 4.2. Beyond the theoretical perspective, my role as a researcher also plays an essential role in my understanding of how scientific knowledge is generated. In particular, Blaikie and Priest (2019) emphasise the importance of the researcher-participant relationship. For example, a positivist 'detached observer' approach regards the researcher as an external observer who actively avoids interacting with their participants. It interprets detachment as an essential element of generating reliable knowledge by minimising opportunities for the researcher's own values to jeopardise the objectivity of the research. Under the interpretivist theoretical perspective of this thesis, a detached observer approach is a poor ideological fit. An interpretivist theoretical perspective values multiple viewpoints and disregards the notion of a perceivable objective universe. A 'faithful reporter' stance is more appropriate approach which more closely aligns with an interpretivist theoretical perspective. As a 'faithful reporter', the role of the researcher is to present participants' points of view by allow them to express it themselves. To do so, it is often necessary for the researcher to "become immersed in their way of life" (Blaikie and Priest, 2019, p. 59). The researcher also acts as an empathetic observer, recognising the essential act of placing one's self in the position of the participant to help comprehend their subjective perspectives. In doing so, this

approach brings the value of participants' subjective understandings to the forefront while asserting the validity of the data as co-created.

4.3.2 Criticisms and limitations of ethnography

Criticisms of ethnographic research are often directed from positivist perspectives. As a highly interpretivist methodology, a positivist may debate the validity of ethnographic research as only offering subjective inferences of the world, lacking a basis to verify claims and lacking the ability to be generalised (Bryman, 2016). However, others argue that ethnographic research can be generalised through other means. Bevir and Rhodes (2010) assert that ethnographic generalisability is derived from the “thick description” that culminates from the extensive use of ethnographic methods and strategies. In collecting data through an ethnographic methodology, the construction of what individuals are doing is pieced together (Geertz, 1973a, p.9), working to understand how they arrive at their perspectives. The ensuing thick description therefore offers an interpretation of what these constructs say about the social contexts from which they originated. As Bevir and Rhodes (2002) claim, the task of ethnography “is to set down the meanings that particular actions have for social actors and then say what these thick descriptions tell us about the society in which they are found.”

Geertz (1973a) describes this kind of interpretivist research is inherently incomplete, in the sense that the deeper it probes, the tighter its scope becomes. The pursuit of interpretivist research like ethnography produces assertions that are “essentially contestable” (Gallie, 1955). This is not a bad attribute for interpretivist research, as it values the idea that “progress is marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debate ... what gets better is the precision with which we vex each other” (Geertz, 1973a). In engaging in interpretivist research, the goal is not to unequivocally answer the questions we ponder. Rather, seeks to make visible the perspectives and meanings of those we research and includes them in “the consultable record of what man has said” (Geertz, 1973a), inviting discussion and comparison. In doing so, interpretations of the world from those who inhabit it as perceived by social actors are presented, the thick description offering insight into societies from which they belong (Bevir and Rhodes, 2002. p.10). It is from this position that further questions and lines of enquiry can be transferred to other contexts (Lauer and Asher, 1988, p.43).

Describing people in their social contexts is at the core of ethnography (Angrosino, 2007). Under classic approaches to ethnography, the ethnographer must act somewhat as a mediator; they must maintain a sense of neutrality in the collection of observations while working to detail and understand the subjective perspectives and interpretations of the subjects they are researching. As Strathern (2004) describes, qualitative methodologies like ethnography are “the deliberate attempt to generate more data than the investigator is aware of at the time of collection.” As a strategy fixated on the social actions of individuals in the cultures and contexts they inhabit, the strength of ethnography lies in its ability to identify the deeply imbedded meanings and understandings of particular situations, rather than seeking to identify the repetition of such findings in other places (Hammersley, Gomm and Foster, 2009 p. 236).

However, it is inaccurate to suggest that an ethnographer places themselves among a group to record the culture that is ‘there.’ Rather, Wolcott (1990) explains that “the ethnographer puts [culture] there” as an abstraction of the ethnographer’s interpretations of the behaviours and actions observed. By observing, detailing, and interpreting a group’s behaviours, rituals, and beliefs, an ethnographer attributes cultural understanding to it (Goodenough, 1976). As the aim of this thesis is to understand experiences of esports spectatorship across the contexts of various sites, ethnography exists as an appropriate methodology to achieve this task. Therefore, it was imperative for me as an ethnographer to immerse myself in these site-based spectating contexts to obtain a deep understanding of the social activities and behaviours that surround instances of esports spectatorship.

Although the above paragraphs have argued against common criticisms directed towards ethnographic research, ethnography like any other methodology nevertheless has some inherent limitations. Efforts to mitigate these limitations have been made across the research presented in this thesis. A limitation of ethnography that needed to be considered early when designing the research course related to the duration of study. Simply, much ethnographic research, particularly those adhering to a ‘classical’ approach as described in Chapter 4.1, often require a greater amount of time to be dedicated to fieldwork and data analysis in comparison to other methods, both qualitative and quantitative (Hogan, Dolan and Donnelly, 2009). The lengthy stints of fieldwork often associated with ethnographies highlight

a risk that by the time that the research is written up, it may be out of date or no longer useful. However, the more pressing issue relating to duration in the context of this thesis was the design of an ethnographic research course that could be completed in a timely manner within the three-to-four-year time span of a doctoral research degree. It was for this reason that only one of the three studies was conducted as a ‘classical’ ethnography, while the other two employed alternative ‘time-deepened’ (Millen, 2000) approaches that could be conducted in a quicker manner.

However, these time-deepening techniques segue into concerns regarding the validity of ethnographic research. Even in lengthy forms of classical ethnography, limitations regarding validity can pertain to ineptitude of the researcher. While evident across most approaches to research, this limitation is particularly pronounced in ethnography by virtue of its often individualistic, researcher focused approaches. Furthermore, inarticulate or inaccurate informants and an overall lack of intensiveness of the fieldwork also factor into concerns regarding validity in ethnographic research (Erickson, 1979; Overholt, 1980; Suryani, 2013). Apart from researcher aptitude, the limitations regarding informant inaccuracies and intensiveness have been often mitigated by the depth that lengthy, classical ethnographies develop. By being embedded in the research field for extended periods of time, it is expected that the ethnographer builds a nuanced relationship with their informants. The forming of these relationships between researcher and participant are paramount to his approach to ethnography, as they elicit truthful and accurate information. In addition, this embedded approach offers ethnographers the opportunity to explore and understand the research field, its inhabitants, and their culture beyond superficial level. In conducting rapid forms of ethnography, the limitations that are usually mitigated by virtue of the relatively long duration of classical ethnography become salient issues to consider.

The issue of researcher aptitude in was addressed in two predominant ways across the research. Firstly, in the first semester of my candidature and before performing fieldwork I took a coursework unit regarding research methods to gain foundational understanding of how to conduct research in the area of information systems, including qualitative and ethnographic methods. Secondly, as mentioned in Section 4.1 I have treated this research course as an educational experience in the pursuit

of learning what it means to conduct ethnographic research as a first-time ethnographer. In doing so, I maintained a reflective attitude towards my conduct, contemplating how my actions and performance as an ethnographer was affecting my research, data generation, data analysis, and findings. Throughout this process I brought up issues and concerns as they arose with my two supervisors for further support, perspectives, and validation.

Issues relating to the potential reporting of inaccurate or insufficient information from informants was address through how I presented myself as a researcher to them. As will be described in Section 4.4.1, I often maintained an observer-as-participant or a participant-as-observer identity when conducting fieldwork. In essence, I often presented myself as being knowledgeable of competitive videogaming culture to my informants. This was not something that I had to stage; I have a keen interest in competitive gaming as a personal hobby. Although I do not consider myself to be an insider of the esports community, I am knowledgeable of esportsing practices and maintain strong understanding of the lexicon and discourses expressed in esportsing and competitive videogaming communities. Participants were thus unafraid to talk about some of the more contextual elements of videogaming and esports culture that a layperson may not have fully comprehended.

Potential issues regarding intensiveness were addressed through the use of multiple observational techniques. While classical ethnographies typically focus on a core mode of observation, approaches employed to ‘time-deepen’ rapid ethnographies make use of a variety of observational sources and techniques to generate data from the field. In doing so, chances of “discovering exceptional and useful” (Millen, 2000) observations are increased to make up for a competitively shorter duration of time spent in the field. For example, data were not only generated from observations across the three studies, but also through the use of photography, the reviewing of esports broadcasts, semi-structured interviews with participants, and photographs provided by participants.

Erickson (1979) notes that another common limitation of ethnographies is a “bias towards the typical.” In short, Erickson argues there is a tendency for nuanced and extraordinary details encountered during fieldwork to be cut out or abstracted when condensing the thickness of ethnographic data into a written research output,

leaving only ‘typical’ instances which may not be fully representative of the studied field. In light of this limitation, a conscious effort was made to focus on some of the more extraordinary events which were encountered in the field, using them to highlight key findings salient throughout broader observations. This is most pronounced in Study 3 at the esports bar, where much of the presented thick description surrounds one particular night spent at the bar where The International 8 *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) esports tournament was screened to patrons. While an extraordinary night in comparison to others spent at the bar, it exemplified many observations made throughout the five months of fieldwork. By using the night of TI8 in an illustrative manner, I was able to express and explore many of the extraordinary nuances which surrounded ‘typical’ instances of spectatorship in the bar.

4.3.3 Why not phenomenology?

The subject of research and the types of language presented in this thesis can be construed as implying a phenomenological approach. According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological research strives to explore “the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon.” Simply, phenomenology looks at commonalities across individuals’ experiences of a phenomenon to produce a description of its “universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). With this emphasis on understanding the essence of experience in mind, a phenomenological approach appears appropriate to explore experiences of esports spectatorship. However, it has been established in this chapter that an ethnographic approach was employed to approach this research. While undoubtedly focused on understanding experiences of esports spectatorship, the understanding of experience through the frame of culture is the key aspect that cements the three studies as ethnographic. Creswell describes that ethnographic studies explore “the meaning of the behaviour, the language, and the interaction among members of a culture-sharing groups.” Central to this thesis is the consideration for how distinct sites of spectatorship influence experiences of esports spectatorship. An integral element of these sites of spectatorship are the groups of people which occupy them and the cultures that they share. Thus, to understand the experience of esports spectatorship with specific consideration for the site of spectatorship, there was an identified need to closely research and

understand the groups of people which inhabit them and the meanings they socially construct.

However, Creswell points out that while approaches to qualitative research are often demarcated and presented individually in textbooks, it is common for researchers to blend approaches in a single study (Creswell, 2007, p. 5). While the research presented in this thesis is firmly situated in an ethnographic approach, other approaches have nevertheless been drawn on to inform the research design. Ultimately, the overarching ethnographic approach of this thesis has been partially informed and inspired by techniques, procedures, and ways of thinking from phenomenological, Grounded Theory, and case study approaches.

4.4 Data generation methods

The following paragraphs describe the methods used to generate data across the three studies, placing them within the broader ethnographic methodology and interpretivist theoretical perspective adopted in this thesis. As this research consists of three separate studies, this section will provide a somewhat broad overview of how these following methods were used across the three studies. Each study employed a distinct and unique approach to ethnography, using methods catered for the specific contextual site of spectatorship they focused on. As such, further information regarding methods used in each study and the ways they were implemented will be elaborated in Chapter 5 (Study 1), Chapter 6 (Study 2) and Chapter 7 (Study 3).

The methods employed across the three studies were largely qualitative and informed by the adopted perspective idealist ontology and constructionist epistemology outlined in Section 4.2, focusing on how spectators construct experiences esports spectatorship. This thesis seeks to understand not only how people experience esports spectatorship, but how sites of spectatorship influence experiences of esports spectatorship. Thus, these methods have been chosen to best answer the overarching research question and its three sub-questions. The implications and challenges of this research topic as described in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 also shaped the implementation of these methods. Furthermore, the methods employed in this research do not exist in a vacuum; the following paragraphs will also cover how these methods synergised with each other.

4.4.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is a method commonly used within ethnographic methodologies, as well as more broadly in other approaches to qualitative research. This highly embedded method generates deep, rich, and nuanced data which reflects candid insights into participants' behaviours and activities (Sangin, 2018, p. 175). In this sense, participant observation is a method that is well suited for addressing descriptive questions that concern the understanding of a specific practice or experience (Richards and Morse, 2012, p.30). Thus, participant observation is a method well suited to an ethnographic methodology that seeks to understand the contextual behaviours and actions of cultural groups.

Participant observation is also useful for gathering data on phenomenon that are little known and somewhat hidden from the general public, particularly those involving subcultures where insider members would have significantly different interpretative stances than those of an outsider (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12). Participant observation has also been demonstrated as a useful technique in the field of games studies. Although participant observation in game studies research is often used to develop insights into the experiences of playing (Conway and Trevillian, 2015; Pearce, 2006), it has also recently been used to understand the experiences of spectating videogames (Karhulahti, 2016). This precedence reflects positively onto the suitability of participant observation as a data generation method in the context of this thesis.

In *Social Forces*, Gold (1957) describes four main approaches to participant observation as a researcher. Although a relatively old resource, *Social Forces* remains a seminal text widely cited in contemporary textbooks and research focused on qualitative methods and ethnography (see Brewer, 2000; Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015; Glesne, 2016). The key distinction between Gold's four methods is the degree of involvedness that the researcher engages with the research subjects. They are, listed here in ascending order of involvedness:

1. Complete observer – In this role the researcher is entirely removed from social interactions with their field subjects. In doing so, the researcher strives to maintain a situation where it is unnecessary for subjects to consider the researcher, “for they do not know he is observing them or that, in some sense,

they are serving as his informants” (Gold, 1957). Although this approach may seek to observe the research field in its most candid and unadulterated state, Gold warns that blind adherence may lead to ethnocentrism, where the researcher uses their own cultural standards to evaluate and make assumptions of the subjects’ culture. A complete observer approach is commonly avoided as the dominant mode in observational research for this reason. However, it usually finds use by researchers as a supplementary approach to ‘case’ the field before dedicating themselves to ‘casing *by* the field’ (Gold, 1957).

2. Observer-as-participant – This approach predominately centres around the use of one-off interviews with subjects to understand the research field they inhabit, rather than directly participating in it. The researcher is at less risk of becoming ethnocentric through this direct interaction with the subject. However, due to the brief nature of the interaction between the researcher and subject, there is rarely time for lasting rapport to be built between them. Consequently, there may be misunderstandings between the researcher and subject that may only be recognised until later into the research. Nevertheless, this approach allows the researcher to remain grounded in an external research perspective while still gaining internal insight of the studied group and their culture (Gold, 1957).
3. Participant-as-observer – Both the researcher and the subject are aware of each other’s roles within the research when using this approach. The researcher not only passively observes, but also actively engages in the activities of the participants and interacts with them regularly. Although there are often opportunities for more ‘formal’ forms of data generation in this approach, such as scheduled interviews, much of the data generated comes from the informal interactions and experiences the researcher has while interacting with subjects in the field. In this sense, this approach is highly immersive and allows for the researcher to gain a personal understanding of the cultural norms and subjective perceptions of the studied group.

While much this approach’s effectiveness relies on the researcher’s ability to develop and sustain rapport with subjects, potentially to the point of

friendship, Gold (1957) asserts that it is imperative for the participant-as-observer to retain a sense of “the stranger” to ensure that data generation is not impeded. For example, Gold suggests that if one were to develop an intimate friendship with a subject with the potential persist as a continued relationship following the completion of the research, either the researcher or subject may potentially withhold certain information for the sake of the relationship at the expense of the research. An implied finite research relationship may also better elicit information when both parties acknowledge the temporary nature of their acquaintanceship.

4. Complete participant – Although similar to a participant-as-observer approach in that the researcher interacts directly with subjects and actively participates in the field, in this approach the researcher does not disclose their role as a researcher to their subjects. Subsequently, the subjects are unaware of their role in the research and the observation performed by the researcher is clandestine. A complete participant approach is also similar to a complete observer approach in that they both strive to avoid influencing the field with the presence as a researcher. This mode of covert observation combined with the act of immersing one’s self in the field is intended to generate a rich and nuanced understanding of the subjects and their culture. This approach uniquely involves “role-presence,” where the researcher must essentially “pretend that his real self is represented by the role, or roles, he plays in and out of [the field] in relationships with people who, to him, are but informants” (Gold, 1957). It is in this way that a complete participant approach is distinguished from autoethnography, where data is generated through the researcher’s directly lived experience as ‘themselves’ (Uotinen, 2010).

When undertaking a role while using a complete participant approach, the researcher is unable to reflect on their lived experiences, as their interactions in the field are conducted through a pretended façade. Thus, the value of the generated data from this approach lies in the researcher’s internal position as an external observer, generating data from a highly immersed position in the field. Gold (1957) stresses that for a complete participant researcher to be successful in this approach, they must not develop self-expression in their

role to the extent of it becoming ‘theirself’. At this point, the researcher is unable to further conduct research as a complete participant, for they are no longer pretending. This does, however, create opportunities for the researcher to reevaluate their approach and consider alternatives that rely on lived experiences, such as autoethnography.

Across the three studies I made use of all four of these approaches to participant observation, often fluidly (and sometimes unexpectedly) transitioning between them in reaction to changes in the research field. As Yin (1994, p. 94) explains, when conducting participant observation, the researcher “may assume a variety of roles ... and may actually participate in the events being studied.” However, upon reflection I largely conducted participant observation using the approaches of observer-as-participant and complete participant, which would occasionally shift into participant-as-observer. While an ethnographer may choose one particular approach and attempt to adhere by it, there are occasions where a researcher may be forced to transition to a different approach. Bryman (2016) discusses a sense of pressure occasionally felt by ethnographers to participate in the field being studied in order to demonstrate commitment and therefore creditability as a researcher, or in the case of complete participants, creditability in their role. Fine (2008) demonstrates this in an ethnography regarding the culinary work of chefs in restaurant kitchens, where his initially observer-as-participant approach centred around the use of semi-structured interviews was challenged, ultimately changing to a participant-as-observer approach after he started helping the chefs in the kitchen during peak hours. Bryman further explains that this sense of pressure can often lead to a predicament for ethnographers in cases where they are presented with, or potentially forced into situations where they may engage in dangerous, illegal, ethically ambiguous, or otherwise uncomfortable activities.

Although I initially envisioned sites of esports spectatorship as posing little risk to myself as a researcher, there were situations where some predicaments arose. Commonly this was the consumption of alcohol and ensuing drunkenness of esports fans. This was naturally most pronounced at the esports bar in Study 3, but was also present during the fieldwork across the two 2017 Sydney stadium-situated esports events in Study 2. In particular, I was torn between engaging in the excessive consumption of alcohol in order to blend into the bar while adhering to a complete

participant approach at the expense of my cognitive abilities, or stay sober and potentially flag myself as an outsider. Valuing the ability to remember my observations, I chose the latter option, which eventually did tip off some patrons I interacted with that I was an outsider. This situation forced me rethink my approach to participant observation in this context. However, as the shift to a participant-as-observer approach yielded some fruitful and interesting data that likely would not have been generated if a complete participant approach was maintained. In another instance, I was offered illicit amphetamines by a patron at the esports bar. In this case my declination of his offer did not faze him and we continued our conversation as normal, although I wondered if he might have been more forthcoming and open if I did take him up on his offer.

4.4.2 Fieldnotes

The use of fieldnotes was one of the dominant methods used to record participant observations across the research presented in this thesis. With ethnography valued for its ability to generate more data than the researcher is initially aware of (Strathern, 2004), a conscious effort was made to generate extensive fieldnotes that covered not only information that stood out as relevant or interesting at the time, but also observations that were not yet deemed significant. This abundance of data led to the generation of unexpected findings, some of which came to define the major findings of this thesis. In less impactful cases, excesses of data made revisiting recorded moments easier when reviewing the fieldnotes. The chosen approaches to participant observation also dictated the way notes were recorded. Using a participant-as-observer approach, I carried a notepad and pen on me as I continuously made notes throughout my time in the field. This method of note taking was not viable when using a complete participant approach however, as it would too easily signal me as a researcher.

To help blend in, a more sporadic and covert approach to note taking was employed in these scenarios. I often recorded notes using a text editor application on my smartphone while in the midst of the field in an effort to make it seem like I was sending a text message to a friend. I also took inspiration from Weed's (2006; 2007; 2008) ethnography of soccer spectatorship in pubs by scrawling notes opportunistically on items like napkins and chewing gum packaging. While I could write freely as a participant-as-observer, as a complete participant I had to be more

photographs separately from the fieldnotes, one would be unable to comprehensively construct meanings from them. As Prosser and Schwartz (1998) assert, “how can we interpret an image or assess its significance without its context?” Such an approach is also important to consider in the context of this research’s theoretical perspective. While an objectivist may consider photographs to be a highly objective record of data as “an image without a code” (Barthes, 1981), Basil (2011) offers an alternative perspective. He proposes that the portrayal of reality presented in photographs are “intentionally constructed”, with the photographer acting akin to “the auteur” as described in film theory (Nichols, 1975).

No two people take an identical photo of the same subject (Sontag, 2001). The photographer’s choice of framing, composition, *mise en scène*, lighting, camera, lens, shutter speed, aperture size, and other variables factor into the portrayal of ‘reality’ presented in the produced photograph. Thus, photographs not only capture what the photographer sees, but also their interpretation of the world (Sontag, 2001). Expanding this stance, Tagg (1988) claims that the value of a photograph as an artefact of observational data lies in the semiotic processes which informed its production. It is for these reasons that photographs are considered to be an extension of fieldnotes in this research, rather than a distinct primary source of data.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews as ethnographic data generation

Next to participant observation, semi-structured interviews were the second most prominent method used to generate data. Sitting between the rigidity of structured interviews and the complete flexibility of unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow for participants to lead the conversation while still granting the researcher the level of control needed to steer discourse in relevant directions (Richards and Morse, 2012, p. 126). What ensues is an interview that often resembles an open conversation. In games studies research, semi-structured interviews are commonly used to understand the motivations and user experiences of videogame play. In a similar vein, the research design of this thesis employed semi-structured interviews to understand a form of videogame engagement, striving to understand experiences of spectating esports instead of playing them. The implementation of semi-structured interviews in this way follows in the footsteps of existing esports literature which have employed the method to understand motivations and activities

surrounding esports spectatorship (Carter, Gibbs and Witkowski, 2017; Qian et al., 2019).

Although the researcher approaches a semi-structured interview with a list of questions and an agenda, the open-ended design of these questions allows the interviewee to elaborate on points that they feel are important. This has the potential for new avenues of inquiry to be explored, particularly those that the researcher may not have initially been aware of or interested in. In essence, the set of questions that the researcher prepares for a semi-structured interview acts as a guide, rather than a script. Both the interviewer and interviewee co-construct data in semi-structured interviews (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). In contrast, data generation in structured interviews is predominantly performed by the researcher, and in unstructured interviews by the interviewee.

The interviews conducted in this research led with general demographics questions to ease the participant into the interview, followed by an open-ended discussion about experiences of esports spectatorship. Rather than directly following up with the next question as in a structured interview, the participant's reply would be considered to determine where the conversation could naturally flow and whether to prompt the participant to continue their line of inquiry. As the conversation continued, I often made notes on my questions sheet of the topics we had covered. Often, the conversation would naturally cover most of the questions I wanted to ask. As the conversations reached their conclusions, participants were asked if they had anything else they wished to express before finishing. The questions were largely open-ended and encouraged the participant to speak in detail. This is not only helpful for encouraging the participant to engage in nuanced discussion, but also forces the researcher to pay close attention to what the participant says they do in their "life setting" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21).

The conversational style of semi-structured interviews also helps the interviewer build rapport with their participant (Cote and Raz, 2015, p. 94). This ability to build rapport was useful in the context of this thesis, as many of the interviews conducted were with individuals that I was interacting with in the field as a participant-as-observer. This also led to some reflections on my status as a researcher throughout the process of conducting these interviews. Much like my personal reflections of

participant observation, I do not consider myself an esports fan. Yet, many I interviewed assumed I was an insider on the basis of my presentation as a young adult male, a demographic that is broadly perceived to be representative of esports spectators (T.L. Taylor, 2012). This was further reinforced by my use of videogaming and esports vocabulary in my questions and expressions while interviewing. This perceived cultural closeness between myself and my participants meant that they were not reluctant to explain themselves in an explicit level of detail using native terminology, commonly making references to cultural stereotypes that I likely would not have been aware of if not for my association with the broad videogaming community. In *Raising the Stakes*, T.L. Taylor (2012) produces some critical reflections on her own fieldwork, declaring her research as not ethnographic as she did not fit in with her predominantly young male subjects; she held a disruptive presence by simply being a middle-aged woman. As will be further expanded on in Chapter 7.3.2, I consider the work presented in this thesis as ethnographic, as my presence as a fellow young male among the majority of my research subjects granted me uncontested access to the sites they occupied, despite not personally considering myself an esports fan.

On occasion, particularly with participants who were non-Australian citizens living in Australia, there were situations where the participant would discuss a term or concept that I was not familiar with. In these situations I did not hesitate to ask the participant for explanation. Although there are benefits in maintaining an insider identity, Miller and Glassner (2004) suggest that “social distances” can help participants envision themselves as an expert of their group and culture. My status as a videogamer and not an esports fan was useful in this regard, providing me and my participants enough cultural similarities to quickly establish rapport and similar levels of gaming literacy, while allowing them to establish themselves as an esports expert in the interview.

Miller and Glassner (2004, p. 130) also suggest that a participant’s perceived importance of the study they are participating in can help elicit deep and nuanced responses during interviews. They propose that, for example, if a participant feels their interview may help others similar to themselves as a part of their “legacy,” they may be more forthcoming and enthusiastic in their responses. It became evident during informal discussions before and after each interview that my participants

perceived this research as important. In particular, they expressed that they felt esports, as well as broader videogaming culture, were often misunderstood in a variety of domains, such as in the media and among family members. Participants were often keen to take part in the study and discuss their thoughts and experience of esports, with some only realising after the interview that they would be getting a retail gift card as an incentive for their involvement. In participating in the research, some participants felt that they would somehow play a role in changing the perception of esports in mainstream discourses, despite this not being a goal of this thesis and research. Some even explicitly thanked me for conducting research into esports spectatorship for this perceived reason.

4.4.3 Case Study

This thesis draws its overall conclusions and findings from three separate studies, each exploring the experiences of spectating esports across different sites of spectatorship. The findings from these three studies are used in the discussion to synthesise broader observations of esports spectatorship experiences beyond each study's individual context. In this sense, this research acts as a case study, with each of the three individual studies representing a different case exploring experiences of esports spectatorship in a unique site. A case study approach is appropriate when it is believed that contextual conditions are paramount to the research. It is for this reason the overarching ethnographic research design of this thesis was partially informed by case study approaches to data generation and analysis.

Stake (2000, p. 436) suggests that for a study to be a case study, it must have a sense of specificity and be enclosed by a set of established boundaries. Evans, Gruba and Zobel (2011, p. 92) provide a similar yet more explicit definition, describing the difference between a case study and a study as “whether you are investigating a phenomenon in its own right or as a case study from which you might draw some generalisations”. Furthermore, Stake proposes that there are three main types of case study that differ in terms of purpose:

1. Intrinsic – Intrinsic case studies centre around a desire to develop a greater understanding of a particular case. This style of case study is generally used when the researcher has an intrinsic interest in the case, rather than when trying to understand a general phenomenon or abstract concept. As Baxter

and Jack (2008) summarise, “it is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest.”

2. Instrumental – As a conceptual opposite to intrinsic case studies, an instrumental case study is used to examine a particular case to explore a broader issue or to develop generalisable theory. In this style of case study, the case itself plays more of a supporting role and is of secondary interest to the generalisations that are produced from it. As Stake (2000, p. 437) describes, an instrumental case study “facilitates our understanding of something else.”
3. Collective – Also referred to interchangeably as “multi-site case study,” “multiple-case studies,” and “comparative case studies” (Goddard, 2010), a collective case study involves the use of a joint study of multiple cases to make sense of “a phenomenon, population or general condition” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). A collective case study can be considered an expansion of instrumental case studies. By drawing from and understanding multiple cases, a stronger understanding of a phenomenon, theory or further set of cases is sought to be generated (Stake, 2000, p. 437; Chmillar, 2010).

Collective case study stands as an appropriate frame with which to understand the research presented in this thesis. By studying esports spectating experiences across three distinct contexts, a broader understanding of esports spectatorship was sought to be generated. Each of the three studies in this research represents a single case in a broader collective study. The individual cases can also be considered instrumental case studies in their own right, as each were “looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed” (Stake, 2000, p. 437).

However, it is their joint design and analysis that unifies them as a collective case study. This is what distinguishes this research from the majority of existing academic literature regarding esports spectatorship; it looks beyond a single context of esports spectatorship to consider how experiences of spectating esports differ across sites to infer what it means to spectate esports more broadly. As made pertinent in Chapter 2.2, the sites in which spectatorship takes place have the

potential to influence experiences of spectatorship. If this research were to only look at one context of esports spectatorship, it would struggle to capture the full landscape of esports spectatorship to the extent that the synthesis of multiple cases can (Yore and Rossman, 2010). In studying multiple sites of esports spectatorship, an intention was made to generate a holistic understanding of esports spectatorship. Furthermore, this approach further aligns the interpretivist theoretical perspective of this research, which emphasises the importance of the social and cultural contexts from which meanings and knowledge are constructed.

4.5 Data analysis methods

With the methods used to generate data described, this section will outline the techniques employed to analyse generated data. With a rich set of qualitative data predominately consisting of fieldnotes and interview transcripts, analysis heavily relied on coding techniques to consolidate and make these raw data more manageable. Although some argue that ethnographic data should “speak for itself” (Bryman, 2016), Jones and Watt (2010) argue that ethnographers engage in iterative processes of data management and editing, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Because of this, pinpointing data analysis methods in ethnography can be somewhat difficult due to their often ambiguous descriptions in ethnographic research. Nevertheless, in order for the data to speak for itself it must be directed by the ethnographer through a set of analysis methods, whether explicitly mentioned or otherwise.

4.5.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analysis approach which involves the identification of patterns in across a data set (Lapadat, 2010). These patterns are broadly termed as themes, which act as categories to code and classify segments of data. Thematic analysis excels at identifying recurrences and commonalities in a data set. Although central to the basis of a thematic analysis, what exactly constitutes a ‘theme’ can be hard to define. As Alhojailan (2012) explains, thematic analysis somewhat suffers from inconsistent or ambiguous descriptions in academic literature. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82) assert that a theme should capture “something important about the data,” while Vaismoradi et al. (2015) describes a theme as “a thread of underlying meaning implicitly discovered at the interpretative

level and elements of subjective understandings of participants.” Overall, academic literature describes themes as encapsulating commonalities in data and are used to represent meaningful aspects of the data set. In this sense a theme can act as a category, descriptor, concept, attribute, and element (Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafel, 2003; Vaismoradi et al., 2015).

Although some ethnographic research makes explicit mention of thematic analysis as a method to categorise and make sense of rich sets of observational and interview data (Reeves, Kuper and Hodges, 2008; Cruz and Higginbottom, 2013), others do not make use of the term. While perhaps not labelled as thematic analysis, methods of analysis employed in ethnographic research nevertheless commonly employ some form of reductive, theme-based categorisation and labelling system to analyse data and generate findings (Jones and Watt, 2010). Whether intentional or not, these forms of ethnographic data analysis share many similarities with, and may even be considered, thematic analysis.

In qualitative approaches to thematic analysis, the total occurrence of a theme in the data set does not inherently indicate its significance. Rather, significance of a theme should be measured in regard to “whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). An implication of this approach is that there is no set ‘size’ of a theme. Although Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that a theme will ideally appear multiple times throughout a data set, they accept that as a qualitative technique, there is no definitive size requirement in such approaches to thematic analysis and will vary contextually.

Despite its popularity and broad use across disciplines, researchers commonly make assumptions of thematic analysis that have the potential to limit its effectiveness and quality when put into practice. One prevalent assumption is the notion that thematic analysis is a single approach. Namely, thematic analysis has received reputation as being an influential qualitative analysis method. Braun and Clarke (2020) argue that while this prominent qualitative identity to thematic analysis is legitimate, such assumptions are blind to alternative approaches that are employed in quantitative and positivist research, which focus on ‘objective’ coding and inter-rater reliability. Furthermore, there exists different approaches to thematic analysis

within the qualitative paradigm. Braun and Clark (2020) express frustration with their version (2006) of “reflexive” thematic analysis being conflated with other forms of qualitative thematic analysis, such as codebook thematic analysis. The ridged coding procedures and the development of codebooks employed by such approaches contrast the unstructured, organic coding procedures and iterative theme development advocated for by Braun et al. (2019).

The often-assumed homogeneity of thematic analysis poses further issues beyond those of categorisation. Braun and Clarke (2020) highlight numerous instances where researchers have drawn on conflicting and incompatible approaches to thematic analysis without rationale, disregarding differences in epistemological and ontological assumptions between them. This issue ties into another assumption which posits thematic analysis as an atheoretical method. Although many approaches to thematic analysis are not conceptualised with a particular theory in mind, Braun and Clarke assert that a conducted thematic analysis will inevitably be affected by researchers’ epistemological and ontological assumptions, even if they are not explicitly expressed or considered. In essence, thematic analysis is adaptable to a broad range of guiding theoretical perspectives, rather than existing as an atheoretical method. It is therefore paramount for researchers to clarify in detail the theoretical perspectives which guide their chosen approach to thematic analysis and to carefully consider their choice of approach in relation to their guiding theories.

It is at this point apt to make explicit the approach to thematic analysis employed across the research presented in this thesis. The chosen approach largely reflects Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2019) reflexive version of thematic analysis. Emphasis is placed on the role of the researcher in the analysis process. The analysis begins with a familiarisation of the data set through an iterative process of reading and re-reading until a level of intimate familiarity is achieved. Data is then coded, identifying key aspects that are relevant to the research questions. Codes are then collated and categorised, looking for broad patterns across them to generate a set of initial themes. The themes are then reviewed and refined, being examined to see if they can be used to craft a convincing narrative of these data. The themes are then formally named, detailed and scoped to be written up in a woven analytical narrative, contextualised and illustrated with data excerpts. Important to Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis is the perspective that themes do not ‘emerge’ from the

analysis as if they were hidden in data waiting to be uncovered, but are rather generated by the researcher, guided by their underlying theoretical perspective as they make sense of data. This positions reflexive thematic analysis as a method that harmonises well with the constructionist epistemology adopted in this thesis as discussed in Section 4.2.3, which similarly views meaning and ideas as socially constructed.

Within Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, an inductive approach was employed. Reflecting the flexibility of the method, they describe how reflexive thematic analysis can be employed using inductive or deductive approaches. Deductive forms of thematic analysis identify themes by using pre-existing theories or concepts as frames to understand the data set, as demonstrated in approaches which use pre-defined dictionaries of themes to code for (Epstein and Martin, 2004). Conversely, an inductive approach places a greater emphasis on the data itself by coding without a strict, predefined frame. There also existing hybrid approaches that make use of use an existing codebook and newly generated themes in tandem (Fereday, Muir-Cochrane, 2006), although Braun and Clarke (2020) argue against such hybrids on the basis of "theoretical and conceptual incoherence."

An inductive approach was chosen for a two main reasons. Firstly, the corpus of research concerning the experience of esports spectatorship is relatively small (despite its recent growth in size and academic interest as established in Chapter 3), limiting work from which preconceived coding frames could have been developed for use in a theory-driven approach. Secondly, an inductive approach synthesises well with the central objectives of this thesis and its guiding constructionist epistemology. As established in Section 4.2.3, a constructionist views meaning and knowledge as being co-constructed by individuals in the social contexts they inhabit. Therefore, for a constructionist it is paramount to consider and explore the settings in which meaning and knowledge are co-constructed among social groups and their members. As I have purposefully employed a range of data collection methods that not only seek to capture the retellings of individuals, but also the spaces they inhabit as they construct these meaningful narratives, data generated across the research presented in this thesis are entrenched in their respective research fields. As this thesis seeks to understand how sites of spectatorship influence how esports spectators construct and interpret experiences of spectatorship, it was important to choose an data

analysis approach that would enable deep exploration of these data to appropriately consider the contexts in which participants construct meaning.

Although the approach to thematic analysis employed in this thesis has been guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) version of thematic analysis, some aspects diverge from their outlined reflexive approach. The major divergence made in this thesis concerns the procedure of coding and theme generation. While Braun and Clarke (2020) are critical of researchers claiming to employ reflexive thematic analysis while making modifications to their original outline, their purposefully vague coding and theme generation approach invites subjective decisions of analysis procedures, largely of researchers' own volitions. With their approach prescribing the use of no specific coding framework, researchers adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis must decide what "open and organic" (Braun and Clarke, 2020) coding should be in relation to their research context, research questions, and theoretical perspective.

Braun and Clarke (2020) themselves advocate for researchers to be critical and flexible when employing and thinking about their version of thematic analysis; indeed a *reflexive* approach. Such criticality and awareness can help avoid methodolatry; the blind adherence to the execution of 'correct' methods at the detriment of other facets of research (Chamberlain, 2000). Braun and Clarke assert that reflexive thematic analysis is malleable and exists as a good starting point that can benefit from thoughtful modification with an awareness of theoretical perspective. Issues are created when theoretical awareness is lacking during the adaption of reflexive thematic analysis, particularly when it is combined with procedures from epistemologically and ontologically incompatible analysis approaches.

Some scholars like Potter (1997) view qualitative methods as skills learned from personal experience like riding a bike, being based in years of built experiential intuition and therefore hard to communicate and prescriptively teach. Others like McLeod (2001) stress the need for instructional approaches to ensure that qualitative methods like thematic analysis remain accessible to a broad range of researchers, particularly those with limited research experience. Braun and Clarke (2006) appear to sit in the middle of these two extremes, providing a loose procedural

guide to their reflexive version of thematic analysis while leaving the specificities of each step vague to allow researchers to develop and employ their own style and approach. This comfortable middle ground was useful to me as a relatively novice researcher, yet I still felt a lack of direction regarding the actual coding procedures of the method. With limited previous experience with which to draw intuition from, it was necessary to diverge from Braun and Clarke's outline and adapt a set of coding procedures to guide data analysis.

In seeking to 'thoughtfully' create a modified form of reflexive thematic analysis, it was essential to consider the perspective interpretivist ontology, constructionist epistemology, ethnographic methodology, research questions, and inductive approach of this thesis. This eventually led to the investigation of Grounded Theory. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory is an approach that takes inductiveness to the extreme, stringently adhering by it to generate theory almost entirely grounded in data. The following section describes Grounded Theory in greater detail, detailing how it influenced the coding procedures employed in my adapted approach to Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2020) reflexive thematic analysis.

4.5.2 Coding techniques from Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (GT) is an inductive data analysis approach initially conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967) that strives to generate theory from a data set with as little outside influence as possible. Rather than grounding itself in pre-existing theories and concepts, GT focuses itself almost entirely on the data. Coding, analysis, data generation, and the building of theory continues until nothing new is being discovered or when theoretical saturation has been reached. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe theoretical saturation as "the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive." The theory that is generated from this iterative process is hence 'grounded' in the data. All thinking and processes of analysis surrounding the generated theory thus returns to the data (Muller and Kogan, 2010, p. 2). As Strauss and Corbin state (1998, p.12), "in this method, data collection, analysis and eventually theory stand in close relationship to one another."

Much like other approaches described in this chapter, determining whether GT should be considered a method or methodology can be somewhat difficult due to the variations, ambiguities, and misuses of its terminology across academic literature

(Bakker, 2019). In their initial iteration, Glaser and Strauss (1967) envisioned GT as a methodology, “a logic of method” based in an interpretivist perspective which posits that social action is to be interpreted by the researcher, rather than observed as simply social behaviour (Bakker, 2019). Yet, GT is also widely used as a “family of methods” (Bryant, 2017) that allows researchers to begin studying without specific hypotheses in mind, guided mostly by base assumptions inherent to the researcher. Bakker (2019) points out that this style of research has been conducted long before GT was formally coined. The importance of GT’s emergence as a formal methodology by Glaser and Strauss for the users of these comparable pre-GT approaches was not the ontological and epistemology foundations it offered, but rather a tradition of inquiry that it established in which researchers could henceforth situate their work (Bakker, 2019).

Rodner (2019) describes GT as having an “inherent sexiness,” as its versatility as an approach, technique, framework, paradigm, and pledge to reveal something new about a poorly understood area can be alluring for a researcher. However, it is common for researchers to claim that they have adhered to a GT methodology when they have more accurately made use of GT methods, forgoing some or all of the central tenets of GT methodology. The deceptive simplicity of GT and the flexibility it offers means that many “flirt” with the idea of using GT methodology but “few are willing to put in the blood, sweat and tears needed to make the relationship work in the long run” (Rodner, 2019). The inaccurate classification of research as making use of GT methodology has become something of a bemoaned *faux pas* in academia (Suddaby, 2006). Yet, Bakker (2019) points out that the use of GT methods outside of a strict GT methodology have proven to be an influential strategy in contemporary sociological research. In choosing to use GT methods in such a way, the researcher should make clear that they are not necessarily adhering to a GT methodology.

It is at this point that I too will make explicit that my approaches to data analysis across the three studies were simply inspired by GT and made use of GT methods; I make no claim of this research being GT in the methodological sense. Although an appropriate fit for the ontological and epistemological stances adopted in this thesis, the use of GT methods is mostly reserved the generation of codes and themes within a broader reflexive thematic analysis method. In this sense, GT’s coding procedures and the methods of constructing meaningful information from data were drawn on,

while setting aside its other characteristics, such as constant comparative analysis, which methodologically clash with Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis. In looking to GT in the developing data analysis procedures employed across the research presented in this thesis, it was imperative to decide which paradigm of GT to draw from. This was a somewhat convoluted process when considering the dynamic history of GT.

Over time, different approaches to GT have emerged following methodological divergences from the initial version developed by Glaser and Strauss (Ralph, Birks and Chapman, 2015). Famously, Glaser and Strauss came to disagree over how GT should be employed and conducted, eventually establishing two paradigms commonly understood today as Glaserian GT and Straussian GT. Glaser's paradigm remained close to the original conceptualisation of GT, retaining a sense of looseness and ambiguity around its methods to place emphasis on the emergence of theory from data as based on the researcher's sense of intuition. Conversely, Strauss (working with Corbin, 1998) sought to clarify the procedures of GT data analysis, creating a GT paradigm with a prescriptive method that could be systematically followed and replicated for verification. It is this need for verification argued by Strauss and Corbin which caused conflict between Glaser and Strauss.

For Glaser, GT needs to only be inductive. In their original article, Glaser and Strauss (1967) posit that in GT, generating theory "both subsumes and assumes verification and accurate description, but only to the extent that the latter are in services of generation." It is argued that Glaser stayed committed to this emphasis of inductive theory emergence in GT (Heath and Cowley, 2004), whereas Strauss sought to emphasise the importance of being able to explicitly verify theories which emerged from conducting GT (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). In disagreement with Strauss and Corbin's efforts to introduce aspects of verification through replicable prescriptive methods in GT, Glaser (1992) asserts that the Straussian paradigm is not GT, but rather an entirely different method. While still detailing a clear three-step coding procedure, Strauss and Corbin (1998) nevertheless assert that the focus of GT should be placed on the emergence of theory, rather than analytical methods.

Another key distinction between Glaserian GT and Straussian GT is that the former sees the failure to generate theory as contradictory to the goals of GT (Glaser, 1992,

p. 81), whereas the later sees the generation of outcomes besides theory, such as description, as appropriate (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In essence, Corbin and Strauss (2008) see a broader application of GT, acknowledging that some researchers may find GT methods useful in contexts beyond strictly theory building.

While Glaser and Strauss' feud initiated the dynamism of GT, other paradigms of GT have emerged more recently. In particular, Charmaz's constructivist GT paradigm exists as a prominent contemporary version. In contrast to Glaserian and Straussian GT, which have been said to be realist or postpositivist (MacDonald and Schreiber, 2001; Annells, 1997), Charmaz (2000) proposes an approach to GT which emphasises constructivist ideals. Specifically, Charmaz's (2000, p. 522) paradigm is centred on the constructivist idea that the generation of meaning should be done "without assuming the existence of a unidimensional external reality." In this sense Charmaz's constructivist GT aligns with the constructionist epistemology adopted in this thesis, for it understands the generation of theory from data as reflective of participants' interpretations of reality, rather than of an objective external world. In outlining constructivist GT, Charmaz directs focus towards interviews, describing how "they are not the original experience itself", but are instead retellings narrated by participants. Consequently, theory is not considered as 'emerging' from the data as in Glaserian GT and Straussian GT, but rather as constructed by the researcher as they make sense of data through the coding process.

It is on the basis of epistemological fit with constructionism and core aspects of Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis that Charmaz's (2000) constructivist GT was chosen as a reference in developing data analysis and coding procedures across the research presented in this thesis. However, in outlining constructivist GT, Charmaz adheres more closely to Glaser than Strauss regarding analytical methods, maintaining a sense of looseness around their application. As a result, I found myself again position where it was necessary to decide how data analysis in this thesis would be mechanically conducted. As previously mentioned in Section 4.1, this thesis not only presents the research I conducted during my doctoral candidature, but also details my journey as an early-career researcher. When conducting my chronologically first study in 2017 regarding the experiences of esports spectatorship in stadia (Study 2), a detailed three-step coding procedure as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was adhered to when analysing generated

data. In doing so, I intended to display consideration for the carefulness and level of detail with which data were coded (Muller, 2014, p. 41). This choice was further motivated by Straus and Corbin's perception of GT as being a useful method in contexts besides theory building. As my candidature continued and I gained experience in conducting a GT-inspired analysis, I eventually moved onto a freer-flowing approach to data coding and analysis closer in line with Braun and Clarke's (2020) "open and organic" strategy. While still referring to Strauss and Corbin, their procedure acted more as a guide, adapted to suit my developing intuition and the context of my subsequent two studies focusing on spectatorship in the esports bar (Study 3) and the home (Study 1). It is through this approach that "grounded theorising" (Hammersley, 2010) was engaged in to conduct a thematic analysis.

4.6 Study design

4.6.1 Study 1 – Domestic esports spectatorship

The home is the typical site in which esports spectatorship occurs. Contemporary esports has largely succeeded where previous attempts at popularising the practice had failed is in its distribution. Spurred by advancements and widespread accessibility of livestreaming platforms like Twitch, esports has been connected to millions of homes across numerous countries. While current research provides ample quantified figures of viewership statistics and descriptions of spectating motivations, little is known about *what* spectatorship looks like in the home.

This study set out to understand the experiences of esports spectatorship in domestic environments. While the least reminiscent of a 'classical' ethnography of the three studies, Study 1 was nevertheless driven by underlying ethnographic tenets and aligned with the theoretical perspective outlined in Section 4.2. The study revolved around roughly one-hour long semi-structured interviews with esports fans. Participants were recruited through multiple approaches. Firstly, posters advertising the study were placed in numerous high-traffic spots around the University of Melbourne Parkville campus. Secondly, the study was advertised on relevant Melbourne-based social media pages and groups with a connection to esports. Thirdly, a snowballing approach was employed where existing participants were asked to inform others that they knew about the study. Snowballing is a particularly valuable approach when attempting to recruit participants from groups

that are somewhat hard to access through other means (Patrick et al., 1998; Streeton, Cooke and Campbell, 2004). Although esports spectators were not a difficult group to access, snowballing was employed to potentially recruit esports spectators who potentially consumed esports content with a more casual attitude and may not have considered themselves to be esports fans. Participants were offered a \$30 retail gift card in exchange for participation.

Interviews were held in conference rooms located on the University of Melbourne Parkville campus. This represents a significant departure from classical forms of ethnography, with the study taking place outside of the field being researched. An alternative method was employed in an effort to bring the ‘field’ into the conference room. Participants were asked to bring a photograph of areas of their homes in which they spectate esports as a prompt for discussion. These photographs functioned as a probe for participants to respond to (De Leon, 2005), providing talking points throughout the interview which helped illustrate the environmental factors that shaped participants’ esports spectatorship, as well as how esports spectatorship shaped their domiciles. These photographs were particularly helpful at illuminating aspects of the participants’ spectatorship that they had not mentioned unprovoked in discussion, usually deeming these aspects as mundane and not worth discussing.

The semi-structured interviews were guided by a list of questions⁶ pertaining to how participants fit esports spectatorship into their lives, how they prepare for esports spectatorship, considerations they make for others in their household when they spectate esports, what they do while spectating esports, where in the house they spectate esports, and on which devices they spectate esports. The semi-structured interviews were recorded with a portable audio recorder and were later transcribed for analysis. Notes were also taken during the interview, acting both as a redundancy and as a guide when analysing the transcribed interviews. Interview transcripts were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis inspired by a three-step Straussian GT coding procedure as outlined in Section 4.5. As this was the chronologically last study conducted as a part of this research course, the Straussian GT coding procedures were loosely followed as a guide, building on my developed

⁶ The full questions guide of Study 1 can be found in Appendix C.

experiences of analysing ethnographic data to allow for my intuition to guide much of the analysis.

4.6.2 Study 2 – Stadia esports spectatorship

Much like conventional sports, esports events garner a substantial physical audience at the site of play. Despite being a highly computerised practice, existing research has demonstrated the importance of physical audiences for esports event organisers. However, there exists room to know what it is like to spectate esports when attending site of play of the stadium.

To gain an understanding of stadium-situated experiences of esports spectatorship, fieldwork at two major 2017 esports tournaments in Sydney across a total of five days was conducted. Due to the intermittence of major esports events in Australia during 2017 and briefness of these events, a classical ethnography could not be conducted where fieldwork is performed “over a period of several months with at least the same amount of time spent in analysis and interpretations of the observations” (Bentley et al., 1992).

In order to reap the benefits of ethnography despite time constraints, researchers have devised ways of generating the richness of data found in classical ethnography without the prohibitive time investment. As described in Section 4.3.1, such approaches made use of “time deepening” (Millen, 2000) strategies such as tightly focused scopes, multiple observational sources, the use of key informants, and interviewing techniques that lead with broad issues and quickly transition to specific underlying topics (Hughes et al., 1995; Bauersfeld and Halgren, 1996; Millen, 2000). In this study, time-deepening strategies inspired largely by Millen’s (2000) “rapid” and Hughes et al.’s (1995) “quick” ethnographies were employed.

I attended the two Sydney esports events to conduct field observations, participate in esports spectatorship, and interview attendees. In addition, two other forms of supplemental data generation methods were employed. Firstly, using a DSLR camera, photographs were captured throughout the events. Secondly, the broadcast livestreams of the events were recorded on a remote computer for later analysis to compliment the field observations. These recordings helped affirm observations made in the field, while also providing a perspective which illuminated further characteristics of the stadia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with

attendees who were approached and recruited at the two events. The semi-structured interviews opened on broad topics regarding participants' esports fandom and habits before moving onto more specific prompts regarding reflections of attendance to the event⁷. Much like in Study 1, the interviews were recorded using an external audio recorder and notes were taken during these interviews. These interview notes acted as a redundancy and were referred to as a guide during analysis. These data were analysed using the reflexive thematic analysis approach and three-step coding procedure as described in Section 4.5. As this was the chronologically first study conducted as a part of this research course, the three-step coding procedure adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1998) was closely adhered. This is reflected in the presentation of Study 2's findings in Chapter 6.

4.6.3 Study 3 – Esports bar spectatorship

This study explored the experiences of spectating esports public communal places. "Third places" stands as an appropriate term and concept to describe these sites of spectatorship. Oldenburg (1989) first describes third places as sites that are neither the home (the first place) nor the workplace (the second place). Common examples include bars, arcades, and churches. He describes the importance third places have in communities, offering a "home away from home" and neutral ground of levelled social status, often attracting and retaining a core group of regulars who maintain the mood of the place. In adapting of the concept of third places to this study, the workplace is replaced with the stadium as the second place in relation to esports spectatorship, existing as sites of esports spectatorship that are geographically and conceptually between the stadium and the home.

To understand the experience spectating esports in public communal places, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted at GGEZ, a Melbourne esports bar, over the course of five months. Each I spent two or three nights a week across these five months at GGEZ conducting observations, engaging in informal conversation with patrons, participate in esports spectatorship. I also conducted a formal semi-structured interview⁸ with the bar's owner to gain contextual insights into the bar and to learn of interesting observations he had made throughout the bar's life. As

⁷ The interview guide for Study 2 can be found in Appendix D.

⁸ The questions which guided the interview with GGEZ's owner can be found in Appendix E.

mention earlier in Section 4.4.1, the approach to participant observation in this research varied throughout the fieldwork in relation to shifts in the relationship between me as the researcher and the bar's patrons.

Initially, I maintained a “wallflower” stance (Adler and Adler, 1987), acting as a complete participant (Gold, 1957). However, the more I frequented the bar, the more I became recognised by the bar's staff and regulars, some of which came to know of my role as a researcher. Thus, my approach to participant observation inevitably shifted towards a participant-as-observer stance. As will be elaborated on in Chapter 7, this shifting approach to participant observation created interesting opportunities for data generation at the bar. The ethnographic approach demonstrated in this study is the one that most closely resembles a classic ethnography out of the three, taking place over numerous months and immersing the researcher in the field. By the end of the research, a rich understanding of the ‘going ons’ in the bar and experiences of spectating esports within it was constructed.

Data generated from this ethnographic fieldwork were analysed in freer-flowing manner than in Study 1 and Study 2, employing an approach to thematic categorisation driven by a thick description approach. This approach to data analysis was chosen to better present the richness of data generated from the five months of ethnographic research. A detailed discussion of these data analysis procedures can be found in Chapter 7.3.4.

4.7 Conclusion and reflections

This chapter has provided a detailed overview of the ethnographic methodology and methods employed across the three studies. The ontological and epistemological perspectives adopted thesis have also been described in detail to highlight an overarching theoretical perspective. Data generation and analysis methods have also been detailed and related back to the adopted methodological, ontological, and epistemological stances.

Table 2 Research Approach

	Study 1: the home	Study 2: the stadium	Study 3: the bar
Methods	Semi-structured interviews Observer-as-participant	Semi-structured interviews Observer-as-participant Complete participant	Semi-structured interviews Complete observer Complete participant Participant-as-observer
Methodology - Ethnography			
Theoretical Perspective – Interpretivist			
Ontology – Perspectivist Idealist (Blakie, 2007)		Epistemology – Constructionist (Creswell, 2003)	

Engaging in an ethnographic methodology also invites reflection upon my personal status as a researcher in the field of research. Reflexivity in ethnography is important, as being aware of one’s emotions and sense of self is needed to maintain academic integrity. As may be inferred from my use of a complete participant approach to participant observation, I did not consider myself an insider of the esports community. Although I consider myself a gamer with a particular interest in competitive, player-versus-player videogames, I do not consider myself an esports fan. In T.L. Taylor’s (2012) seminal work on esports, she eventually concludes that although she made use of ethnographic methods, her status as an outsider to the esports community meant that she could not classify her research as an ethnography. She asserts that her demographic attributes differ from those of the broad esports community, disqualifying her from being accepted as an insider. Although I do not consider myself an insider to the esports community, I often felt that I was largely perceived as an insider by individuals across each study. In my case, it became evident that I was being accepted as an insider without question based on my visible demographic attributes.

The general demographic of an esports fan and gamer are very similar (Burroughs and Rama, 2015; Jenny et al., 2017), with esports often being considered a subculture of broader gaming culture (T.L. Taylor, 2012). My appearance as a male in his early-to-mid-twenties of mixed Caucasian and Asian ethnicity meant that I fit in with the

Chapter 4 – Research approach

common demographics present in esports communities. Furthermore, my gaming literacy of the types of competitive videogames often played as professional esports meant that I did not need to ask for clarification when spectators spoke to me using gaming slang and terminology. Although I may not frequently watch esports myself for leisure or consider myself an esports fan, I stay up to date with the ‘going ons’ in esports through my engagement with the gaming communities I am a part of, which centre around many of the competitive games played as esports. It is for these reasons that upon reflection, I consider this research to be ethnography.

With the methods and methodology introduced and outlined in this chapter, the following chapters will present the findings of the three studies conducted to explore experiences of esports spectatorship across different sites. Chapter 5 will begin with Study 1 – domestic experiences of esports spectatorship.

Chapter 5 – Spectating in the home

5.1 Introduction

The home is considered to be the typical site of esports spectatorship (Gibbs, Carter and Witkowski, 2017). Efforts to replicate domestic environments in lab-based research designed to investigate the experience of esports spectatorship (see Rambusch, Taylor and Susi, 2017; Chapter 8.2.1) reinforces this perspective. While Chapters 6, 7, and 8 will demonstrate how these assumptions draw attention away from other modes esports spectatorship, it is undeniable that the majority of esports spectatorship takes place within the homes of esports fans.

If the televising of contemporary sports brought the typical mode of sports spectatorship into the home (Kelner, 2012 p.16), the spectatorship of esports can be thought of as near native to the home. As asserted in Chapter 1.2, the inherent mediation of esports affords no particular site of spectatorship any notable advantage in spectating *perspective*, leading one to potentially view the home as the logical site to spectate in on the basis of convenience. When combined with large online viewership numbers that major esports tournaments garner on livestreaming platforms, it is unsurprising that the home is assumed to be the dominant site of esports spectatorship. As will be introduced in this chapter however, the *experiences* of esports spectatorship across different sites are not as uniform as their spectating perspectives.

Although much research on esports spectatorship is framed in an assumed domestic context, the implicitness of the home as a site of spectatorship blinds analysis of its salient features. Pursuing such domestic impacts has long been noted as worthwhile in conventional sports spectatorship literature. Gantz et al. (1995) note that by virtue of being conducted in the home, the experience of domestic sports spectatorship often blends into and becomes shaped by aspects of the spectator's personal life. They elaborate on this point, explaining that “televised sports spectatorship is a part of the fabric of daily life; for better or worse, it is fit into the mosaic of everyday activities as well as into significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 307). It is on the basis of this observation that shortcomings in approaches towards the assumed domesticity of esports spectatorship become evident. While Rambusch, Taylor and Susi's (2017) efforts to replicate a “home-like” spectating

environment implies an effort to capture an emblematic experience of domestic esports spectatorship in a lab-based setting, its contrived nature is inherently unsuitable for capturing aspects of spectators' unique domestic lives and the interpersonal dynamics of those they share their homes with. As will be seen in this chapter, these factors have the potential to noticeably influence domestic experiences of esports spectatorship. As Bollmer (2015) argues, "the materiality of software and hardware are nothing other than tools used by humans for pursuits that are ultimately about human desires and conflicts." Throughout this chapter it will be made salient how domestic spectators manipulate the software and hardware they use to spectate esports, as well as other material and noncorporeal elements of their spectating environment to construct desired experiences of spectatorship.

This chapter presents Study 1, which was designed to address these identified limitations in existing academic esports literature. While it is accepted that contemporary esports is spectated in spectators' homes (see van Ditmarsch, 2013; Gibbs, Carter and Witkowski, 2017), we know little of how the spatial, temporal, and social dynamics of domestic spaces influence experiences of esports spectatorship. To this end, Study 1 sought to generate a detailed understanding of how the unique characteristics of esports spectators' homes influence domestic experiences of esports spectatorship. Adhering to the overarching ethnographic methodology outlined in Chapter 4, Study 1 centred around 12 semi-structured interviews conducted with those who spectate esports in their homes. These semi-structured interviews guided participants through discussions pertaining to their domestic spectatorship habits, rituals, behaviours, and considerations. The findings of these interviews generated further insights into how esports spectatorship is constructed and engaged with inside of the home.

From a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2020) conducted on the transcribed interviews, it was found that the home is a relatively restrictive site of spectatorship, particularly in contrast with the stadium and the esports bar as found in Study 2 and Study 3. While spectatorship in the home implies that the spectator holds a great sense of autonomy over how they construct their spectator experience, the findings of Study 1 revealed that factors of compromise are commonly encountered by domestic spectators when partaking in esports spectatorship. In addressing RQ1, it was found that domestic spectators' experiences of esports

spectatorship are inherently influenced and shaped by these homely compromises, often culminating in non-ideal experiences.

Furthermore, the findings identified that dimensions beyond leisure exist in domestic esports spectatorship. In addressing RQ2, it was found that while most participants described the construction of their domestic esports spectatorship experiences through frames of leisure, others did so through frames of labour. Several participants constructed their domestic experiences of esports spectatorship in an educational manner to improve their own personal game play, while others worked to construct an idealised authentic experience. To do so they staged their spectatorship by configuring corporeal and non-corporeal elements in the domestic lives and environments, working around household constraints in the process. In relation to RQ 3, it was ultimately found that this staging largely centred around notions of attendance and mundanity, working to construct an experience in their home which transcended that of daily life to create a sense *presence* and *attendance*, despite spectating remotely. Others performed labour through their esports spectatorship, constructing their experiences specifically to leave an impression on their household co-habitants. It is on this basis that I introduce the concept of *laborious spectatorship*, which later also became salient in Study 2 and Study 3.

5.2 Method

5.2.1 Overall approach

In line with the overarching ethnographic methodology and constructionist epistemology of this thesis, the approach employed in Study 1 placed emphasis on the lived experiences of esports spectators. 12 individuals who watch esports in their homes were recruited to take part in a roughly one hour-long semi-structured interview conducted in a conference room at the University of Melbourne Parkville Campus. The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions which sought to explore how participants' domestic environments influenced, or were influenced by, their efforts to construct experiences of esports spectatorship. The interviews were transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis as described in Chapter 4.5; an interpretation of Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2020) reflexive approach alongside the adaption of coding procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). In comparison to Study 2, the data analysis procedure employed in Study 1 took a freer-

-flowing, organic approach. From the thematic analysis, a set of themes were generated which outlined the key findings of the study. These findings are presented from Section 5.3 onwards.

5.2.2 Participants and recruitment

12 esports spectators⁹ were recruited as participants for the study firstly via posters placed at high-traffic areas in the University of Melbourne’s Parkville campus, secondly via posts made in local esports-related social media groups, and thirdly via a snowballing approach utilising previously recruited participants as outlined in Chapter 4.6.1. The snowball approach was particularly useful in recruiting participants with a peripheral interest in esports.

Table 3 Study 1 Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Household cohabitants
1	24	Male	Employed full-time	Girlfriend
2	26	Male	Employed full-time	Mother, father
3	26	Male	Self-employed	Mother, father, 3 younger adult brothers, 1 older sister
4	25	Female	Graduate student	Mother, father, older brother
5	28	Male	Graduate student	5 housemates
6	19	Female	Undergraduate student	Mother, father
7	21	Male	Graduate student	None
8	21	Male	Undergraduate student	Mother, father, younger sister
9	23	Male	Graduate student	Housemate
10	28	Male	Employed full-time	Wife, father in-law, mother in-law, brother in-law, sister in-law
11	20	Female	Undergraduate student	None
12	25	Male	Employed part-time	Mother, father, younger sister

⁹ See Appendix B for expanded demographic information.

In comparison to the rapid and opportunistic approach to participant recruitment in Study 2, recruitment for Study 1 took a longer, more considered approach. A range of participants representing a range of domestic contexts and demographic characteristics were sought. This diversity was particularly important when considering this study as being situated in a games research context. A common criticism posed to examples of games research concerns the dominance of male, teenaged or young-adult, student gamers in participant samples. While this demographic is highly visible, easily accessible, and thought of broadly as the stereotypical gamer demographic, there exists other types of people who play and spectate games beyond this narrow category (Hayes, 2005; Grooten and Kowert, 2015; Maclean, 2016). It was therefore paramount that Study 1's participant sample represent a broader range of gamers and game spectators. In addition, the sample was also informed by spectators' domestic contexts. If domestic environments are known to influence spectating experiences (Bale, 1998), then it is imperative to consider how different domestic dwellings and their household compositions uniquely influence these experiences of spectatorship. Specifically, the sample captures:

1. Both students and those in the workforce.
2. A variety of household compositions including spectators living with a spouse, parents, siblings, housemates, in-laws, or alone.
3. An age range between 19-28.
4. Both women and men.
5. Different types of domestic dwellings (see Appendix B).

Nevertheless, the sample still contains limitations. Participants with children were sought during recruitment, but none responded to the advertising material or were referred by previously recruited participants during the snowballing process. A broader age range was desired, but similarly no participants older than 28 responded to the advertising material or were referred through snowballing. Ideally the sample would have represented greater balance between women and men participants. Although the sample does contain women, they only represent 25% of the

participants. In addition, there was room to include those who identify beyond this gender binary, as well as non-cis-identifying individuals.

The sample size of Study 1 was informed by the achievement of data saturation, the point where “no additional data are being found whereby [the researcher] can develop properties of the category” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Although commonly used as the “gold standard” for judging reliability in qualitative research (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006), what data saturation looks like and how it is achieved is often loosely defined in academic literature (Francis et al., 2010). In working to define and achieve data saturation, I predominantly referred to three widely cited articles written of the topic. In a study employing open-ended semi-structured interviews, Guest et al. note that data saturation was achieved at 12 interviews, observing that almost every code was generated by the 12th interview, and that any codes generated from further interviews were variations on existing themes and infrequent.

Francis et al. (2010) further defines the point at which additional interviewing is unnecessary following the achievement of data saturation. They posit that a study should establish two criteria in achieving data saturation. The first is a minimum sample size for initial analysis. The second is a stopping criterion consisting of a number of consecutive post-initial sample interviews where no new ideas have been generated. In their article, Francis et al. suggest a stopping criterion of three. Coalescing the guidelines of Guest et al. and Francis et al., Study 1 aimed for a sample size of at least 12, consisting of an initial sample of nine and a stopping criterion of three. The data analysis and interviewing stages of the study overlapped and largely were conducted in parallel. Upon the completion and analysis of the nine initial sample interviews, three more interviews were conducted and analysed. Comparing the codes and themes which were generated in the initial sample and the three additional interviews, it was observed that no new ideas had been generated, signalling the achievement of data saturation.

In determining an appropriate sample size, Malterud, Siersma and Guassora’s (2015) work on “information power” in qualitative interview studies was also drawn on. Information power is a concept coined by Malterud et al. in response to the ambiguities which surround data saturation, providing an alternative frame with

which to judge the reliability of a qualitative sample. They position information power as a qualitative analogue to power calculations used to determine sample sizes in quantitative research. The more *information* that is able to be generated from the sample, the smaller the sample size can be. In essence, Malterud et al. suggest that studies that are tightly scoped, recruit a diverse and targeted sample, and are centred on a single case exude a high degree of information, particularly when compared to open-ended and opportunistic studies.

Study 1 was evaluated as holding a relatively high degree of information power, particularly when compared to Study 2. Study 1 employed sample that was specifically targeted based on diversity, was guided by theories of staging and experience construction from sports and tourism studies, and was scoped to focus how esports spectatorship experiences are constructed specifically in domestic settings. In comparison, Study 2 employed opportunistic sampling across two stadium-situated esports events and focused more broadly on the motivations for esports spectatorship at the two events. The sample sizes of Study 1 and Study 2 reflect the differences in their information power; Study 1 required 12 interviews to reach data saturation while Study 2 required 19. Furthermore, the interviewing procedures of Study 1 contributed to its information power. As will be described in the Section 5.2.3, the semi-structured interviews conducted with participants for Study 1 were relatively long, detailed, and composed. In comparison, interviews in Study 2 were more rapid and direct due to environmental constraints inherent to recruiting and interviewing participants on-site during the stadium-situated esports events.

5.2.3 Interview procedure

The interview procedure employed in Study 1 was honed by a series of four pilot semi-structured interviews conducted before the recruitment process. These pilot interviews were conducted with pre-existing contacts and were intended to test the effectiveness of the interviewing procedure and the guiding questions posed to participants. Initially, interviews were to be conducted in participant's home, where the participant would also give a video-recorded narrated tour of their homes to further illustrate the domestic environments they spectate esports in.

This home-situated approach was dropped for the post-pilot interviews, with participants instead being interviewed in a conference room on the University of Melbourne Parkville campus and asked to bring photographs of the spaces in their homes they watch esports in. This shift in approach was motivated by the lack of fruitful data being generated from the narrated home tours. While the pilot interviews took place in the participants' homes, the narrated home tour unintuitively worked to distance the domestic environment from the interviewing process. By including a separate tour of the house, participants did not refer to specific aspects of their home in illustrating their spectatorship habits and behaviours. Furthermore, the participants largely narrated their home tours in a descriptive manner, providing little insight into the ways that their domestic environments shaped, or were shaped by, their experiences of esports spectatorship.

With this situated approach tested and deemed unsuitable from the pilot interviews, participants were instead invited to partake in a semi-structured interview lasting roughly one hour on campus. The decision to cut the narrated home tours meant that the interviews could occur outside of participants' homes, allowing for the recruitment of participants who may have felt uncomfortable with letting a stranger into their home to conduct research.

As mentioned in Chapter 4.6.1, the questions which guided the semi-structured interviews not only sought to explore the perspectives of each participant's experiences of esports spectatorship, but also how the unique characteristics of each participant's home and domestic life shaped their spectating experiences and *how* they engaged in esports spectatorship. To this end, questions¹⁰ pertaining to how esports fit into the participants' daily schedules, the considerations they make for others in the household, the influences behind the location and mode of esports spectatorship, and how they prepared for esports spectatorship were asked. While the narrated home tour was scrapped, the desire to have participants refer to the composition of their domestic environments to provoke and illustrate discussion was not. Participants were asked to bring a photograph of the area(s) in their home where they commonly spectated esports in as a prompt for additional discussion. The photographs also proved useful for illustrating environmental elements which

¹⁰ The full questions guide for Study 1 can be found in Appendix C.

shaped the participants' esports spectatorship, and conversely how spectatorship shaped the home. Furthermore, the omnipresence of the photographs on the table during the interviews meant that both I and the participant could refer to them throughout the interview, an aspect that was harder to achieve through the narrated home tours during the pilot interviews. In this sense, the interviews which took place in the conference room provided a more embedded account of participants' experiences of esports spectatorship in their homes than the situated pilot interviews.

5.2.4 Thematic analysis

As described in Chapter 4.5.2, the transcripts of each interview were subjected to a reflexive thematic analysis, employing a three-step coding procedure adapted from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach to Grounded Theory and applied to Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2020) reflexive thematic analysis. After reading the transcripts for familiarisation, a first pass of *open coding* was conducted to break down, examine and categorise segments of the data into thematic ideas and concepts. Following a second pass of the transcripts, the existing themes were related and compared with each other to establish further thematic links between them through the process of axial coding. Finally, relationships between these axial codes were made to establish a set of selective codes which constituted the key findings presented in the forthcoming sections of this chapter.

This coding procedure was similar to that employed in Study 2. However, Study 2 followed the three-step coding procedure prescriptively, whereas it more so guided analysis in Study 1. This is important to note when considering the chronology of the studies. Study 2 was the first study to be chronologically conducted in this thesis and represented the first time I had employed this data analysis procedure. In seeking clear direction in conducting this form of thematic analysis, I closely adhered to the coding procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1998). With the experience I gained from Study 2, I then approached Study 1 using a more fluid approach, drawing on my developed sense of intuition as encouraged by certain qualitative scholars like Potter (1997). In some ways this free-flowing, intuition-driven approach aligns Study 1 more closely with Braun and Clarke's interpretation of "open and organic" reflexive thematic analysis than that of Study 2.

The following sections present the key findings of this Study 1 as generated from the thematic analysis. Firstly, key aspects which factored into participants' efforts to *stage* their domestic experiences of esports spectatorship are outlined. Secondly, ways in which participants' attention was split from the act of spectatorship is explored through their *multi-tasking and second-screening* behaviours. Finally, the qualities of participants' experiences of spectatorship are detailed, exploring how these experiences often ranged *from leisure to labour*.

5.3 Staging

When speaking to participants about how they constructed experiences of spectatorship in their homes, they all described various ways in which they compose their domestic environments and lives, *staging* them for spectatorship. Efforts to stage the experience of esports spectatorship within the home was thus a prominent theme present across the interviews. As identified from participant's responses, the private identity of the home offers spectators the ability to customise the spaces in which they engage in esports spectatorship. The domestic spaces in which esports spectatorship occurs in are carefully composed by spectators to construct a valued spectator experience. Although there was a great variety among across these spectator experiences, they all involved intricate staging. While this was often achieved through the composition of corporal elements of the domestic spectating space, noncorporal elements such as time of day and choices of technology played a central role in staging efforts, having the potential to profoundly influence the spectating experience. This theme of staging closely relates to the perspective discussed in Chapter 2.2. of spectatorship being a product of *Gesamkuntswerk* (Rosenthal and Hurd, 2003). While commercial experiences of spectacle are carefully composed by event organisers (Clarke and Clarke, 1982), in the home the spectator becomes the principle artist of the *Gesamkuntswerk* which frames the spectator experience. Six major factors of staging were generated from the analysis: *location, comforts, apparel, people, spectating platform, and scheduling and time*.

5.3.1 Location

In staging their domestic experiences of esports spectatorship, the space within the home where spectatorship was to be engaged in was the factor that participants often first considered. The chosen location then acted as the foundation on which other

aspects of staging would be built on. The choice of domestic space therefore acts as one of the most elementary factors of staging for esports spectating experiences in the home. Each area of the home affords certain characteristics and interactions; living rooms are used for social, communal interactions with cohabitants or selected outsiders (Riggins, 1994 p.101), while bedrooms offer a heightened sense of privacy (Lincoln, 2015 p. 88-89). In this sense, the location within the home influences the type of spectator experience to be had.

Participant 10's spectating behaviours act as a clear illustration of this point. Unlike some of the other participants who typically spectated alone in their household, Participant 10 enjoyed hosting viewing parties with usually 5-10 of his friends in his home to spectate major esports tournaments. While Participant 10 typically spectated esports from his bedroom, spectatorship instead took place in the living room when his friends were over. The living room acts as a large open space with ample seating in its existing configuration to consume audio-visual content, offering an optimal space for a social esports spectating experience involving multiple spectators. Other rooms in the home are conversely less optimal for this type of spectator experience. Participant 10 noted that he could not construct a comparable social spectating experience in his bedroom, where the space was more limited. Similarly, Participant 1 sought to spectate major esports events in the living room for a high-fidelity experience. Conversely, minor esports events which Participant 1 cared less about were often watched on his desktop computer in the study or on his phone in the kitchen, where the esports content was not directly engaged in but functioned more closely as a form of ambience to augment types of domestic labour like cooking and cleaning. This ambient form of esports spectatorship is further elaborated on in Section 5.4.4.

5.3.2 Comforts

A recurring theme across most participants' responses was a desire to create a comfortable spectating experience. Unsurprisingly, the familiarity and security offered by the home positions it as a prime location for such experiences characterised by comfort. The theme of *comfort* took various forms across the responses, including the enjoyment of certain foods and drink, seating cushions, blankets, headphones, lighting, and clothing. The spectatorship of esports often acted as form of escapism for participants from the stresses of life, and for one

participant¹¹, from their clinically diagnosed depression. In creating this sense of escapism, participants sought to ensure that their experiences of spectatorship were subjectively comfortable, hence the wide variation across this theme.

Alternatively, the conscious staging for comfort was also a major factor for those seeking to partake in immersive spectator experiences. By making all possible comforts present during spectatorship, the spectator does not need to take breaks that would shatter the sense of immersion. For example, Participant 10 mentioned that he went to great lengths to ensure that when his esports buddies came over to watch a big match, he ensured that they were well supplied. Pizza was ordered in advance, while an ample supply of alcohol was made readily available in the living room. By having all of this food and drink organised and present in the living room during the spectatorship of esports, Participant 10 asserted that no unnecessary breaks were needed to be made, allowing for full concentration in the spectatorship of the esports matches. For other participants, the consumption of food was less of a conscious decision, instead standing as an unspoken ritual they commonly associated with media consumption more broadly. For example, Participant 5 remarked that he would often make popcorn when sitting down to watch an esports match in full, similarly to how he would do when watching a movie. Food consumption in this case helped construct a sense of what esports spectatorship should be, connecting the activity of spectating esports with broader media consumption rituals.

As will be elaborated in Section 5.3.3, clothing choice was another comfort considered by some participants. In particular, Participant 7 purposefully would get changed into comfortable clothes when watching esports, seeking to construct a relaxing experience for particularly long sessions of spectatorship. Participants engaged in spectatorship across a range of durations. Some watched for hours at a time, while others only for a few minutes a day. Participants' duration of spectatorship was often determined by the type of esports content they were choosing to watch. Unsurprisingly, longer stints of spectatorship occurred when watching full esports matches or tournaments, whereas fan-made highlight clips only demanded brief

¹¹ This participant expressed that while they were happy for their condition to be reported in the findings of the study, they requested that this aspect of their response be further anonymised to the extent that it be unattributed from their participant number.

engagement. Mentions of comfort largely coincided with when participants discussed the spectatorship of full esports matches, where they would largely be sitting down for over an hour.

5.3.3 Apparel

In some cases of spectatorship, participants made conscious efforts to wear particular articles of clothing. In particular, some participants noted that they often wore their favourite team's or player's apparel when watching esports. These participants responded that they primarily wore team apparel when spectating particularly pivotal matches that their favourite player or team was playing in. While the wearing of team apparel during communal spectatorship at remote locations beyond the site of play has been noted in the context of conventional sports to construct a sense of sporting place (see Fairley and Tyler, 2012; Chapter 2.2), participants responses revealed that the wearing of team apparel commonly occurs when spectating esports alone. Although the wearing of team apparel was sometimes reported as a joint effort among the participant and their friends, most instances of team apparel were reported in relation to solo esports spectatorship.

While their choice of clothing was largely observed by no one beyond themselves, participants engaging in this behaviour expressed a heightened sense of connection to their team. In particular, the act of donning team apparel evoked a sense of being at the stadium, cited as something they would do if at the site of play. In doing so, these participants evoked a feeling of being a part of a partisan crowd or collective, often presented in esports broadcasts as a massive gathering of enthusiastic fans wearing their teams' colours.

Beyond the wearing of team apparel, Participant 7 made mention of his choice to wear comfortable clothing when spectating esports. For him, spectatorship was supposed to be a relaxing and pleasant to provide an escape for the stresses of life. His conscious decision to wear comfortable clothes was one part of his broad routine for staging idyll experiences.

5.3.4 Cohabitants

Other people in the household acted as an important factor in the staging of domestic esports spectatorship experiences. Participants reported that the presence or absence of other people had profound influences over their experiences of

spectatorship. The presence of other esports fans often helped to imbue a sense of authenticity into the experience of spectatorship. For example, Participant 4 reported making efforts to spectate esports with her brother, who follows a team which is considered to be a rival to her favourite. Participant 4 discussed how the jocular yet sometimes fierce rivalry between the two when spectating esports together introduced a sense of ardent partisanship that made the esports rivalries portrayed online on social media platforms tangible and genuine. Participant 10 also cited the spectatorship of esports with physically present others as key to the staging of an authentic experience. For him, the spectating parties he held in his home with his friends offered a spectator experience reminiscent of being among a rowdy alcohol fuelled crowd of fans at the stadium.

For others, experiences of spectatorship were staged around the absence of other people. This was salient across the majority of respondents, with only Participant 7 and 11 living alone. For this majority living with cohabitants, efforts of staging esports spectatorship often worked to prevent non-fans living in the household from being exposed to the constructed experience. This staging was usually not done for the sake of the spectator, but rather for the sake of non-fans in the household. Participants felt that their spectatorship would be disruptive to the activities of their cohabitants. This was most pronounced in Participant 3's context, having grown up in a large family with six siblings, four of which were still living alongside him in his parents' house alongside their mother and father at the time of interviewing. Although some of Participant 3's siblings also spectated the same esports leagues he followed, the attitudes towards media consumption in his household that persisted across his childhood and adult life placed value on private spectatorship. With an emphasis on not disturbing others around the house, joint spectatorship often only occurred when everyone present shared an interest in the media to be spectated. Consequently, Participant 3 predominantly spectated esports on a desktop computer in his private bedroom. As will be discussed in Section 5.5.4, acts of compromise in response to others in the household exist as a major limitation in the staging of desired esports spectatorship experiences in the home.

Alternatively, there were cases where staging occurred for the explicit purpose of exposing cohabitants to the participant's spectatorship of esports. In staging these spectator experiences with others in the household in mind, the act of spectatorship

took on a laborious quality and extended beyond motivations of leisure. For example, Participant 4 further described how she almost exclusively watched major esports tournaments held in grand stadia with high production values in her family's communal living room. She explicitly expressed an intention for her parents to incidentally see this staged esports spectacle. Although spectatorship on the laptop in her room offered an experience without the distractions of household cohabitants, Participant 4 nevertheless spectated in the living room so that her parents were exposed to these professionalised portrayals of esports spectacle. Participant 4 felt that it was a part of her duty as an esports fan to help improve the perception of esports among non-fans. By exposing her parents to highly composed professionalised esports in the living room, Participant 4 worked to present esports as an acceptable and legitimate activity to them.

“I only watch it in the living room when there's really special events. Because you know, in the finale they usually have the ceremony in the beginning and there's fireworks and somethings really cool at the end ... It happens in a really big stadium and it looks professional. To my parents it's just gaming. I told them it's esports and not gaming, and then when I want to mention about esports I want to show to them that it's a real sport or something related to entertainment, that lots of people are watching this in the stadium”

As an extension of these endeavours, Participant 4 conversely ensured that she spectated lower-production value esports events, such as those held entirely online with no physical staging in a stadium, privately in her bedroom so that her parents remained blissfully unaware of this format of esports that she perceived as unprofessional. Participant 8 partook in a similar endeavour, choosing to spectate all esports in his private bedroom beyond his parent's gaze. When asked why he chose to spectate in this way, he remarked that his parents would likely never understand the concept of esports and felt that maintaining their unawareness would be the best way to ensure that they would not come to view esports in perceived negative manner.

5.3.5 Spectating platform

Choices of streaming platform played a major role in the staging of esports spectator experiences within participants' home. *Streaming platform* in this context refers to the tools which facilitate the spectatorship of esports. On a hardware level, this includes computers, smartphones, televisions and videogame consoles. Furthermore, this also encompasses the software and services which run on this hardware, including operating system, online livestreaming services, and social media. Participant's careful consideration for the technologies with which they watch esports demonstrated varying levels of suitability across a variety of targeted spectator experiences.

Online livestreaming services in particular were a technological consideration among most participants. Certain livestreaming services offer tools and functionalities that make them attractive to some participants and unattractive to others in the staging of esports spectator experiences. For example, Participant 11 discussed her preference for watching esports on Twitch over YouTube Live, citing the social tools in Twitch as being more robust. By spectating esports on Twitch and making use of its the chatroom functionalities, Participant 11 was able to construct a valued sense of sociality across her experiences of spectatorship with greater ease and effectiveness than YouTube Live.

However, choices of spectating technologies also centred around technical limitations or difficulties. Although Participant 11 discussed her preference for using Twitch, she had to predominantly spectate esports on YouTube Live as video playback on Twitch constantly stuttered on her computer for unknown reasons. Other technological limitations were discussed by participants, such as the difficulties of getting Twitch to work on specific hardware and poor Wi-Fi signals limiting spectatorship in certain areas of the home. Network connectivity issues were also mentioned by Participant 3, who often struggled to spectate live esports in his bedroom without buffering due to poor Wi-Fi reception. Once he was able to set up a wired ethernet connection from his bedroom to his home's router, this was no longer an issue.

Choice of screen also proved to be another technological consideration. Large screens like TVs that can be viewed by multiple people at once were commonly favoured

when constructing communal spectatorship experiences. TVs also proved popular for those who sought fidelity in their spectatorship, particularly by those wanting to create experiences which captured a sense of being at the stadium. A large TV in combination with a surround sound system and other staging efforts to minimise other distractions allowed these participants to revel in the visual and audible effects of the stadium as captured in esports broadcasts. In contrast, the smaller screens of laptops, desktop computers, and smartphones were more prominent in private spectatorship experiences. In particular, small screens were often used when multi-tasking, allowing for other concurrent activities to occupy the spectator's gaze. As will be further discussed in Section 5.5.1, this was apparent both when esports spectatorship was the primary or peripheral secondary activity.

Spectatorship also commonly took place on the computers that participants played videogames on. All participants regularly played videogames, and the previously played the games they watched as esports at the time of being interviewed. For those watching esports for self-improvement purposes, spectating on the same device and screen from which they play was reported to establish a sense of familiarity that would allow for a more seamless application of spectated skill and technique into personal play.

5.3.6 Scheduling and time zones

The time¹² when spectatorship occurred was often determined by type of spectator experience that was sought to be constructed. Most instances this theme occurred in close relation with the live spectatorship of esports. For some participants, the indeterminacy of spectating esports live was paramount to the desired spectator experience. The suspense of an ambiguous outcome and the sense of sharing the unfolding events in real-time with other like-minded spectators appealed to an exclusive sense of authenticity that only they would ever have.

Major esports tournaments were often the events where live spectatorship was emphasised by participants, who often adjusted their schedules to ensure they could spectate live. These scheduling efforts are likely more pronounced in the Australian

¹² 'Time' can refer to numerous aspects of temporality. In this section I use the word 'time' predominantly to refer to occurrence and duration. However, temporal concepts relating to 'time' also include tempo, rhythm, sequence, intensity and periodicity (Adam, 1990; Fine, 1990; Lefebvre, 2004).

context in which this research is situated in than in other countries, particularly those in the northern hemisphere. As established in Chapter 3.2, predominantly northern hemisphere regions like North America and Europe many major esports leagues and tournaments. While these events are held at times convenient for spectators in the time zones in which they are produced, they often occur during awkward hours for most living in Australia and the southern hemisphere. For example, *Dota 2's* (Valve Software, 2013) The International 8 tournament took place at 1am in eastern Australian regions on a Sunday, a point which will also be pertinent in Study 3 (Chapter 7). Rather than simply having to schedule their work or study to accommodate for these events, participants had to adjust their entire sleep cycle in order to spectate certain esports events live. Participant 2 made mention of taking a day off work to catch up on sleep after staying up a whole night to watch a live esports event. Participants 1 and 5 ensured months in advance that certain days of the year would be kept clear from work and study respectively in order to spectate certain esports events live.

This flexibility in being able to drastically adjust personal schedules to spectate live was not shared among all participants, however. Nevertheless, some participants conceived creative ways to replicate the sense of indeterminacy that live experiences of esports spectatorship would have. Participant 5 made mention of covering the bottom section of his computer monitor with a piece of cardboard when spectating recorded esports to hide the media player's timeline bar, the duration of which could give away the outcome of the match. In doing so, Participant 5 sought to recreate the outcome uncertainty of spectating esports live when only able to spectate recorded matches.

Although most participants expressed a desire to watch matches live, they often did not see this as a necessity when spectating less impactful esports matches. Often, recordings of preliminary league matches would be spectated by participants in the evening when work or study had been completed, feeling little desire for indeterminacy in the experiences of spectating these matches of relatively minor consequence.

5.4 Multi-tasking and second screening

It became evident from the interviews that esports spectatorship often occurs in parallel with other activities. In some cases, other activities were engaged in to augment the experience of esports spectatorship, while in other cases the spectatorship of esports was used to augment a secondary activity. In particular, cases of multi-tasking spectatorship predominately involved the use of two screens to consume and engage with multiple forms of media. This “second screening” is a trend broadly observed by human-computer interaction researchers following the proliferation of internet connected personal mobile devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptop computers (Cesar, Bulterman and Jansen, 2008; Doughty, Rowland and Lawson, 2012; Carter, Nansen and Gibbs, 2014). As the widely cited *New multi-screen world: Understanding cross-platform consumer behaviour* report produced by Google (2012) proclaims, “TV no longer commands our full attention as it has become one of the most common devices that is used simultaneously with other screens.”

The engagement with a second screen device has become a prevalent way to augment and enhance the experience of media engagement on a primary screen (Courtois and D’heer, 2012). For example, Gil de Zúñiga, Garcia-Perdomo and McGregor (2015) note how second screeners access social media through personal mobile devices to conduct research and fact-check information presented through television programs, particularly in the context of political participation. Alternatively, Giglietto and Selva (2014) note how television viewers use second screens to engage in discussion and debate with other viewers in real-time on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Second screening is indicative of the fusing of technology use in Jenkin’s (2006) theory of convergence culture. In this sense, it also reflects Deuze’s (2011) assertion that the multi-tasking of media has become a staple of regular life, emblematic of a state of modern society where individuals live *in* media, rather than simply *with* it.

Four major categories were generated from the analysis in relation to second screening and multitasking: *social interactions*, *spectating while playing*, *serious leisure* and *spectating while working*. Furthermore, some participants at the time of being interviewed did not engage in second screening when partaking in esports spectatorship but expressed a desire or intention to do so in the future. For example, Participant 3 explained that he was soon going to purchase a second monitor for his

desktop computer so he could spectate esports on it while working on his primary monitor:

"I sometimes multitask when watching esports. I commonly split [the esports broadcast] into half of the screen. I've actually been looking into getting a second screen so I have can the broadcast running itself. Otherwise I have it on half screen because the work I do, how to put it, is commonly number entering, following journals, some basic things."

5.4.1 Social interactions

When participants engaged in esports spectatorship as their primary activity, second screen devices were predominantly used to introduce elements of sociality to their experiences of spectatorship. A variety of services and platforms were used to achieve this. Commonly, participants communicated remotely with their friends over instant messaging applications like Facebook Messenger, Discord, and WeChat while watching live esports, introducing a sense of sociality despite not being able to be situated in the same place to spectate. Others similarly communicated with remote friends while watching live esports by using online voice chat services. Participants engaging in this type of second screening described the act of socialising with friends while watching esports as an integral part of a desirable experience of esports spectatorship.

Other participants sought to create this perceived essential quality of sociality through different methods of second screening. For example, Participant 6 noted how she often followed a Reddit thread that was set up to allow for communal chatter and discussion of Overwatch League matches as they happened. Other participants engaged in similar behaviours, using social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to connect with other fans. In doing so, participants reported that they felt like they were sharing their experience of spectatorship with a wider, interconnected group of like-minded individuals, rather than just being a lone spectator. A similar effect was also achieved by using a second screen to access the integrated chatrooms of the livestreaming platforms used to spectate esports. Although participants rarely engaged in any meaningful communication with other spectators in these chatrooms, the rapid pace and nonsensical nature of the chat messages acted as an analogue for the cheers and chants of spectators at the stadium. Likewise, by contributing to the

visual noise of these chatrooms, participants felt part of this text-based cheering crowd.

These desired senses of sociality in domestic esports spectator experiences reported by participants helps to clear ambiguities in existing literature regarding the importance of social elements in esports spectatorship. The findings of Study 1 align closely with those presented in Chapter 3 by Ford et al. (2017), Musabirov (2018), Qian et al (2019) and Shaw et al. (2019, pp.81) who observe how social interactions through online platforms are actively sought by esports spectators and contribute to the construction of enjoyable spectatorship experiences. Conversely, the findings contrast those presented by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), who assert that these social functions and interactions are not particularly important to the experience of esports spectatorship.

5.4.2 Spectating while playing

The spectatorship of esports was often engaged with on a second screen as a way to augment other leisurely activities. In most cases the act of spectating esports was a secondary activity, with a primary activity occupying the majority of participants' attention and concentration. The play of videogames was one activity that was often multi-tasked and second screened by participants. Often using a second monitor or simply playing in a minimised window while listening to commentary, esports spectatorship was a secondary activity used to augment the leisurely play of videogames. Participants referred to the second screening of esports as something interesting to have playing in the background to mask the mundanity of grinding¹³ in-game. These observations corroborate with findings presented by Carter, Nansen and Gibbs (2014), who examined the use of multiple screens in contemporary gaming contexts. They similarly found that gamers often consume media on a secondary screen to fill in uneventful or banal segments of videogame play.

Conversely, some participants reported that they spectate esports while playing videogames as a way to fill in uneventful parts of esports matches. While listening to the audio track of the match while mainly focusing on the videogame being played,

¹³ King, Delfabbro and Griffiths (2011) describe 'grinding' as a structural characteristic of videogames which involves "doing the same thing over and over, in order to get a large reward."

Participant 8 would be alerted to pivotal or exciting moments based on the responses of the commentators, acting as a prompt to shift his attention and gaze to the esports match. In this sense, the relationship between videogame play and esports spectatorship as primary and secondary activities was not necessarily fixed; participants' attention would often shift and fluctuate in reaction to whichever became the most compelling in the moment.

5.4.3 Serious Leisure

In Carter et al.'s (2014) rationale for conducting research into the use of multiple screens in videogame play, they expressed that most work originating from the field of human-computer interaction regarding multiple screen use has been conducted in the context of non-gaming leisure and professional work. The findings of Study 1 further expand on this observation, revealing multiple screen use in a context which sits at the crossroad between work and leisurely videogame play.

The play of esports often crosses over into the domain of serious leisure. To reiterate, serious leisure is a concept popularised Stebbins (1992) which describes the pursuit of amateur or hobbyist activity that has extended beyond the motivation of leisure alone, where an individual can develop a fulfilling “career” through the acquisition and expression of specialised skills and experiences. The use of the word ‘serious’ was inspired by Stebbins’ research participants, who used the adjective to describe the sincerity and importance with which they approach their activity of interest. In the context of esports, many professional esports players start their careers simply as gamers playing competitive games leisurely, eventually developing the skills and proficiencies that allow them to competitive at the highest of levels and pursue a career in what was initially a hobby. In this transitional process, reasons for playing competitive games exist beyond leisure, serving training and team building purposes for the advancement of players’ careers (Kauwelo and Winter, 2019).

Some instances of second screen esports spectatorship performed by some participants indicated that they were in the process of transitioning towards becoming a serious leisure esports player. In these instances, the spectatorship of esports was the secondary activity to the primary activity of playing competitive videogames. The predominant motivator driving this behaviour was the use of high-

level esports matches as a reference point to learn useful skills and strategies for use in personal play.

For example, Participant 9 invested in a dual monitor configuration for his gaming computer so that he could play *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (Valve Software, 2012) on his primary monitor while having pre-recorded professional esports matches play on the secondary monitor. Setting up a private test server populated by AI controlled opponents and teammates, Participant 9 would shift between watching strategic moments of esports play on the secondary monitor to attempting to execute them for himself in game on his primary monitor. This type of dual monitor second screening is distinct from that noted previously in Section 5.4.2, as in this case the spectatorship of esports acted as an educational resource from which Participant 9 sought to improve his own personal serious leisure play, rather than as a pleasant ambience sought to augment leisurely play.

5.4.4 Spectating while working

The spectatorship of esports was often an activity engaged with on a second screen as way to augment the experience of performing laborious tasks. In these cases of second screening and multitasking, esports spectatorship took place on a screen to the periphery of the laborious task. For instance, esports was often spectated as an augmentative activity to housework. Participant 1 noted how he usually plays an esports match on his TV while cleaning his apartment to cut through monotony of the housework. Interestingly, those who spectated esports to augment housework often did not engage with the visual content of the esports spectacle with their gaze. Mostly fixated on performing acts of housework, participants used verbs like “listen” and “hear” rather than “watch” or “see” when talking about their esports spectatorship in this context.

Participant 1 again helps to illustrate this observation, who described his process of loading up an esports match on his phone to listen to while washing dishes. Putting his phone on a windowsill in his kitchen to ensure it did not get wet, Participant 1’s spectatorship in this scenario was an entirely audible experience with no visual engagement. He described this mode of spectatorship as similar to the radio broadcast of conventional sporting matches. Citing the detailed and illustrative commentary present in the matches of the *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009)

esports leagues he follows, he asserted that he was able to adequately follow matches in this way. He elaborated that this type of esports spectatorship is good companion activity to the routine tasks of cooking and dishwashing.

“I have a lot of down time when I’m doing things like cooking. I can just put [my phone] down and listen to it. I mostly follow the commentary, the game sounds are there too, and a lot of that alerts you to when something is happening and when it requires more of my attention, I guess.”

Although spectatorship has been characterised so far in this thesis and existing academic literature as being predominantly engaged with through gaze, participants sometimes partook in esports spectatorship predominantly through audible modes to augment their domestic labour. Often, participants working or studying from home would do so while listening to esports playing in the background. For example, Participant 2 described that when sitting at his desktop computer doing data entry work, he often played a pre-recorded esports match in his web browser and then immediately minimised the window, shifting to his Excel spreadsheet to work while listening to the audio of the match playing in the background. When asked about how he was able to stay concentrated on his work while listening to esports matches, he explained that he only listened to esports while doing relatively boring work that did not require much cognitive effort. He described his attention span as weaving between his work and audio spectatorship in a similar manner as outlined in Section 5.4.2, noting how he relied on crescendos and sudden shifts in the intensity of the commentary track to prompt him to start paying close attention to the match. In some cases where commentary seems particularly explosive, Participant 2 admitted that he stopped working to spectate the seemingly pivotal moment with his full attention. While at a glance it appeared that Participant 2 used esports to mask the tedium of his work, conversely his work had done something similar for his esports spectatorship, filling the uneventful gaps between exciting moments of play and allowing him to be productive in the process.

5.5 From leisure to labour

With the ‘*how*’ of domestic esports spectatorship presented in Section 5.3 and 5.4, this section will shift focus to the ‘*what*.’ Namely, this section will draw on the previously discussed themes to establish a sense of what the experiences of domestic

spectatorship are like. Ultimately, five overarching major themes were generated from the analysis to which characterise experiences of domestic esports spectatorship: *leisurely augmentation*, *learning from the pros*, *authenticity and attendance*, *compromise*, and *laborious spectatorship*. It is important to note that no single participant's experiences of spectatorship were characterised solely by one of these themes. Rather, participants' spectatorship experiences were characterised by and constructed for a variety of these themes.

5.5.1 Leisurely augmentation

The spectatorship of esports was often a secondary or auxiliary activity used to make a primary activity more enjoyable. Often done so in conjunction with menial work, study or chores requiring little cognitive effort, the spectatorship of esports worked to ease the monotony of these activities. With gaze directed towards the primary activity, an emphasis was placed on the audible elements of esports spectatorship. Participants became highly reliant on the soundtrack of esports matches to follow emergent narratives of the competition. In particular, predominantly audible esports spectatorship was facilitated by detailed commentary tracks. Participants described the descriptive and emotive nature of professional esports commentary as illustrative enough to comprehensively understand the narrative of play. Even in cases where visuals were deemed essential to the following of the match, the commentary track acted as a prompt for participants to direct their gaze back towards match during particularly pivotal moments.

These findings demonstrate another dimension of commentary in the mediation of esports spectacle, adding to previous research which has highlighted the utility of esports commentators. For example, Byrö (2017) observes how the promotional metadiscursive language of esports commentators helps to convey the rivalry between players, generating sense of fierce competition by framing the actions of players against this narrative of rivalry. In doing so, a heightened emotive response is evoked from the spectator. Similarly, Kempe-Cook, Sher and Su (2019) note how besides providing descriptive play-by-play analysis and descriptions of the match, the choices of language, tone and syntax by commentators generate hype around the play and provide context for pivotal moments. In both of these texts, the authors ultimately conclude that esports commentary plays a fundamental role in communicating the narratives, actions, and enveloping contexts of professional

esports play. In doing so, commentary in esports broadcasts transforms what is often a mess of player perspectives and disparate moments into a coherent and entertaining spectacle. The use of commentary tracks by participants in Study 1 as a way to spectate esports as leisurely, augmentative experiences exemplifies their importance in the mediation of esports spectacle. This mode of esports spectatorship allows for a coherent experience of esports spectatorship akin to conventional sports spectatorship over radio broadcast.

5.5.2 Learning from the pros

Some domestic experiences of esports spectatorship engaged in by participants were constructed largely for the sake of learning. These participants sought to build on their own competitive gaming knowledge by watching professional competitive play. In some cases, this was a serious leisure pursuit, with esports media acting as an educational tool rather than a source of entertainment. Instead of watching matches from start to finish, those spectating for the sake of learning commonly skipped through pre-recorded content to find skilful moments to learn and replicate in their own play, often spectating these short segments on repeat. Little care was expressed towards to narratives or outcomes of the matches; most already knew which team had won and had simply chosen to spectate the match based on its reputation of containing skilful play.

These findings align with those made in existing esports literature. For example, Lee and Schoenstedt (2011) found that skill building for actual play was a particularly pronounced esports spectatorship motivation when compared to conventional sports spectatorship. They conclude that esports spectators have a strong desire to stay competitive and skilful at playing esports titles. By extension, their conclusion suggests that esports spectators are commonly also players of esports titles, an observation also made by Rambusch et al. (2017). Similarly, Seo and Jung (2016) assert that those who engage in esports practices typically take on multiple roles ranging from playing, spectating and governing.

5.5.3 Authenticity and attendance

The concept of authenticity often converged with the concept of attendance across participants' retellings of their domestic esports spectating experiences. In constructing these experiences, participants often sought to achieve a sense of being

removed from ordinary life, working to be totally immersed in their spectatorship. Notably, spectators worked to construct their domestic experiences of esports spectatorship in ways which reflected spectatorship at the stadium, largely drawing on portrayals of stadia in esports broadcasts as inspiration. Participants perceived the stadium as a source of esports authenticity, mimicking characteristics of the stadium remotely in their homes to authenticate their domestic experiences of spectatorship. Cases such as Participant 4's wearing of team apparel to reflect those worn by spectators at the stadium, Participant 10's invitation of friends over to emulate a sense of being in a crowd of like-minded spectators, and multiple participants' engagement with Twitch chat as an analogue for cheering illustrate this finding.

These acts of staging also contributed towards another valued quality in the construction of authentic esports spectator experiences: a sense of attendance. Participants staged their domestic spectating environments in ways that would not just only reflect the experience of spectatorship at the stadium, but also in ways which create a sense of having engaged in the act of attendance without leaving the house. As Rogerson et al. (2019) demonstrates, the act of attendance itself is a major motivator for hobbyist engagements. Based on a survey of serious leisure boardgame hobbyists, Rogerson et al. note how travel to and attendance of large international board gaming conventions worked as a defining moment (Weed and Bull, 2009) in respondents' identity as a boardgamer and in their engagement with the hobby. They note how one respondent expressed a desire to attend a certain major boardgaming convention despite being unsure if they would actually enjoy participating in it. Rogerson et al. conclude by asserting that attendance to these conventions by hobbyists represent an 'active' engagement with the boardgaming hobby, demonstrating a greater level of dedication than 'passive' forms of engagement (Green and Jones, 2006; Gibson, 1998).

In the context of the present study, participants sought to partake in active forms of esports spectatorship to create a valued sense of attendance. By virtue of the stadium being perceived and presented as an authentic site of esports spectatorship, attendance to stadia becomes an authenticator of the experience of esports spectatorship. One must travel to attend, leaving the mundanity of daily life and the home for the fantastical liminoid space constructed in the stadium. Likewise, those

spectating from home sought to transform mundane domestic spaces into sites of esports spectatorship.

The home is often considered as an epitome of mundanity in life, being the place where a large number of daily routines take place. It is not the routines themselves that make the home a mundane space, but rather that we often do not pay much attention to the routine activities we perform in the home; we simply live in it (Enloe, 2011). Likewise, when a new technology or object becomes commonplace in domestic environments, it takes on a mundane quality in that it no longer draws attention (Talsi, 2012). Mundane domestic routines of getting out of bed in the morning, brushing our teeth, and getting dressed are all acts that for most of us do not elicit much thought to perform; we simply do so as needed in a spontaneous, improvised manner. Pink and Mackley (2016) assert that the home is largely construed as a mundane space through senses of improvisation present in routine domestic activities.

Inverting this logic, acts which are planned and considered in advanced breaks such senses of mundanity. Events taking place beyond the spontaneous routines of regular life become the extraordinary; the opposite of the mundane (Shaffer, 2000). Planned extraordinary events such as holidays, celebrations and attendance to concerts or sporting events become the landmarks with which we construct the narratives of our lives that we communicate and retell to others, rather than the mundane routine activities that we largely live through. Often, these extraordinary events involve the departure from the home to an extraordinary place, or the profound transformation of the mundane domestic space into an extraordinary space. The latter can be observed in the spectating behaviours of some participants in Study 1. Although they did not physically travel, these participants were able to create a sense of attendance by bringing authentic elements of esports spectating place into their homes.

Some including Kim, Cheong, and Kim (2016) suggest that by constructing such perceived authentic elements into the home, the domestic spectator creates a sense of presence, “the phenomenon in which an individual develops a sense of being physically present at a remote location through interaction with media.” Others however argue that rather than dislocating the spectator and ‘transporting’ them to

a place they geographically are not, the artifice of the constructed experience is itself the extraordinary to be immersed in. For example, Keightley (1996) notes that hi-fi enthusiast men are portrayed in 1950s era magazines as constructors of technologically advanced music listening solutions, that through careful composition and sophisticated equipment, immerses the listener into a high-fidelity experience that momentarily obscures the mundanity and femineity of domestic life. Here, the hi-fi enthusiast is not ‘taken’ to somewhere else, but is rather given an opportunity to escape from the home into a contrivance specifically designed for such a purpose; the authenticity of the ensuring high-fidelity listening experience stems from the technological assemblage’s ability to block out or mask surrounding elements of domesticity.

Such notions of immersion through technological contrivance have seemingly persisted into the 21st century. In the context of videogaming, Taylor and Alder (2018) frame the construction of gaming “man caves” in a manner similar to Keightley (1996), noting how men seek escape from the feminised home through composing technological assemblages which enables unconstrained and undistracted gaming experiences. Other games scholars like Carter, Nansen, and Gibbs (2014) and Keogh (2014) similarly reflect Taylor and Alder’s perspective, arguing that gamers do not become immersed in the game worlds they are playing, but rather in the composition of their material gaming environments and configurations. Such perspectives tie into broader theories of how people ‘make room’ for media within their homes, whether it be permanent assemblages of media technologies and furniture, or ad hoc compositions for temporary use (Spigel, 1991, pp.238-240).

The introduction of new media technologies, such as the radio, television, and video game console, not only have the potential to mask senses of domesticity, but also fundamentally change the purposes of the areas of the home they are placed and used in. For example, Spigel (1992, p.102) notes that the TV acted as a new apparatus with which to create a window to “another world”, superseding the literal glass window which brought the “other world” of the outdoors into the domicile. Homeowners were not so much as interested in immersing themselves in other worlds, but rather in the apparatus of the TV which would create a window into such worlds and foster family harmony. Eventually this harmony would be interrupted through individualistic media apparatus use, something which home videogame

consoles like the *Wii* and *PlayStation 3* sought to remedy by respectively encouraging communal family play and acting as the central media centre of the living room (Flynn, 2003; Chambers, 2012). Alternatively, Tobin (2013, pp.65-69) notes how portable consoles enabled the construction of domestic gaming spaces beyond the living room. Likewise, Study 1 has found that domestic spectators of esports not only transform the living room into spaces of esports spectatorship, but also other rooms of the house largely through the use of mobile devices like smartphones and laptop computers.

Study 1's findings also demonstrate that domestic esports spectators do not simply compose their spectating environments to feel as if they are superficially at the stadium, but rather become immersed in their carefully thought-out compositions, masking the domesticity of the home and creating a sense of sporting place. Bale (1998) describes sports spectators as having a place-making quality, being able to transform places such as bars or empty fields into sporting places by the rituals and attitudes spectators bring to such spaces. Likewise, participants of Study 1 also demonstrate a place-making quality in their homes. The bringing of like-minded fans into the home, the wearing of ostentatious team apparel, and engagement the feverous visual noise of the Twitch chat were each acts which masked the mundanity of domestic life in these instances of esports spectatorship.

Out of all of the characteristics that appeared in participants' descriptions of their domestic esports spectator experiences, it was often the construction of social aspects that masked the domestic sense of mundanity. In the context of conventional sports spectatorship, the sharing of spectator experiences with other like-minded spectators, whether they be collocated and invited into the household or remote and engaged with over social media, helps construct of a sense of sporting place. In doing so, the experience of spectatorship becomes authenticated through the enactment of these essential rituals and the mundanity of the home is masked. Study 1 has demonstrated that this too occurs in the context of esports spectatorship, a theme which will reoccur in Study 3 (Chapter 7) during instances of esports spectatorship at GGEZ esports bar. In essence, these instances of domestic esports spectatorship become events that are organised, consciously composed, and actively engaged in, as opposed to instances of opportunistic spectatorship. As will be discussed in Chapter

7.7.4, such extraordinary instances of esports spectatorship become key definers of one's esports fandom and constitute a form of gaming capital.

5.5.4 Compromise

Compromise was the theme which underscored almost every aspect of participants' experiences of domestic esports spectatorship. Although participants believed themselves to hold a high degree of autonomy over the construction and engagement in esports spectator experiences in their homes, often their ability to exercise this autonomy was diminished by a variety of factors. Rather, the responses of participants portray domestic spaces as restrictive in the construction esports spectating experiences.

There were three main ways in which participants had to commonly create compromise in their spectator experiences. Firstly, there was compromise on a technological level. Although participants often desired to spectate esports using a certain configuration of technology to create an intended experience of spectatorship, technological constraints or issues often prevented them from doing so. As mentioned in Section 5.3.5, Participant 11's preference to spectate esports on Twitch was often quashed by buffering issues she commonly encountered on the platform, forcing her to use YouTube Live instead. While lacking the robust social tools of Twitch that Participant 11 sought to employ in constructing experiences of esports spectatorship, YouTube Live would at least allow her to actually watch esports without interruption from buffering.

In some situations, the limitations of spectating technologies did not directly pertain to issues with devices or services, but were rather enacted by other members of the household. Participants often had to make compromises around habits and desires of their domestic cohabitants, influencing the spaces in the homes they could spectate esports in and the devices on which they could spectate. In particular, the media consumption habits of others in the household usually overrode those of the participants. This commonly manifested in parent-child relationships, with participants needing to spectate in their private bedrooms or on a private screen using headphones while their parents occupied and spectated other media in communal living spaces. The abundance of this form of compromise can be attributed to the sample of the study being compromised predominantly of young adults

ranging from 19-28 years old, half of which still lived with at least one parent when interviewed. Conversely, those living alone held the greatest degree of autonomy over the staging of their esports spectator experiences, lacking this often profoundly impactful source of compromise.

Although those living alone did not need to deal with the constraints of household cohabitants, this did not make the staging of their esports spectating experiences completely free from compromise. The one type of compromise experienced by all participants was that of scheduling. In particular, the ability or inability to spectate esports live were the most common manifestations of this compromise. Temporal constraints, particularly those relating to time zone differences, appear in research pertaining to conventional sports spectatorship. For example, Weed's (2006) ethnography of soccer spectatorship in British pubs revealed how FIFA followers have to often choose between compromising their spectatorship or their daily duties to watch World Cup matches live. The Australian context of Study 1 accounts for the abundance of this particular factor of compromise. With major esports events largely taking place in the northern hemisphere, live spectatorship is prohibitive for Australians adhering to a conventional sleep schedule. Nevertheless, even esports events occurring in Australia required consideration for participants' schedules, much like other forms of scheduled media programming.

5.5.5 Laborious spectatorship

Across many responses, compromise had to be made around others in the household when constructing a domestic esports spectator experience. However, some instances of spectatorship were staged specifically with household cohabitants in mind, rather than the spectator themselves. Specifically, these cases revolved around efforts to present esports in a perceived positive manner to members of the household who were not esports fans. The goal was not to convert these non-fans into fans, but rather to simply have them come to view esports in a manner that the participants perceived as professional and legitimised. As T.L. Taylor (2012) notes in *Raising the Stakes*, esports is largely perceived by non-fans as an amateurish activity with little distinction from other videogaming practices. T.L. Taylor expresses that this perception does not accurately reflect the professionalisation of contemporary esportsing practices and culture, a position that Participants 4 and 8 clearly share in Section 5.3.4.

While these cases of spectatorship could be construed as another form of compromise as participants were staging the experience of spectatorship with their non-fan cohabitants in mind, this is not entirely the case. The examples discussed in section 5.5.4 can be considered as compromised, as an intended experience of spectatorship could not be constructed due to the presence of certain domestic obstructions. Conversely, the efforts of Participants 4 and 8 to portray esports in a positive manner to their parents was itself the intended experience of spectatorship.

The use of high production value esports spectacles to positively portray esports to non-fans in a household represents another form of spectatorship engaged with beyond motivations of leisure and entertainment. Furthermore, this type of spectatorship further sets itself apart by being engaged in not for the sake of the spectator. In this sense, this type of spectatorship takes on a laborious quality. As will be discussed in Chapter 8.3, these laborious motivations provide a new perspective with which to frame experiences of esports spectatorship, as most current research on esports activities is framed through concepts of leisure.

This marks the first appearance laborious spectatorship in this thesis outside of Chapter 1. As will become apparent in Study 2 and Study 3, forms of spectatorship engaged in for laborious reasons is as a recurrent theme across the three sites of spectatorship studied in this thesis, manifesting differently in each.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the first exploratory study into the experiences of domestic esports spectatorship. Study 1 identified the ways in which domestic spectators staged their spectatorship and the considerations they make when doing so to construct valued qualities into their experiences of esports spectatorship.

The thematic analysis of 12 semi-structured interviews generated five major themes which characterised domestic experiences of esports spectatorship. I have affirmed that spectatorship in this context pertains to more than just simply watching esports. Particularly in cases of leisurely augmentation, the audio tracks of esports matches are engaged with to make banal activities more enjoyable. In other instances, spectatorship is not entirely leisurely, working either as an educational resource for the betterment of personal play among serious leisure esports hobbyists, or as a form of laborious spectatorship intended to help improve the perception of esports among

non-fan cohabitants. Participants' domestic spectating experiences were often authenticated through the engagement in key esportsing rituals and behaviours, working to create a sense of attendance without leaving the home by masking the innate atmosphere of domestic mundanity. In particular, participants turned to the stadium as a reference from which to construct an authentic experience of esports spectatorship within their homes. Throughout almost all experiences were factors of compromise, positioning the home as a relatively restrictive site of spectatorship, particularly in comparison with the findings presented in Study 2 (Chapter 6) and Study 3 (Chapter 7). Ultimately, three dimensions of esports domestic spectatorship were generated from the findings of this study: the spectacular, the mundane, and the laborious.

Esports spectatorship within the home relies on the mediated broadcast of esports matches and events. Although an facilitated by a collection of computerised and virtual practices in terms of both play and broadcast, major contemporary esports tournaments are nevertheless commonly situated in grand venues such as stadia with intricately staged productions and live audiences akin to conventional sports. Chapter 6 will next explore the experiences of esports spectatorship at the site of play of the stadium, focusing on two major stadium-situated esports tournaments held in Sydney during 2017. It will explore how experiences of esports spectatorship at the stadium are staged and constructed for two different audiences: those present in the stadium and those spectating remotely.

Chapter 6 – Spectating at the stadium

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents Study 2, which explores the experiences of esports spectatorship in stadia. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted across two major international esports events held in Sydney during 2017, employing data generation methods including semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and personal lived experiences of the events. No longer restricted to small local events with limited reach, esports has evolved into a globally spanning industry with events situated in grandiose sites including convention centres, television studios, theatres, and stadia (T.L. Taylor, 2012). The current globalised nature of esports has led way for numerous international esports circuits and tournaments (Carter et al., 2017), with host cities reaping the economic benefits such events generate as high-profile spectator experiences.

For example, the Polish city of Katowice was little-known internationally until it hosted the Intel Extreme Masters (IEM) finals in 2013. Since then, it has continued to host the IEM finals alongside other esports competitions, becoming known as the “European capital of esports” (Jurkic, 2020). Katowice now hosts one of the world’s largest esports event each year, putting Poland at the forefront of European and global esports. South Korea stands as another quintessential example of how the embracing of esports can benefit a country. Esports is now a part of mainstream South Korean culture and is supported directly by its government. With this support, the South Korean esports market was worth around \$39.5 million in 2005, almost a decade before the broader rise of esports in North America, Europe and other East Asian regions (Samsung Economic Research Institute, 2005, as cited in Jin, 2010).

It is unsurprising that stadium-situated esports has been the subject of recent academic interest. The high-profile nature of these events has drawn attention particularly from business and events management fields, exploring the economic opportunities that stadium-situated esports events offer (Jenny et al., 2018; Lee, 2019). Other research has explored motivations for attendance at stadium-based esports events, reflecting a broader trend across other academic esports literature which largely centres around motivational research. For example, Sjöblom et al. (2018) compare gratifications for esports spectatorship between remote

spectatorship and attendance at stadium-situated sites of play. Others like Witkowski (2012) focus on the roles that technology and physicality perform at prominent esports events, exploring how these elements influence the experience of esports play. In later work, Witkowski (2013) sheds light on the hegemonic sporting masculinities which are performed by attendees at esports events. Nick Taylor (2016b) offers a perspective on the spectators of esports at stadium-situated events, noting how spectators have shifted from being audienceed as cocreators of spectacle to commodities for advertisers to exploit. Despite stadium-based esports events receiving recent academic attention and their contemporary status as high-profile spectacles, little is known about what the experience of spectating esports at the stadium-situated site of play is like.

Although there exists no directed academic literature which explicitly concerns the esports spectatorship experiences of stadium-situated events, two authors' work have shed some light on such experiences of esports spectatorship in these sites. Szablewicz's (2016) work exploring the construction of esports spectacle at stadium-situated esports events in China reveals experiences of spectatorship largely defined by expressions of patriotism and shaped by endeavours made by the event's organisers to construct a mediated broadcast spectacle for remote audiences. Szablewicz frames the physically present audience at the stadium as a type of commodity used in the construction of the mediated broadcast spectacle delivered to remote spectators. She notes how the physically present spectators at a Chinese esports event were purposefully manipulated to portray the event in its mediated broadcast as being full of enthusiastic, patriotic, and socially acceptable fans.

In *Raising the Stakes*, T.L. Taylor (2012) observes the manipulation of physically present spectators at esports tournaments, similarly noting how physical audiences are used as props in constructing mediated broadcasts of such events. She explores this dynamic between the experience of spectatorship at the site of play and the mediated broadcast text constructed from its imagery. Drawing on Hutchins (2008), she asserts that esports is inherently entrenched in media and technology. Unlike in conventional sports, the performance of esports cannot occur beyond media and computerisation, for it is inherently "co-constructed through human and machine action" (T.L. Taylor, 2012). While the 'pitch' of esports is virtual and uniform across sites of spectatorship, T.L. Taylor considers the physical space of stadia and other

physically-situated sites of esports play as fundamental in shaping experiences of esports spectatorship, drawing on the “energy” that is generated among the physically present audience and conveyed through mediated broadcast to remote audiences. These concepts raised by Szablewicz and T.L. Taylor also play a fundamental role in Study 2. Building on their observations, I explore the ways in which attendees at the two Sydney esports events negotiate their dual roles as spectators and commodities in the construction of their spectator experiences.

Although the research presented in this thesis seeks to be generalisable, it is impossible to ignore the Australia context in which its studies are situated. In comparison to other regions mentioned in previous paragraphs, Australia has been affected by relatively few effects of globalised esports. This is due certain characteristics and limitations unique to Australia. Carter et al. (2017) assert that Australia’s geographic location has hampered esports growth in the country due to issues regarding high latency, which limit opportunities for Australian esports professionals to compete against international opponents. Furthermore, they assert that a lack of esports services and local tournaments in Australia compounds this issue. However, 2017 saw this situation start to shift. International esports organisations have started probing Australia as a potential market for esports (van Boom, 2017; van Daal, 2017; Walker, 2017). In 2017, two large international esports leagues, the Intel Extreme Masters and the Overwatch World Cup (OWC), hosted events in Australia for the first time. These two Sydney esports events not only offered an opportunity to explore the experiences of esports spectatorship in stadia, but also to observe how these types of events may manifest in an Australian esports landscape. Retroactively looking back at IEM Sydney 2017 and OWC Sydney 2017 in the latter half of 2020, the two events can be seen as marking the beginnings of Australia as an international sporting destination.

Thus, to understand the experiences of spectating esports at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney, we must consider the Australian context in which this study is based. In doing so, it is key to understand what motivates people to attend Australian esports events and what kinds of spectatorship experiences are constructed in the Australian cultural context. While little is known about Australian esports spectatorship (Carter et al., 2017), it is undeniable that the watching and playing of sport is a quintessential and celebrated aspect of the Australian cultural identity (Stoddart,

1986; Cronin and Mayall, 2005; Melnick and Wann, 2011). Understanding the spectatorship of sports in Australia can shed light on the attitudes which Australians may approach esports spectatorship with. As previously established in Chapter 3, studies have also shown some similarities between motivations of esports and conventional sports spectatorship (Cheung and Huang, 2011; Lee and Schoenstedt, 2011).

The findings generated from Study 2 highlight four main themes which characterised attendance at the two Sydney esports events: *entertainment*, *education*, *socialisation* and *active support*. While these themes share broad similarities with those generated from Study 1 in domestic contexts, the ways in which they manifested at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney differed. Nevertheless, when taken together with the findings of Study 1, the findings of Study 2 expand on notions of esports authenticity, the staging of esports spectacle for multiple audiences, and acts of laborious spectatorship.

This was the chronologically first study conducted as a part of this doctoral research, with the first stint of fieldwork at IEM Sydney taking place roughly five months into my candidature. Following a preliminary review of esports literature I embarked on the fieldwork with a focus on studying motivations of spectatorship, but very early on I shifted to a focus of experiences of spectatorship. Rather than abandoning my pursuit of understanding spectator motivations, I instead worked to understand experience through motivation. Ultimately, individuals are motivated to partake in certain experiences (Gnoth, 1997). Motivations for attendance frame elements of the experiences of spectatorship at the stadium that are valued and anticipated by spectators. Consequently, attendance motivations can be compared with spectators' reported lived experiences of the events to observe in which ways the two diverge (Fluker and Turner, 2000).

As found in Study 1, domestic spectators hold idealised perspectives of what the experience of spectating esports at the stadium events is like, drawing on these notions to authenticate spectatorship within their homes. Conversely, Study 2 explores what the experience of spectating esports in the stadium is like in practice and how idealised perspectives of stadium spectatorship motivate attendance. As will be made evident in the following paragraphs, spectators' expectations of IEM

Sydney and OWC Sydney as expressed through their attendance motivations largely aligned with or were surpassed by their lived experiences of spectatorship at the events. The experiences of spectatorship at the stadium were fulfilling for most participants, affirming their idealised perspectives.

6.2 Context

6.2.1 The Intel Extreme Masters Sydney 2017 (IEM Sydney)

IEM Sydney was a *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (Valve Software, 2012) tournament organised by ESL, the world's largest and oldest esports organisation¹⁴, as a part of their international Intel Extreme Masters series. IEM was among the most notable of several international esports events to be held in Australia for the first time in 2017. As will be explored further in Chapter 8.4.1, the hosting of IEM in the Qudos Bank Arena in Sydney Olympic park lent the event a sense of sporting grandeur, taking place in the same venue that historic Olympic and sporting events were held. IEM Sydney acted as the final stage of the ESL's Intel Extreme Masters series for 2017, with previous stages held in other cities across various countries. IEM returned to Sydney in 2018 and 2019. The event was also scheduled to be relocated to Melbourne in 2020 as a part of the 2020 Melbourne Esports Open (MEO) but was cancelled due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, IEM is scheduled to return in 2021 as a part of the 2021 MEO, cementing itself as an annual landmark Australian esports event. The 2017 event featured a number of internationally renowned teams of loose regional associations, with most predominantly maintaining a 'placeless' identity.

6.2.2 Counter-Strike: Global Offensive

CS:GO is a team-based first-person shooter developed by Valve Software (2012). Although the game features numerous game modes, 'bomb defusal' is the mode predominantly played in esports tournaments like IEM Sydney. A team of five 'terrorists' must plant a time-bomb in a specific location on the map, while a team of five 'counter-terrorists' must prevent them from doing so. Once planted, the terrorists must prevent the counter-terrorists from defusing the bomb. The terrorist team wins if the bomb detonates or if all members of the counter-terrorist team are eliminated. Conversely, the counter-terrorists win if they defuse the bomb, if all

¹⁴ As of 2020.

members of the terrorist team are eliminated before the bomb is planted, or if the bomb is not planted before the round timer reaches zero. *CS:GO* is characterised by its relatively fast gameplay, with popular formats playing to the best of 30 rounds with a 115 second timer for each. Both teams play as the terrorists and the counter-terrorists in a single match, swapping sides after 15 rounds.

6.2.3 Overwatch World Cup Sydney Qualifiers 2017 (OWC Sydney)

OWC Sydney 2017 was an *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016) tournament which acted as a preliminary qualifier for the Overwatch World Cup Finals held later in 2017 in California. The event was hosted by Blizzard Entertainment, *Overwatch*'s developer and publisher, in The Star Event Centre. Unlike IEM Sydney, OWC Sydney featured teams which represented specific countries, with national players handpicked to represent their homelands. While IEM Sydney has continued to return to Australia in subsequent years as an annual event, OWC Sydney 2017 remains the only time a stage of the OWC was held in Australia as of 2020. However, it is likely that this was not due to the Australian nature of the 2017 event, as all countries which hosted OWC stages in 2017 were not selected as hosts in 2018 except for the USA. Despite the departure of OWC Sydney, *Overwatch* retains an esports presence in Australia, with the Australian Overwatch Contenders series being established as a pathway for Australian Overwatch esports players to enter Blizzard's international franchise-based Overwatch League. The finals of the Overwatch Contenders have been staged as stadium-situated spectacles akin to OWC Sydney, acting as a headline event for the 2018 and 2019 iterations of the MEO.

6.2.4 Overwatch

Overwatch is a first-person shooter developed by Blizzard Entertainment (2016). Like *CS:GO* (Valve Software, 2012), *Overwatch* is team-based game which sees two teams of six competing against each other. The game is described by Blizzard Entertainment as a 'hero shooter'; players selects a 'hero' from a roster to play as, each with their own unique abilities, strengths, and weakness. Thus, the synergies created by certain hero compositions on a team constitute much of the strategy surrounding *Overwatch*. During OWC there were 28 playable heroes, which as of October 2020 has grown to 32.

Overwatch features four main game modes:

1. Escort – A ‘payload’ is escorted by the attacking team to a delivery point under a time limit, while the defending team must impede their progress.
2. Assault – Two control points must be systematically captured by the attacking team under a time limit, while the defending team must impede their progress.
3. Hybrid – Combining the ‘Escort’ and ‘Assault’ game modes, a lone capture point must be captured by the attacking team, after which they must escort a ‘payload’ to a delivery point. Both objectives must be completed before the timer runs out while the defenders impede their progress.
4. Control – Both teams fight for control of a single control point in a ‘king of the hill’ format. When in control of the point, a team accrues 1% per 1.2 seconds towards their ‘completion’ metric. The team to first reach 100% completion wins the round.

At OWC Sydney, all of these game modes were played in a best-of-four gauntlet, with an additional round played in case of a tie. This contrasts *CS:GO* at IEM Sydney, which featured a single game mode.

6.3 Method

6.3.1 Overall approach

To answer the research questions, motivations behind attendance and experiences of spectatorship at the two Sydney esports events were sought to be made salient. As detailed in Chapter 4, Study 2 adheres to the overarching ethnographic methodology of this thesis, employing what some consider to be a ‘rapid’ approach to ethnography (Millen, 2000). This rapid ethnographic approach worked to ‘deepen’ the time spent at the two Sydney esports events to generate a wealth of data. This was an essential strategy to employ in this study, as the fields of research only existed for the fleeting duration of IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney; the former lasting for two days and the latter for three. Drawing from Millen (2000) and Hughes et al. (1995), the predominant time-deepening strategy employed in this study was the use of various sources to generate data across the two events. While semi-structured interviews with attendees stand as the centrepiece of this study, the findings that will be presented in forthcoming sections have been generated and informed by data sourced from observations of attendees at the two Sydney esports events, my own

lived experiences of attendance and spectatorship at the events, photographs I took at the events as described in Chapter 4.4.3, and the mediated broadcast texts of the two events as livestreamed on Twitch.

6.3.2 Participants, recruitment and data generation

Due to the limited time available to both recruit and interview participants at the two Sydney events, a more opportunistic approach to recruitment was employed than that featured in Study 1. Participants (n=19) were recruited at the events during breaks between matches when spectators would leave the seating areas and be free to participate in an interview. Prospective participants were approached in a systematic manner; idle attendees were approached, given a brief explanation of the study and offered the opportunity to take part in an interview. If the attendee agreed, they were given a detailed study brief detailing the aims of the study and their role in the research, as well as a consent form. Upon the reading the document and signing the consent form, the interview would start immediately. Of all the attendees approached, roughly 50% agreed to take part in the study. Many of those who chose not to take part expressed interest in the research but were worried about potentially missing upcoming matches. Some who declined to take part offered to be interviewed later during the day, but none of these individuals followed through on their pledge. Although the possibility existed to participants to be recruited at the two events and interviewed remotely at a later date, this approach was not chosen as Study 2 sought to capture attendees' impressions of the two events in the moment, rather than recalled reflections at a later date. Ultimately, the demographic representation of the sample of recruited participants reflected that of the boarder audience of attendees present at the events, largely consisting of white young adult men.

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Table 4 Demographics of participants interviewed for Study 2

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Place of residence
1	24	Male	Employed full-time	Perth, Western Australia
2	20	Male	Undergraduate student	Sydney, New South Wales
3	20	Male	Undergraduate student	Sydney, New South Wales
4	23	Male	Employed full-time	Auckland, New Zealand
5	25	Male	Unemployed	Adelaide, South Australia
6	24	Female	Employed part-time	Adelaide, South Australia
7	26	Male	Employed full-time	Bunbury, Western Australia
8	22	Male	Employed full-time	Sydney, New South Wales
9	24	Male	Employed part-time	Sydney, New South Wales
10	30	Male	Employed full-time	Brisbane, Queensland
11	25	Female	Graduate student	Sydney, New South Wales
12	22	Male	Employed full-time	Sydney, New South Wales
13	22	Male	Employed full-time	Sydney, New South Wales
14	20	Female	Undergraduate student	Sydney, New South Wales
15	25	Male	Employed full-time	Melbourne, Victoria
16	19	Male	Undergraduate student	Sydney, New South Wales
17	23	Male	Graduate student	Sydney, New South Wales
18	25	Male	Employed full-time	Sydney, New South Wales
19	24	Male	Employed full-time	Sydney, New South Wales

With the interviews being shorter than those in Study 1 and a more opportunistic recruitment procedure employed, the minimum sample size and stopping criterion (Francis et al., 2010) for Study 2 was higher to accommodate for a weaker information power (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2015). A minimum sample size of 13 was established, with a stopping criterion of 4 subsequent interviews where no

new codes or themes are generated. Eight interviews were first collected at IEM Sydney and analysed before fieldwork was conducted at OWC Sydney. The analysis of these first eight interviews helped to refine and guide the interviewing procedures for those conducted at OWC Sydney. With it being unknown how many further interviews would be needed past 13 to achieve data saturation, a surplus of interviews was conducted at OWC Sydney, totalling 11 for the event. From the analysis of the second round of interviews, the stopping criterion was met at interview 18, signalling that data saturation had been achieved.

While semi-structured interviews with attendees constituted a significant portion of data for Study 2, further sources were drawn on for data generation as a part of the employed time deepening strategy. Firstly, I engaged in participant observation at the two events, detailing the ‘going-ons’ in the stadia. In particular, I made observations of both the behaviours of the attendees, as well as activities the events’ staff and organisational personnel engaged in. This provided observations regarding how the events were run and offered further insight into how attendees behaved during the two events beyond what was self-reported through the interviews. To record these observations, fieldnotes in the form of written memos and photographs were generated as mentioned in Chapter 4.4.2 and 4.4.3. In addition to these observations, I also drew on my own experiences of attending the events as a source of data. Besides conducting interviews and observing those present at IEM and OWC Sydney 2017, I also spectated every match at the two events. In doing so I was not only a researcher, but also an attendee experiencing the event in the audience. Finally, I also drew on recordings of the events’ mediated livestreams to further triangulate observations made across the other data sources. More importantly however, the recordings represented how the events were portrayed to remote spectators, helping to identify how elements of the stadium-situated events were constructed and presented to create mediated broadcast texts.

6.3.3 Interview procedure

Interviewing commenced immediately after recruitment and lasted between 15 and 30 minutes, approximately the same duration as the breaks. A portable audio recorder was used to record the interviews, which were later transcribed for analysis. As mentioned in Section 6.3.2, interviews were conducted on-site to capture attendees’ impressions of the events as they happened. This allowed participants to

reflect on their experiences of the events and their motivations for attending while they were still fresh in their minds. Through this approach, the events and the stadia they were situated in acted as ethnographic probes. As De Leon and Cohen (2005) explain, probes are a useful ethnographic tool that can be used to help “stimulate or encourage an informant to provide data on specific topics with minimal influence from the interviewer.” With the intention to understand participants’ experiences and motivations for attendance at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney, the process of interviewing at the events saw participants refer and react to their surroundings and recent spectatorship, offering highly embedded accounts and reflections of their lived experiences at the two events.

As previously asserted in Chapter 4.4.2 and Chapter 5.2.3, semi-structured interviews offer the flexibility to pursue avenues of discussion raised by participants while guided by a structured outline. Seeking to explore how the site of the stadium factored into participants’ experiences of and motivations for esports spectatorship at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney, the semi-structured interviews multiple facets of their attendance and esports spectatorship behaviours. These questions¹⁵ were designed to explore the interviewees’ motivations for attending the event, their esports consumption behaviour, their perceived experience of the event, their videogame playing behaviour, their relationship with conventional sports, and their thoughts on the Australian esports scene.

6.3.4 Research sites

IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were chosen as the fields for Study 2 as they stood as landmark Australian esports events, marking the first time that the IEM and OWC series hosted a stage of their circuits in Australia. Prior to these two events, the Australian esports landscape was relatively barren. As Carter et al. (2017) asserts in the context of 2016, there are limited opportunities for both esports professionals and esports researchers in Australia due to a lack of esports services, events, and broadcasters. The hosting of IEM and OWC in Sydney during 2017 signalled a disruptive change to this equilibrium, offering two major esports events that not only presented Australian spectators an opportunity to attend events of such international calibre in person, but also offered Australian esports researchers like

¹⁵ See Appendix D for the full interview guide employed in Study 2.

myself and others¹⁶ a local stadium-situated field to research. Furthermore, these events had a relatively high number of attendees in comparison to previous Australian esports events, with IEM Sydney being the largest Australian esports event at the time with 7000 attendees each day event (ESLgaming, 2017). While official attendance numbers for OWC Sydney were not published, the venue which hosted the event advertises on their website that it is able to accommodate around 1500 people in the configuration used for the event (Event Centre, n.d.).

6.3.5 Thematic analysis

These data generated from the two events were collated, transcribed where appropriate, and subjected to a thematic analysis. As discussed in Chapter 4.5, the approach to thematic analysis was a modified form of Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive approach, adapting coding procedures from Grounded Theory approaches. While this research is not considered to be a piece of GT work (as established in Chapter 4.5.2), the interpretive stance underscoring grounded theory analysis procedures provided a useful reference point for conducting a thematic analysis on a data set cemented in the field it was generated from. In essence, it was important that theory generated from the analysis was done in a way that was close to these data to best capture the intricacies of the stadium in relation to the attendance motivations and spectating experiences of attendees. In particular, Charmaz's (2000) constructivist approach to GT was drawn on to guide the thematic analysis. As this study concerns the subjective experience of esports spectatorship in stadia, Charmaz's framing of data as subjective interpretations of reality is an apt way to guide an inductive thematic analysis rooted in constructionist perspectives. Consequently, during the process of analysis I saw myself as constructing theory from these data, rather than uncovering latent meanings.

Study 2 was the first study conducted in the chronology of this research course, representing one of my first attempts at conducting a thematic analysis. As mentioned in Chapter 4.5.1, I found it necessary at this early point in my research career closely adhere to guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006), as well as Strauss and Corbin (1998), in conducting a thematic analysis on the data generated for Study 2. In contrast, the experience I gained from conducting a thematic analysis

¹⁶ See Butt and de Widt's (2018) "Beer & Pixels: Embodiment, drinking and gaming in Australia," which contains observations made at IEM Sydney 2017.

in Study 2 provided me with the foundational experience needed to conduct a freer flowing, intuition-drive approach in Study 1 and Study 3.

As outlined in Chapter 4.5.2, the coding procedures used in the thematic analysis were adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1998), with data being coded in adherence with three-step coding procedure. Firstly, data were subjected to open coding, the “process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Words, sentences and observations in the data that held insightful ideas were compared and placed into categories. Secondly, the relationships between categories were explored and connected in the axial coding stage. Thirdly, selective codes were generated by relating axial codes to each other. From here, a narrative connecting the key findings was developed and explained. As this was the first study conducted in the chronology of my doctoral candidature, these coding procedures were adhered to more closely than in Study 1. Through this inductive data analysis, four major themes were generated to characterise spectators’ attendance across the two Sydney esports events: *entertainment*, *education*, *socialisation*, and *active support*. When exploring the ideas contained in these motivations and spectators’ reflections on their attendance, a sense of fulfilment underscored the experiences of spectatorship at the two events. For the most part, spectators’ expectations and preconceived perceptions of the events were met or surpassed, being largely seen as professional, legitimate, spectacular, and authentic.

6.4 Entertainment

Entertainment was one of the major themes generated from the analysis. Engaging in *fandom*, *excitement* and *game passion* were identified as axial codes of this theme. Table 3 outlines the open and axial codes which constitutes *entertainment*.

Table 5 The constituents of ‘entertainment’

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Entertainment	Esports narratives	League follower Personal investment in players Team fandom Player fandom Contextualisation Dramatic Commentary
	Excitement	Thrilling content Strategic play Being in the crowd
	Game passion	Casual game player Watching high level play

6.4.1 Esports narratives

The dramatic storylines that surrounded the two Sydney events held entertainment value for participants. It is important to note that these narratives were not those found within the videogame titles of *CS:GO* (Valve Software, 2012) or *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016), but rather those which surrounded the events, leagues, teams, and players.

Those who were *league followers* closely monitored previous stages of IEM and OWC, keeping track of the dominant teams, underdogs, rivalries, and other conflict. In doing so, they pieced together each event into a timeline to construct a narrative of the league. For example, Participant 4 stated that he particularly enjoyed following the underdog narratives and the ensuing drama when a theoretically weaker team beats an over-confident opponent. For *league followers*, IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were the next chapter in their league narratives. For those attending IEM

Sydney, which acted as the grand final for the 2017 IEM series, the event provided a conclusion to their league story. In a similar fashion, participants engaging in *team fandom* and *player fandom* constructed similar storylines based on previous performances of their favourite team or player. Others were *personally invested in players*, following not only the narrative of their favourite players' performance in esports, but also of their personal lives.

The construction of narratives was not solely performed by the participants. Constant *contextualisation* was offered throughout auxiliary elements present at the two Sydney events. A prominent example was the introduction of teams with a short profile video outlining their previous performance, the events that shaped their play style, their motivations to win, and if they were considered underdogs. In this sense the profile videos offered pieces of background information for viewers to construct a narrative and create predispositions of the competing teams. Furthermore, narratives were also constructed during matches by the commentators. Commentators often incorporated suspenseful foreshadowing and speculation and references to previous events to dramatise the matches.

6.4.2 Excitement

The allure of an exciting experience of spectatorship was valued across most participants. In particular, the desire to watch *thrilling content* was commonly reported. Participants mainly sought to watch matches that were dramatic, emotionally arousing, and unpredictable, regardless of the match's outcome. For example, Participant 5 still enjoyed watching a close match that his favourite team eventually lost:

“I mean it wasn't the best seeing my team get knocked out, but the match was pretty intense, so I'm hoping for a really good grand final.”

Participants were particularly thrilled by *strategic play*. Beyond seeking to spectate unconventional techniques used to overcome established strategies, participants were also keen to speculate about how such instances of disruptive play would change the metagame¹⁷ of *CS:GO* (Valve Software, 2012) or *Overwatch* (Blizzard

¹⁷ The 'metagame' is a term used by players to refer to the dynamic higher strategy that defines competitive gameplay beyond the basic rules and mechanics of the game (Carter, Gibbs and Harrop, 2012).

Entertainment, 2016) from that point onwards. Others found excitement from *being in the crowd*. By being in the crowd, participants reported that felt energised by contributing to the cheering and enthusiasm of those around them. Participant 16 remarked when describing the difference between watching esports in crowd compared to watching from home:

“It’s a way better atmosphere, that’s pretty much I’d say the only difference is the atmosphere but it’s a pretty big difference, having a big atmosphere of people cheering and stuff like that. It’s just more hyped I guess, you get more involved.”

6.4.3 Game passion

Almost all participants who were at the two Sydney esports events played the videogame titles they spectate as esports, holding much personal passion for *CS:GO* (Valve Software, 2012) and *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016). In this sense, the spectatorship of esports at the two events contributed to the passion held by participants for these particular videogames. Much like in Study 1, the majority of participants were non-professional *casual game players* of the esports titles they spectated. For these participants, simply watching a game they played as a professional esports proved to be a novel experience which portrayed a notion that videogaming had started being taken seriously. Participants also expressed enjoyment in *watching a high level of play*, experiencing awe in the masterful performance of the professional players. Participant 12 described being impressed by professional players’ abilities to execute actions and strategies that he and other non-professional players struggled to do in their own personal play:

“There’s very few mistakes, and if there are mistakes generally they’re calculated. It’s really like watching a masterpiece. Basically, it’s just something that most people can’t do. That’s really why most people watch anything, right?”

6.5 Education

Education was one of the major themes generated from the analysis. *Game knowledge* and *understanding the appeal* were the two axial codes of this theme. Table 4 outlines the open and axial codes which constitutes *education*.

Table 6 The constituents of 'education'

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Education	Building game knowledge	Learning through watching the professionals Strategic play Metric of skill Explanatory commentary
	Understanding the appeal	Gaining a first-hand account of broadcast esports Being in the crowd

6.5.1 Building game knowledge

Building game knowledge to inform one’s own personal play was commonly reported among participants attending the two Sydney events. This was most commonly achieved by watching the matches and *learning through watching the professionals* play. By watching play of a higher level to their own, participants sought to incorporate professionals’ techniques and skills into their own play. Some participants looked more broadly beyond the professionals’ play, looking at the strategies being employed to understand the current competitive metagame and observing how it is challenged to improve one’s own strategic play. As Participant 7 stated:

“I like watching people find ways to beat their opponents. I love watching how the different metagames evolve in each game. The best thing is when someone figures out how to beat that with unexpected play and it kind of blows your mind. How did they even do that? And it just completely changes the game from that point on.”

Some participants also reported that they used professionals’ technical play as a *metric of skill* to determine their own placement on the skill ladder of *CS:GO* (Valve

Software, 2012) and *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016). For Participant 2, this was about seeing how much investment it would take to master the game:

“When you’re playing an esports you gain an appreciation for how hard it is, and when you watch you get to see how much time you need to put into perfecting it.”

Organisers of the events actively sought to teach viewers about the game through the use of *explanatory commentary* during matches to help describe skills and techniques to the viewer. This was most pronounced during the Australia versus Sweden match at OWC Sydney. This match was not only streamed online via Twitch, but was also broadcast on an Australian free-to-air television channel. During this match the commentators shifted their focus away from complex aspects of the game, instead breaking down basic gameplay mechanics for the less experienced television audience and simplifying their language to be less jargonistic.

6.5.2 Understanding the appeal

Beyond understanding the game, some participants attended in part to satisfy their curiosity of stadium-situated esports events. Participants who had previously watched esports reported attending to *gain a first-hand account of broadcast esports* so they could compare the two spectating experiences. These participants expressed a desire to experience aspects of the stadium that they felt could not be accurately experienced through remote spectatorship. For example, Participant 11 wanted to see if the aspects of esports events portrayed through mediated broadcasts on livestreaming platforms were more impactful and gratifying in person, despite already having enjoyed a ‘perfect’ viewing perspective from home:

“Obviously you have a perfect view when you’re looking at your own computer at home. So I just wanted to know if it’s better to be there in person with everyone cheering, or is it cool that actually you can see the players or whatever, like that. I wanted to find out.”

For some participants, the crowd was their main curiosity. These participants sought to understand what it was like *being in the crowd*, describing how the energy and enthusiasm of those around them made them feel more excited and hyped, enhancing their experience of spectatorship. Participant 17 compared this experience to being at a concert:

“When you go to a concert you can feel the noise and feel the applaud and screaming and really, how do you say, you can interact and be affected by the other people.”

Participant 19 also succinctly explained his desire to be in the crowd:

“When you’re online and you hear them talk about the crowds and how energetic and how like really exciting it is being here and you think ‘oh yeah, but you get the same experience online’ but you really don’t. Being out here is a completely different feeling than being sitting at home behind a computer screen.”

6.6 Socialisation

Socialisation was one of the major themes generated from the analysis. *Substantiating online relationships, strengthening bonds* and *making new friends* were identified as axial codes of this theme. Table 5 outlines the open and axial codes which constitutes *socialisation*.

Table 7 The constituents of ‘socialisation’

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Socialisation	Strengthening bonds	Meeting online gaming friends Bonding opportunity Physically engaging with members of the community
	Making new friends	Meeting like-minded people Seeking others to play with Community areas

6.6.1 Strengthening bonds

The esports events provided an opportunity for participants to strengthen existing relationships. Participants who attended the event with at least one other person

used the opportunity as a mutual experience to bond over. Those who saw the events as a *bonding opportunity* were partially driven to attend by their friend(s). In some instances, the decision to attend was made in tandem with their friend, while others were made aware of the event by their friend. Others attended to *meet online gaming friends* that they had formed relationships online and had not yet met in person. Participants indicated that meeting their gaming friends in person worked to substantiate their friendship, perceiving that their previously online relationship been ‘upgraded’ to a ‘real’ friendship. The esports events offered a mutual excuse for online friends to meet up who would otherwise be unable to for logistical reasons. For example, Participant 12 reported that attending OWC Sydney justified the interstate flight from Perth to finally meet his Sydney-based online gaming friend.

Others sought to *physically engage with members of the community* rather than specific individuals. Participants often reported that one does not usually interact face-to-face with other members of the esports community as interactions are often had online. Through the online social platforms which surround and frame competitive gaming fandoms, members of esports communities do not necessarily need to be within the same local proximity to facilitate relationships. Nevertheless, there was a desire among participants of wanting to meet esports community members in-person. Participant 8 highlighted this by describing the lack of local esports scenes in comparison to conventional sports.:

“A lot of times in esports when you play games you’re playing online and you don’t necessarily meet the other person on the other side. Traditionally you know you might, you know you can go into a local team sports in your area but online it’s different. You can’t really do a local thing here ... it’s very rare to get like a community of gamers and people who just come together. Everyone’s kind of online at home all the time in their own little zone. When they came here it’s surprising. It’s kind of like a fulfilling experience.”

6.6.2 Making new friends

Outside of engaging in existing relationships, the esports events provided an opportunity for attendees to make new friends. Some participants believed that *meeting like-minded people* would be easy at the two Sydney events, as those

attending would likely share similar interests in esports, videogaming and gaming culture. Some participants extended this desire to not only seek new friends, but to actively *seek others to play competitive videogames with*. Participant 12 believed that those attending stadium-situated esports event in person would take the game more seriously than the average player, thus making them good gaming partners:

“You know typically the people who show up today play [the game] on like some form of level where they take it like quite seriously... everyone here is just purely here out of interest and nobody is here because they have to be or for any other reason really.”

At both events, but mostly at IEM Sydney, there were community areas which facilitated the gathering and socialisation of attendees. At IEM Sydney there was a designated place in the stadium which hosted activities and a small community tournament that attendees could take part in and mingle with others.

6.7 Active support

Active support was one of the major themes generated from the analysis. *Setting the precedent, experiencing sports-like activities and behaviours*, and *engaging in fandom* were the three axial codes of this theme. Table 6 outlines the open and axial codes which constitutes *active support*.

Table 8 The constituents of 'active support'

Selective Code	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Active support	Setting the precedent	Showing evidence of an audience Avoiding being passive Desire for localisation Testing Australian viability
	Experiencing sports-like activities and behaviours	Alternative/parallel to conventional sports Patriotic outlet Understanding sports fandom
	Engaging in fandom	Personal investment in players Team fandom Player fandom Audience staging Merchandise

6.7.1 Setting the precedent

The desire for future major esports events to be held in Australia was commonly reported by participants at both events. Additionally, most of these participants saw their attendance and spectatorship at the events as a way to help establish Australia as an attractive esports destination for event organisers, thus helping to bring more esports events to Australia in the coming years. The idea that IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were designed to *test Australian viability* for esports resonated among the participants. Participant 8 stated that his future esports viewing habits would hinge on:

“whether [esports event organisers] believe Australia was worthwhile coming to and whether that they might have another even on in Australia again or not.”

The main way this was expressed was through *showing evidence of an audience*. For example, Participant 18 remarked that his presence, along with all the other attendees, would constitute a large crowd and thus display to event organisers that there is a market for live stadium-situated esports in Australia, therefore encouraging future events. Participants appeared aware of their power and labour as a part of a captured, commoditised audience that would be attractive to investors and advertisers (Nick Taylor, 2016b). This was further compounded by *not being passive*. It was on this basis that the act of attending the events in person was perceived by the majority of participants as a more active and effective method of showing support for Australian esports than viewing it remotely.

Aware of their status as props in the staging of the broadcast texts of the events, the spectators' displays their fandom and dedication were largely performed to the camera as it swept over the crowd atop a towering boom pole capturing footage. In one notable example, the camera was drawn to a small group of spectators ushering for its attention. Once the camera had fixated on the group and began broadcasting the footage to the large displays in the stadium and to online viewers, a spectator in the middle of the group started performing a shoey: the infamous Australian drinking ritual of using one's (or someone else's) shoe as a vessel from which to chug



Figure 2 A 'shoey' performed on camera at IEM Sydney 2017.

beer or other alcoholic beverages. This was not the only shoe performed at IEM Sydney, with at least one other captured on camera.

6.7.2 Experiencing sports-like activities and behaviours

For some participants who had no interest in conventional sports, the two Sydney esports events provided an outlet to experience and participate in sports spectatorship practices in a way they were genuinely enthusiastic about. To these individuals, esports was seen as an *alternative or parallel to conventional sports*. Rather than considering esports as distinct from conventional sports, esports was interpreted by these participants as retaining most of the practices and norms of conventional sports, except with the competitive spectacle being performed within the virtual space of a videogame. In a similar sense, the esports events functioned as a *patriotic outlet* for those uninterested in conventional sports. For Participant 14, attending the OWC to support Australia helped fulfil that patriotic desire which she felt had been neglected through her disinterest in conventional sports:

“I know I’m not into conventional sports really and being able to support the country in something that I genuinely enjoy definitely helps.”

Additionally, the engagement in sports spectating practices in an esports context helped non-fans of sports understand why people enjoy sports. *Understanding esports fandom* represented participants who were both uninterested in conventional sports and did not understand its appeal, but were able to gain an empathic understanding through their personal enjoyment of esports. Participant 7 stated that:

“For the longest time I didn’t get the point of [conventional sports] until I got into esports. That’s when it clicked for me, when I could empathise with the people following their sports. What they love about sports is what I love about esports.”

6.7.3 Engaging in fandom

Most participants attending IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney sought to demonstrate support and engage in fandom. Typically, participants engaged in *team fandom* to support a favourite team, or *player fandom* to support a favourite player. Some participants also reported engaging in both. Participants engaging in *team fandom*

and/or *player fandom* reported that attendance to events as a sign of support helped demonstrate their dedication as a fan. On a deeper level, some participants were not only fans of certain players, but were *personally invested in players*. In this sense, they were attending the event to support their favourite player on a personal level, rather than just based on their skill. Participant 4 stated the stakes that his favourite player had to lose at IEM Sydney amplified his existing *player fandom*.

The event organisers also worked to portray a sense of fandom among the crowd through *audience staging*. This open code resonates with notions of audiencing at esports events previously raised by Nick Taylor (2016b). The most explicit ways that the physically-present audiences at the two events were staged and therefore audienced was through the seating configurations. Organisers at both events made efforts to ensure that spectators were seated closely grouped together in the centre of the stadium, rather than spread out across all of the available seating around the perimeters of the seating area. This was particularly evident at OWC Sydney, where spectators were directly instructed over the event's sound system to group together in the centre of the seating. Initially when all the attendees entered the stadium, fans and their friend groups sat either as close to the stage or as close to the back of the stadium as possible. This choice of seating fulfilled a desire to obtain an optimal position to view the matches. For those sitting up front, a number of large televisions stood in front of the stage. Two even larger projector screens hung from the ceiling provided a feed of the gameplay for the rest of the audience, which could most comfortably be watched from the back of the stadium without the need for one to tilt their necks upwards at an uncomfortable angle. This was something observed by some participants with Participant 18 suggesting that:

“they want to show you how many people are actually here to support.”

Furthermore, attendees were also given small Australian flags, signs and other props to cheer with by staff. While not given explicit instructions of how or when to use the props, the audience waved their flags and signs while cheering, particularly when the camera was pointed at the crowd. The audience members and their use of props were featured prominently in the online broadcasts, portraying an enthusiastically engaged audience. The audience itself acted as a prop in the portrayal of fandom and spectacle for remote viewers. Additionally, *merchandise* and

apparel were available for purchase at both events, proving popular among attendees who sought to show their support for the team they followed. Individuals wearing game and team branded apparel were also prominently featured in the livestreamed broadcasts of the events.

6.8 Discussion

6.8.1 Esports events as a form of entertainment

There were three primary forms of entertainment experienced by attendees at the IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney. Firstly, spectators engaged in multiple forms of esports narratives, ranging from those pieced together on a league level to dramatic narratives constructed by commentary during matches. This style of dramatisation has been observed in sports spectatorship research. Byrö (2017) asserts that “the ability to promote the rivalry between the competitors is just as important as fast and accurate commentary.” He elaborates that the vocabulary of experienced commentators is often more evaluative and metaphorical than the vocabulary of inexperienced commentators. In the context of basketball, Morris and Nydahl (1985) identify the use historic, objective, and interpretive information to accentuate points in the action and craft drama. In this sense, commentary does not act as a filler of time, but rather as way to texture it (Morris and Nydahl, 1985; Rhodes, Coupland and Cruickshank, 2010). According to Ryan (1993), sports commentators must choose which potential plot points to highlight, thus shaping a formative narrative.

Secondly, excitement was another element that entertained attendees. Among participants there was a desire to watch professional play that was unpredictable, intense, close, and employed the skillful dismantling of the other team’s strategy. Similarly, Cheung and Huang (2011) found that suspense was a dominant spectatorship motivation among both esports and sports spectators. They also found that suspense rose particularly from knowing tactical information the player does not, otherwise known as information asymmetry. In this sense, the foreshadowing of outcomes and the potential fulfilment or failure to fulfil them generates excitement.

Beyond the matches, attendees also constructed excitement by being in the crowd. Participants reported that the atmosphere of being in the crowd was “hype” and “electric,” something that they had not experienced to the same extent when

spectating esports remotely. By being in the crowd, participants felt that they too were more enthusiastic and responsive to dramatic elements of the matches. This heightened emotional experience aligns with what Barsade (2002) describes as emotion contagion, “the transfer of moods among people in a group.” She asserts that the conscious or unconscious synchronisation of one’s emotions to those expressed by individuals around them (Hatfield et al., 1993). Levenson (1996) and Doherty (1998) claim that emotional contagion stems from the innate human tendency of behavioural mimicry of others. Barsade further explains that once an individual has mimicked a behaviour, they experience the emotions associated with it based on bodily reactions. Emotional contagion has also been applied in the context of sports, with Wann et al., (2008) suggesting that communal experiences of sporting events reinforces group norms and generates a pleasurable experience of spectatorship.

6.8.2 Esports events an opportunity to learn

Corroborating similar findings in domestic contexts as presented in Chapter 5.5.2, the findings of Study 2 demonstrate that even at the site of play, esports events acted as an educational experience for some attendees. There were two primary subjects that participants sought to learn about by attending the two Sydney events: game knowledge to augment their personal play and the appeal of attending an esports event in person. For the former, most learning was achieved through the observation of professional play, which acted as a point of reference to compare one’s personal play with or as a resource to learn techniques and strategies beyond one’s skill level. Unsurprisingly, almost all participants were active players of the games featured at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney.

The explanatory commentary used during matches at the esports events represent a self-aware reflection of the events’ status as an educational resource, with the style and complexity of commentary changing to suit the level of expertise of the audience. This was exemplified during the televised Australia versus Sweden match at OWC Sydney, where commentary performed in a more descriptive and basic manner for a non-fan audience. Georgen, Duncan and Cook (2015) write about a similar instance of simplified commentary during The International 4 *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) tournament, where a separate “noob stream” existed for inexperienced spectators, using simplified language and detailed explanation of game basics. In essence. This style of commentary acts as a distant cognitive apprenticeship for novice spectators,

assisting them in learning expert skills and strategies that are required for spectatorship and play (Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989; Georgen et al., 2015).

Participants appeared curious of the auxiliary elements which surrounded matches captured in broadcasts of esports events. While watching professional gameplay was a motivator for attendance, it was not the sole reason. At both events, the feed of the matches in the stadia and on streaming platforms were identical; those watching remotely would technically have the same viewing perspective when watching the matches. In the context of conventional sports, researchers have written about the option of having a new viewing perspective by attending the even in person (Esbjörnsson et al., 2006). However, this is inapplicable in the context of esports, as the playing space is situated within the computerised system of a videogame. As established in Chapter 1.2, there is no way to watch the ‘pitch’ of esports unmediated with the bare eye; it must be captured using in-game interfaces as controlled by a production team to position virtual cameras and shift between players’ perspectives. The findings of Study 2 found that attendees were curious to discover and seek out the qualities of live, stadium-situated esports that would enhance the experience of spectatorship. For most participants, IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were the first esports event they had attended in person. Reflecting on their previous remote observations of the stadium through esports broadcasts, participants wanted to know if the being among the crowd was as exciting as it appeared on livestreaming platforms.

6.8.3 Esports events as an opportunity for socialisation

The two Sydney events offered an opportunity for socialisation among attendees. There were two primary dimensions of socialisation across IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney: the strengthening of bonds with existing friends and the making of new friends. Social qualities of the spectating experiences at both events were particularly valued by many participants. This was particularly prominent among those who had been made aware of the event by their friend, reporting that they likely would not have attended if their friend had not. For most participants, the events acted as a venue to meet people they would normally only interact with online, ranging from online gaming friends to like-minded strangers. The events encouraged these social interactions by providing communal areas and small competitions separate from the main event for attendees to collectively participate in.

Socialisation has been noted as an important aspect in other forms of situated experiences of sports spectatorship, particularly those which are hard or impractical to spectate in person at the site of play. For example, Esbjörnsson et al. (2006) notes that in rally racing, which can't be spectated in its entirety in person due to the size of the racecourse, socialising with like-minded fans sharing similar interests is an aspect of the spectatorship experience greatly valued by spectators, offering conversations and speculation between brief moments of action.

The value placed on socialisation as a quality of the spectating experiences across IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney contrasts the findings produced by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), who assert that esports spectators find social interaction not important to their spectating experience despite the prevalence of social functions embedded in many livestreaming platforms used to watch esports. It is important to note that Hamari and Sjöblom's study focused remote online forms of esports spectatorship, rather than at the stadium. Nevertheless, these findings of Study 2 harmonise with those found in Study 1 and those presented by Ford et al. (2017), Musabirov (2018), Qian et al (2019) and Shaw et al. (2019, pp.81), affirming social elements as valued in the construction of esports spectating experiences.

The use of the esports events as a venue for socialisation has implications for the development of esports culture in Australia. Carter et al. (2017) claim that the stagnant growth of the local Australian esports culture is partially caused by a lack of established local tournaments, which would bring together and nurture the local community. It was evident that IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney performed this role outlined by Carter et al. If future Australian esports events continue to occur frequently and bring together the local esports community, then the Australian esports culture and industry could see sustained growth as discussed in Section 6.10.

6.8.4 Esports events as an outlet to show active support

Active support was the main characteristic which distinguished the experiences of and motivations for stadium-situated esports spectatorship from those of remote esports spectatorship. Through this theme, participants sought to actively show support by attending the event in person rather than passively spectating remotely. Some participants' attendance was motivated by a desire to encourage future esports events to be held in Australia by demonstrating the existence of an enthusiastic local

audience, while others attended to support their favorite team. This was consistent throughout all instances of active support, demonstrating that participants believed that physically-situated presence displays stronger support than online viewership. Furthermore, many instances of active support across the two Sydney events embodied a laborious quality, making these cases of active support a second manifestation of laborious spectatorship in this thesis.

Spectators saw a purpose in their spectatorship that extended beyond leisure, envisioning themselves as promoters or advocates of Australian esports. Participants largely shared a perspective that if esportsing organisations took notice of Australian esports fans as enthusiastic and dedicated enough able to fill stadia, future major international esports events would be held in Australia. It was also evident that organisers of the events composed the spectating environments of the stadia in a way that would present spectators as enthusiastic fans engaging in forms of active support, with resources being employed in both events to stage their audiences. Spectators were shepherded to be closely packed together and supplied with cheering props like flags and signs to create the spectacle of a large and enthusiastic crowd. Similar examples of crowd staging have been observed in prior esports studies.

As previously discussed in Section 6.1 and Chapter 3, T.L. Taylor (2012) recalls an emphasis made by the floor management of an esports event on shifting audience members to construct the illusion of a partisan division between fans. Szablewicz (2016) also notes a similar experience at a Chinese esports event. She describes how the physically present audience was staged to the extent of having spectators present in the stands for only the opening and closing ceremonies of the event. Through this staging, the event's organisers worked to dispel the traditionally negative image of esports present in Chinese culture by portraying esports as a healthy form of videogaming; an "alternative to harmful Internet (wangluo¹⁸) games." In doing so, the traditionally held assumption of videogaming as being unhealthy and antisocial was reversed and presented instead as social and patriotic, becoming an ideological reflection of Chinese values, politics, and nationalism. Ultimately, the mediated

¹⁸ "Wangluo" is a Mandarin word that literally translates to internet or network. The word is used in the term 'wangluo youxi' to refer to online games, usually with a negative connotation (Szablewicz, 2016).

broadcast of the event was the one to be “directly lived,” rather than that in the stadium.

As similarly discussed in Chapter 5.5.3 in relation to attendance and presence, bestowing a sense of ‘liveness’ on an event grants it a sense of reality, which helps to mask its inherent mediation from remote viewers and helps to establish a sense of genuineness and authenticity (Morris and Nydahl, 1983). Although spectatorship at the two Sydney esports events was live and situated at the site of play, their production teams determined the perspectives of gameplay to be spectated using the various technologies and strategies at their disposal, piecing together images and sounds of the event to construct a meaningful and engaging narrative. Bourdon (2000) states that “live really is not only about the technical performance, but also the spectral belief.” In essence, Bourdon argues that an event is not ‘live’ just because it is broadcast in real-time. Rather, it is through signifiers of ‘liveness’ that a spectator perceives an experience of spectatorship as happening live. These signifiers can range from paratexts surrounding an event, such as posters and advertising material that orient spectators to be accepting of the event’s liveness. Another key factor that helps construct a sense of liveness is the candidness of participants on screen, or simply, the promise that they are not acting.

This does not just apply to players on the stage or politicians at the podium, but to all individuals captured on camera, including spectators (Bourdon, 2000). Spectators, among other entities, can be used to establish liveness of an event and convey messages. Whether a large crowd is present because of their fandom or because they were paid is irrelevant; the crowd is ‘legitimate’ to the remote viewer unless indicated otherwise. In the context of IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney, the staging and audiencing (Nick Taylor, 2016b) of present spectators helped enable the presentation of active support during the events by portraying a large and enthusiastic crowd of spectators.

A desire to experience sports-like activities and behaviours at the two Sydney esports events was evident in attendees who expressed little interest in conventional sports. This is particularly interesting when considering the Australian context of Study 2. Conventional sport has unusually strong cultural significance in Australia when compared to other countries, stemming from the historic development of the

Australian national identity. Mewett (1999) asserts that whereas other nations use sports as a vehicle to celebrate symbols of their nationhood, sports itself is intrinsic of Australian national identity. This was partially due to the eventual succession of Australian sporting teams over British teams in the nineteenth century (White, 1981). Once Australians began consistently winning championships over the motherland, a perception of “Britons” raised in Australia being superior to those raised in Britain was propagated in the colonies and began to unite them through a newfound sense of nationalism (Horton, 2000). This was amplified by the emphasis the British placed on encouraging the participation in sports in Australian colonies to further the progression of the British ‘race,’ which was seeing physical degradation in Britain and the USA due to urbanisation (Mewett, 1999).

Unlike the USA, Australia had not fought for its independence and remain strongly tied Britain in terms of association and identity. This excellence in athleticism and sport became one way that colonial Australians were able to separate themselves and have a distinct identity from the British while the country itself remained a vassal of the motherland, thus becoming a key element in the formation of the Australian national identity (Mewett, 1999). In this sense, IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney offered outlets for esports fans with minimal interest in conventional sports to engage in Australian cultural practices that they normally may feel excluded from. In doing so, spectators at IEM and OWC Sydney were able to ‘perform’ Australianness and authenticate themselves as Australian through a form of esportsing nationalism.

6.9 A fulfilling experience

Spectators’ lived experiences of esports spectatorship at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney largely met or surpassed the expectations manifested across their attendance motivations. No spectator interviewed expressed disappointment of their spectator experience at either event, highlighting how they were able to partake in an experience that aligned with the expectations they held of the event. Overall, it can be said that the experiences of spectatorship at the two Sydney esports events were of fulfillment.

Taken together with the findings of Study 1, some observations regarding authenticity in esports spectatorship can be made. The findings of Study 1 observed

that in domestic environments, spectators often turn to replicating aspects of stadium spectatorship to authenticate and make spectacular their experiences of spectatorship within the home. In essence, domestic spectators viewed the stadium as an authentic site of esports spectatorship. In Study 2, it was observed that the experiences of spectating esports at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney affirmed for participants the stadium as an authentic site of esports spectatorship. Underscoring participants' responses was a perception that attendance to the two Sydney events helped to quantify esports, esports spectatorship, and esports fandom. Spectatorship in the stadium brought natively virtual esports into a situated place; the 'real world.' Online friends met face-to-face, fans experienced the thrill of being in the crowd with like-minded enthusiasts, and esports was spectated at a physically-situated site of play. While major stadium-situated esports events are relatively infrequent in Australia, participants at the two Sydney events largely perceived their lived spectating experiences as the epitome of esports spectatorship; it was what they believed esports spectatorship *ought to be*.

As will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 8.4, this perception of the stadium as an authentic site of esports spectatorship is intriguing. Unlike in many conventional sports, the stadium is not a native site of esports play or spectatorship. Much like domestic spectators in Study 1, particularly those conducting laborious spectatorship to portray esports positively to non-fan household cohabitants, participants at the two Sydney events perceived the experience of spectatorship at the stadium as authentic. They did so based on elements which aligned with broadly accepted conventional notions of legitimacy and professionalism, rather than qualities inherent to competitive videogaming practices. Notably, characteristics analogous with those associated with conventional sports spectatorship, such as the patriotic expressions of support and opportunities to engage in sports-like rituals, were particularly revered in the legitimisation and authentication of esports spectatorship experiences at the two Sydney events. By embodying a situated form reminiscent of conventionally perceived legitimate and professional sports spectacles, the experience of spectatorship at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney transcended inauthenticities perceived in computerised, supposedly placeless esports.

6.10 Following the study: Australian esports events in 2018 and beyond

The data collection stage of Study 2 at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney took place early in the research course, commencing roughly five months into my doctoral candidature in 2017. As time progressed and other aspects of the research course were worked on, more major esports events were held in Australia. The presence of major Australian esports events in subsequent years indicates that a precedence has been set to an extent, likely appeasing the wishes of spectators described in Section 6.6.1. In 2018, IEM returned to Sydney while OWC did not. However, the 2018 edition of OWC did not return to any of its 2017 host cities, opting for an entirely new set of hosts. Thus, it is unlikely that the OWC chose not to return to Australia based on the performance of OWC Sydney in 2017.

While IEM Sydney 2017 was portrayed as a success in news coverage and official public relations statements, IEM Sydney 2018 surpassed the previous year's iteration across several dominant aspects, boasting greater attendance and online viewership numbers. Curiously, the infamous shoey was banned at IEM Sydney 2018, with spectators were ejected by security after performing the act. Upset over this change, spectators took to Reddit to organise shoey protests, where large groups of spectators gathered in the stadium to perform shoeys together in solidarity as an act of defiance against the ban. When these protesting spectators were subsequently ejected from the stadium, other spectators protested by holding one of their shoes above their heads as the camera panned over them. It is evident that rituals like the shoey are important performances of Australian nationalism. To disallow such acts is to interrupt the endeavors of laborious spectatorship, thus evoking distain from spectators working to establish Australia as an esports destination.

Since 2017, Australian cities outside of Sydney have become host to major esports tournaments. In particular, Melbourne has made a bid to become the esports capital of Australia by being host to the Melbourne Esports Open, a joint venture between the Victorian state government and ESL. Unlike, IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney in 2017, the inaugural MEO in 2018 acted as both showcase convention of esports and a competitive spectacle. Each day of the two-day long event featured a range of concurrently played esports matches of a variety of games, with two headliners taking prominence: the Overwatch Contenders Australia Finals and the League of Legends Oceanic Pro League finals. The following 2019 iteration of MEO would

mirror this esports line-up with the addition of an open *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2017) tournament.

From my experience of attending both MEO events, I observed that the atmosphere and experiences of spectatorship were similar to those of the two 2017 Sydney events. Although the two MEO events featured were national leagues and thus targeted at an Australian audience, spectators nevertheless projected great enthusiasm and expressions of patriotism (including the infamous shoey), performing to the camera and international commentators present at the events that Australians are worthy spectators of esports. Prior to its cancellation due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, MEO 2020 was scheduled to break its tradition of being a showcase of national esports leagues by becoming the host of IEM 2020, snatching the coveted event from Sydney.

Australia has also become host to a number of more niche international esports events since 2017, catering to fans of games that sit on the periphery of the esports titles which define the contemporary esports landscape such as *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016), *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009), *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2017), *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013), and *CS:GO* (Valve Software, 2012). For example, the PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds ZIMO Australia Invitational was held in Melbourne during 2018, featuring teams from Asia-Pacific countries including China, Australia, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Although a smaller event held in a single hall of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, the experience of the PUBG ZIMO event was similarly social and ardent experience.

There were some key differences which made the PUBG ZIMO stand out against the other esports events I had attended. In particular, the key differences pertained to the intricacies of *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) as an esports. Firstly, the staging of the competitive spectacle was quite distinct. In contrast to most major esports titles which feature two teams of roughly four to ten players each competing against each other, *PUBG* belongs to a game genre known as 'battle royale', where roughly 100 players either playing as individuals or in teams of up to four compete in a large open-world map to be the last surviving party (Gibbs et al., 2018). Unlike some other esports titles where players 'respawn' after being eliminated, players eliminated in *PUBG* and other battle royale games like *Fortnite*

(Epic Games, 2017) must sit out for the remainder of the round. This unique format meant that roughly 100 players had to be staged in an appropriate manner to create a sense of spectacle for both those spectating at home and those present at the stadium. To do this, the stage extended further horizontally than those in the other attended Australian esports events and featured tiered rows of stands for each team. What was particularly novel about these stands was that they were each adorned with a large light globe for each player that would be turned off upon elimination, allowing spectators to tell at a glance among the often chaotic action of 100 competing players who had been eliminated and a sense of roughly how many players were left.

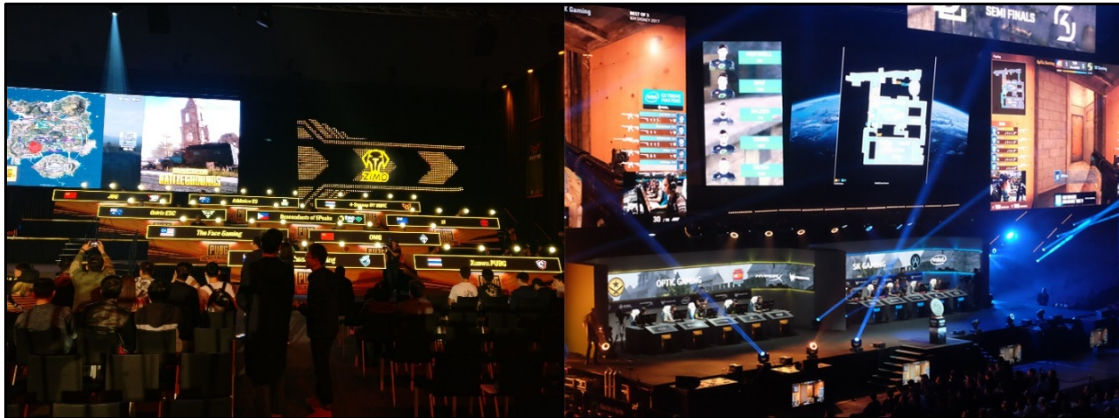


Figure 3 Comparison of the stages at the PUBG ZIMO Australia Invitational (left image, right half of stage) and IEM Sydney 2017 (right image, full stage).

The PUBG ZIMO highlights an often-overlooked aspect to consider when researching esports and esports spectatorship. Esports are not homogeneous, with various games of differing genres and formats populating the contemporary esports landscape. To say otherwise would be akin to saying that all conventional sports are the same. Different esports titles involve different formats, modes, and spectatorship staging. Much like the vast different spectating experiences of conventional sports like tennis and soccer, the ways that *PUBG* (PUBG Corporation, 2017) and *CS:GO* (Valve Software, 2012) are staged and mediated as a spectacle are also experienced in distinctly different manners.

6.11 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the motivations for and experiences of esports spectatorship in stadia. Across two major Australian stadium-situated esports events in 2017, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted with attendees to

learn of their attendance motivations and their personal experiences of the events. Observations of the events were recorded and used along with their mediated broadcasts as additional sources of data to ‘deepen’ the time spent across the two events.

Based on a thematic analysis of these data, four themes were generated to characterise the two stadium-situated Sydney esports events: *entertainment*, *education*, *socialisation* and *active support*. *Entertainment* demonstrated the amusement participants found in the events through the engagement in esports narratives, excitement and game passion. *Education* demonstrated how the events functioned as an educational resource for players of esports titles and as an opportunity to affirm and understand the experience the spectating esports at the stadium. *Socialisation* demonstrated how the events acted as venues which drew together scattered members of the Australian esports community, providing a mutually interesting activity for existing friends to bond over and for new friendships to be formed. *Active support* demonstrated that the events offered an opportunity for attendees to support the Australian esports scene, to support their favourite team or player, and to perform sports-like activities and behaviours in a context they were genuinely interested in.

By exploring the anticipated experiences of spectatorship embodied in participants’ attendance motivations, it was concluded that the spectatorship experiences at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were fulfilling for attendees. In most cases, participants’ expectations of the events were met or exceeded, allowing them to partake in activities that allowed them to construct valued qualities in their experiences of spectatorship. Through partaking in fulfilling experiences of spectatorship at the two Sydney esports events, participants’ preconceived notions of the stadium as an authentic site of esports spectatorship were affirmed. By being held in a stadium environment, esportsing and online gaming practices were legitimised, manifesting in the ‘real world’ as opposed to online contexts. Furthermore, the situated space of the stadium drew parallels with elements of spectatorship associated with conventional sports. By allowing attendees to partake in analogous sports-like rituals and behaviours, the experiences of spectatorship at the two Sydney esports events were further authenticated by similarities they shared with aspects of

conventional sports spectatorship that were broadly perceived as professional and authentic.

So far, the studies presented in this thesis have explored the experience of esports spectatorship in the home and in the stadium; the two sites of spectatorship that have received attention in academic research. The following chapter will explore the experiences of esports spectatorship in a site with little focused research attention: public communal places. Specifically, Study 3 explored the experiences of spectatorship in a Melbourne esports bar. Unlike the stadium, the esports bar provided a consistent and freely available site of public esports spectatorship outside of the home. In essence, public communal places like esports bars are sites that are situated geographically and conceptually between the stadium and home. Centred around roughly five months of ethnographic fieldwork at Melbourne-based GGEZ esports bar, Study 3 explored how the stadium was referred to by those remotely spectating esports outside of the home.

Chapter 7 – Spectating at the esports bar

7.1 Introduction

The remote spectatorship of esports in public communal places like esports bars highlights an emerging mode of spectatorship that occurs neither at the site of play nor in the home. This chapter presents Study 3, an ethnographic study which delves into the experiences of esports spectatorship at GGEZ esports bar. In doing so, it looks beyond typical modes and places of esports spectatorship, offering insight into less conventional, largely undocumented spectatorship sites. Taking the form of a ‘classical’ ethnography conducted over the course of five months, Study 3 examines what it means to spectate esports in public communal places, why patrons chose to spectate esports at GGEZ, and how patrons construct experiences of spectatorship in the bar.

The status of esports bars as places conceptually and geographically someplace between the stadium and the home liken such venues to Oldenburg’s (1989) concept of the “third place.” Oldenburg originally conceived of third places as being geographically and conceptually places between home and the workplace, acting as community anchors for largely non-romantic male relationships. Third places are typically defined by a flattened social hierarchy, little obligation, a playful atmosphere, the presence of regulars who set the mood of the place and initiate newcomers, flowing conversation, and a sense of being a home away from home. Each of these attributes were clearly present across the fieldwork at GGEZ. The bar can be seen as a third place of esports spectatorship, existing not as a place situated between the home and the workplace, but rather one between the home and the stadium. As will be elaborated on later in this chapter, the experience of spectating esports at GGEZ exhibits third place characteristics, culminating in a heightened sense of *communitas* as will be described in Section 7.7.4.

Across the roughly five-month long ethnography conducted at GGEZ, over 100 hours of fieldwork was culminated. Data generation methods centred around participant observations, informal conversations with patrons, and participation in esports spectatorship at GGEZ. As mentioned in Chapter 4.3, the form of ethnography conducted in this study is the one that most closely resembles ‘classical’ ethnography, generating rich data from extended periods of time embedded in the research field.

With GGEZ existing as a static and consistently available site of esports spectatorship with a regular patronship, a classical ethnographic approach was deemed most suitable. Consequently, this study was the most time and labour intensive of the three. While this chapter presents general observations from across the five months of fieldwork, it also presents a detailed account of one night in particular at GGEZ: the overnight screening of The International 8 (TI8), a major annual *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) esports tournament. This night is featured prominently in this chapter, as it succinctly epitomised many of the essential qualities which characterised experiences of esports spectatorship at the bar throughout the fieldwork. Thus, it works to illustrate the key observations and findings of Study 3. The following section presents contextual information regarding *Dota 2*, TI8, and GGEZ, followed by a detailed outline of the employed ethnographic approach and data generation methods. Introductory impressions of the bar are then introduced in Section 7.4, followed by a thick description of the overnight TI8 screening session. From the thick description, a discussion is presented that summarises the key findings of the study and connects them to those presented in Study 1 and Study 2.

7.2 Context

7.2.1 GGEZ esports bar

Situated in an unassuming basement in the central business district of Melbourne, Australia, lies a peculiar bar. If enticed inside by the neon red and blue glow that spills from its skylights and bathes the sidewalk, you will be met with a trendy, lively venue filled with a broad demographic in terms of age and class, ranging from suit-clad businesspeople to university students. While some are drawn by venue's merits as a bar, others will tell you that they are there to watch esports. GGEZ is an esports bar; a venue dedicated to the spectatorship of esports in the presence of alcoholic beverages, food, and other esports fans.

The spectatorship of esports in bar environments was not introduced by GGEZ or other esports bars. As noted in Chapter 3, Barcrafts have been a prominent form of bar-based communal spectatorship which have received a modest amount of interest in academic research. However, these Barcrafts were held in regular bars, as opposed to venues dedicated to esports spectatorship. This is what distinguishes

spectatorship at intermittent events like Barcrafts to spectatorship at GGEZ and other esports bars, which exist as consistently available, specialised sites intended for the spectatorship of esports.

Since concluding the ethnographic fieldwork, GGEZ has made efforts to appeal to a broader, pop culture and gaming audience. This was something that the bar's owner mentioned they would do, as he felt that the bar had already saturated its esports fan clientele; in order for the bar to continue growing, it would need further patrons from other niche interests. The bar now features a gaming PC from which visiting Twitch streamers can play and stream to their online audiences, a pop culture trivia night is hosted every Wednesday, arcade cabinets for those wanting to play games, and small grassroots esports tournaments which are held at the bar on occasion. Nevertheless, the core identity of GGEZ is firmly cemented in the fandom, aesthetics, and practices of esports and esports spectatorship. It is from this core esports identity that the bar reaches out and appeals to other, broader niches of gaming and pop culture.

Also worth noting were the other non-esports gaming spectacles commonly shown at GGEZ, despite the venue being marketed as a site intended for esports spectatorship. These non-esports spectacles were commonly the broadcasts of Twitch livestreamers playing competitive videogames. Although not esports, Twitch streamers were sometimes shown in the bar for fans of certain games that did not have a prominent esports scene. For example, at the time of conducting the fieldwork, *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2017) had only just begun ascending towards its gargantuan peak of popularity. While popular, the game had not yet developed a large esports scene in 2018. In the absence of *Fortnite* esports, the bar instead showed streamers playing *Fortnite* for patrons who were fans of the game. The bar's owner established a set of standards when showing livestreamers in lieu of esports. The streamer had to be 'skilful' and 'competitive' at the game, and only livestreams that did not include a facecam of themselves were to be used if possible. Essentially, these standards worked to ensure that the substituted livestreams had the appearance of esports, being a spectacle based around the skilful, competitive play of videogames, rather than a form of entertainment based on the personality of the streamer and their leisurely play.

Another type of non-esports spectacle occasionally shown in the bar was videogame speedrunning. Speedrunners often compete against each other to beat a game in the quickest possible time. This lends the practice a competitive culture that is reminiscent of high score leader boards of the arcades as mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.2. Speedrunners often livestream their attempts at speed records, while numerous speedrunning charity events take place annually and are also livestreamed. Some even consider speedrunning a form of esports because of its competitive culture, including GGEZ's owner. It was on this basis that he allowed speedrunning to be show in the bar.

7.2.2 Dota 2:

Valve Software's (2013) *Dota 2* is a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game where two teams of five compete on a symmetrical map. Both teams' objectives are to defend their own base while concurrently attacking their opponent's. Each team's base contains an 'Ancient' which they need to defend from destruction by the opposing team. Once a team's Ancient is destroyed, they lose the round. The map contains various paths and bottlenecks into both teams' bases, placing much emphasis on territorial control. The pace of *Dota 2* is considered relatively fast for a MOBA game, with rounds usually lasting between 30-60 minutes. Similar to *Overwatch* (2016), players each control a 'hero' with unique abilities, strengths and weaknesses. As of October 2020, players can choose from a pool of 119 heroes. Prior to each round the two teams engage in a hero drafting stage, taking turns to ban their opponents from using specific heroes. This drafting stage creates a level of strategy where each team must tactically adapt to these bans when composing their team structure.

7.2.3 The International:

The International (TI) is a major *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) tournament that has been held annually since 2011 by the Valve Software. TI predates the official release of *Dota 2*, with its first two iterations featuring beta versions of the game. TI has been held in Seattle for every iteration of the tournament apart from the inaugural 2011 TI which took place in Cologne and 2018's TI8 in Vancouver, which is the iteration of TI featured in this ethnography. 2019's TI9 also took the tournament away from Seattle, taking place in Shanghai. 2020's TI10 was scheduled to take place in Stockholm prior to its cancellation due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

TI has grown exponentially since its inception and ranks as one of the largest esports tournaments in terms of both viewership and prize pool; TI8 had a prize pool of over USD \$25.5 million and a peak viewership of around 15 million (Mejia, 2018). The prize pool was largely funded by the proceeds of certain in-game items purchased by *Dota 2* players. While TI8 had a large physically present audience, it was mostly spectated remotely via online-streaming platforms. For western audiences, the dominant platform for this was Twitch.

7.3 Method

7.3.1 Overall approach

The ethnographic fieldwork of Study 3 was conducted at GGEZ esports bar in Melbourne between May and September in 2018. In comparison to the approaches to ethnography employed in Study 1 and Study 2, Study 3 more closely aligned with what is often considered to be ‘classical’ ethnography, involving extended periods of embedded fieldwork. Participant observation constituted the majority of the collected data, alongside notes taken from informal conversations with patrons. Additionally, a formal semi-structured interview was conducted with the bar’s owner, which was conducted at the bar. The owner played an active role in the bar’s operation and identity, often being found behind the bar pouring drinks and conversing with regulars about esports. The interview was guided by questions which probed the inner workings of the bar and explored observations the owner had made since GGEZ opened in 2017. The interviewing procedure largely reflected those employed in Study 1 and Study 2 as described in Chapter 4.4.2.

7.3.2 Participant observation

The employed approach to participant observation was not static throughout the fieldwork and changed over the five months. Beginning fieldwork initially as a “wallflower” (Adler and Adler, 1987), as I frequented the bar I eventually became recognised by regulars, some becoming aware of my role as a researcher. However, I did not engage in the activities that would grant me membership to their community, relying predominately on observations and informal conversations with patrons to gather data. This relatively passive approach gradually shifted into a more involved strategy, where I took part in activities surrounding esports spectatorship with the bar’s patrons. As will be made evident in the following paragraphs, it would have

been near impossible to remain a passive, detached observer; a great deal of flexibility was required to read and adapted to the mood of the bar. The eventual participant-as-observer approach which I transitioned to is particularly evident in the thick description of the night of TI8 at GGEZ presented in Section 7.6.

During the night of TI8, my role as an observer sat somewhere between participant-as-observer and a complete participant, with some patrons aware (or having become aware) of my role as a researcher, while others did not (Gold, 1957). This had some noticeable effects when interacting with patrons. I am an Australian man of mixed Caucasian and Asian descent who was in their early 20s at the time conducting the fieldwork. Although I hold a keen interest in videogaming and have previously engaged in esports and gaming related research, I approached the research initially as an outsider, holding limited interest in consuming esports as a leisurely activity. My personal background and context were deemed beneficial for this ethnography, providing the gaming literacy required to confidently become familiar with the field, yet lacking recreational esportsing experiences that could have formed preconceived notions towards observations and experiences at the bar as a researcher.

Despite being an outsider, I was commonly assumed by those unaware of my status as a researcher to be a well-versed esports fan. Demographically, I fit in with the average patronship of the bar and my gaming literacy allowed me to understand and speak using the same slang used by patrons when discussing esports. In doing so, I was able to engage in more candid interactions with patrons and was able to develop a sense of how the bar's patrons engage with each other. Conversely, when interacting with patrons who were aware of my researcher role, I was able to generate more reflexive insights. Miller and Glassner (2004) suggest that "social distances" can help participants envision themselves as an expert on their culture. These patrons, keen to passionately talk about the culture of the bar and their experiences of spectatorship, offered insights into nuances that likely would not have been obtained otherwise. Furthermore, I was also offered opportunities to experience first-hand how enthusiast fans treat and support their novice friends when spectating esports.

It is important to note that my privilege as a young adult male gamer afforded me uncontested access to the site of GGEZ and made possible the conduction of this

study. It is unlikely that someone who did not outwardly present themselves as a young adult male gamer could have as inconspicuously conducted such research in the esports bar. As Nick Taylor (2018) describes in his own reflections as a young adult, straight, white, male-identifying gamer conducting ethnography in public sites of intensive videogame play, fitting in with the stereotypical gamer demographic created situations where research participants felt comfortable engaging in certain behaviours and practices that they may not have performed in the presence of outsiders. In the particular case Nick Taylor highlights, he discusses his own discomfort in such situations and the guilt of complacency when his research participants partook in sexist acts in his presence, seeing Nick Taylor as an agreeable peer who would not raise objection to this behaviour. From these experiences, he ponders the dilemma of staying “dialed in to certain masculine dispositions” for the sake of gathering so-called “good data,” as opposed to challenging the behaviours of participants at the risk of losing rapport and access to the communities they represent.

Like Nick Taylor (2018) in his research sites, my presence seemingly did not unease other patrons at GGEZ, nor did I attract any undue attention to myself simply by being present; a female-identifying researcher may experience the contrary in such sites of relative male homogeneity as T.L. Taylor (2012) ponders in relation to her own work. While I did not observe any sexist behaviour like the blatant case described by Nick Taylor in his own work, it is important to acknowledge that my self-identification as a masculine individual within a male body impacts the way I make sense of the world and thus could render me inadvertently ignorant of certain sexist occurrences (despite my best efforts to unlearn such dispositions). As Nick Taylor and others like Pink (2009) assert, the body is the apparatus that researchers, particularly ethnographers, use to make sense of the research field and the subjects which inhabit it. Our sensory functions, internal and external identities, experiences conducting research, and broader life experiences contribute to how we investigate and interpret what it is we research, as well as how the subjects we research respond and react to us. It is on a related note that T.L. Taylor (2012) considers her work presented in *Raising the Stakes* not to be an ethnography. While embodying many qualities of robust ethnographic research, T.L. Taylor ultimately concludes that her

identity as both a woman and an older individual disqualified her from interacting with her subjects in ways reflective of how they would do so with their peers.

7.3.3 Research field

The single field of GGEZ esports bar was chosen for a number of reasons. While the existence of other potential fields, such as cinemas screening esports events, offered the possibility for a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), GGEZ was chosen as it presented a consistently accessible field. The permanence of the bar offered a valuable opportunity to become familiar with the intimacies such venues, something which the sporadically scheduled cinema screening events could not offer. Although special screening sessions for major esports tournaments were held at and advertised by GGEZ, it was open 6 days a week and constantly screened esports to the numerous TVs mounted throughout the bar during its opening hours. Being the only readily accessible place intended for the spectatorship of esports in Melbourne at the time, it quickly became clear that GGEZ acted akin to a “third place” (Oldenburg, 1989; Putnam, 2000), offering a flattened social hierarchy and a place away from home to participate in remote esports spectatorship.

7.3.4 Data analysis procedures

The data analysis procedures employed in Study 3 were freer-flowing than those used in Study 1 and Study 2. This approach to analysis reflected the status of Study 3 as a ‘classical’ ethnography. As Angrosino (2007) discusses, there is no single accepted approach to ethnographic data analysis, often perceived as an ‘art’ informed by intuition. Nevertheless, Angrosino asserts that there are a range of common tools used by ethnographers in their free-flowing approaches to data analysis. In particular, a commonly drawn on method is the thematic categorisation of data in a similar fashion to thematic analysis. As previously mentioned in Chapter 4.5.1, these loosely defined thematic approach to data categorisation commonly used in ethnographic research can be considered a form thematic analysis, even if not explicitly stated to be so. Likewise, the method of thematic categorisation employed in Study 3 can be considered to be a form of thematic analysis, albeit less defined and freer-flowing than the reflexive approach outlined in Chapter 4.5 and employed across Study 1 and Study 2. However, the method of thematic categorisation employed in Study 3 was not haphazard. Rather, the data analysis procedure was

informed by the core tenets of the ethnographic tradition of social investigation, being largely guided by a thick description approach.

The analysis was driven by a desire to generate a ‘thick description’ account of the experiences of spectatorship within GGEZ. Ryle (1968) first coined the term, establishing a distinction between thin and thick description. Thin description refers to surface-level observations of behaviours, while thick description provides contextual information behind such behaviours. Ryle’s thick description acted as a foundational approach for early adherers of the ethnographic tradition, who at the time had begun to explore how supposedly inconspicuous events could provide nuanced insights and understandings that were not immediately evident at a glance (Yon, 2003). In doing so, thick description further cemented the core ethnographic tenet of understanding individuals within the social and cultural contexts they reside. Geertz (1973b) later popularised and refined Ryle’s concept, framing thick description as an analytical approach. Objecting to reductive approaches to ethnographic data analysis which condensed rich data into thin “menial observations,” Geertz advocated for an analytical approach that would emphasise the nuanced implications behind surface-level observations, producing findings that accounted for and were intrinsically linked to cultural contexts from which they were derived. In this sense such findings are not simply the product of thick description, but rather are themselves “thickly described” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Geertz (1973b) emphasises the importance of thick description in ethnographic work by drawing on Ryle’s (1968) illustrative example of the act of winking. While a simple bodily motion, a wink can be motivated by a wide range of factors and can communicate various contextual meanings:

“Two boys rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes. In one, this is an involuntary twitch, in the other a constitutional signal to a friend. The two movements are, as movements, identical ... Yet the difference, however unphotographable, between a twitch and a wink is vast; as anyone unfortunate to have had the first taken for the second knows.”

It was this emphasis on contextual understanding which drove the thick description approach to data analysis in Study 3. With much rich data generated from the highly embedded fieldwork at GGEZ, it was imperative to preserve the contextual

information they contained. This approach proved useful in exploring patrons' spectating behaviours in the bar. While patrons' spectating behaviours at GGEZ were similar to those performed by spectators in the stadium and spectators in the home, the thick description approach made it evident that these behaviours were being enacted for distinctly different reasons in the context of the bar than elsewhere.

7.3.5 Presentation of findings

While a thick description approach to data analysis allows for the incorporation of rich, contextual information into the findings, it can complicate the ways they are presented. Unlike in more reductive approaches where codes and themes can be neatly collated and presented like in Study 2, there is simply much more information to present from a thick description analysis. This issue is particularly compounded when considering the word limits imposed on doctoral theses. To present the richness of the findings while keeping the length of Chapter 7 proportional with Chapter 5 (Study 1) and Chapter 6 (Study 2), I present my findings largely through illustrative ethnographic vignettes of certain nights spent at the bar. Vignettes have been widely used in ethnographic research as an effective way to present and illustrate key findings by evocatively contextualising them in narratives from the fieldwork (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek and Lê, 2014). In particular, a vignette of the night that TI8 was screened at the bar will be focused on, as it exemplified many key observations made throughout the fieldwork.

Section 7.4 leads the presentation of findings, delivering a vignette of my first night of the bar to explore the general setting and atmosphere of GGEZ. Section 7.5 further elaborates on the dynamics within the bar, providing a generalised overview of the typical approaches to spectatorship and attendance at GGEZ. Section 7.6 delves into the vignette of TI8 at GGEZ, working to further illustrate how spectators engaged in and framed their spectatorship in the bar through a narrative retelling of the night.

7.4 Impressions of GGEZ

Fieldwork began during the first week of May 2018, which held the 2018 iteration of the Intel Extreme Masters Sydney. This scheduling was not coincidental: as mentioned in Chapter 6.10, IEM Sydney 2018 was a landmark Australia esports event, with the IEM series being one first major international esports series held in

Australia when it was inaugurally hosted in Sydney's Olympic Park during 2017. Such an important Australian esports event would be a good introduction to the esports spectating experience at GGEZ. IEM Sydney 2018 would both have the sizeable fan following of a flagship tournament and be held in a convenient Australian time zone. As discussed in Chapter 5.3.6, Australians must often dedicate themselves to staying awake during awkward hours if they desire to spectate live, as most major esports events are held in the northern hemisphere.

When approaching the bar from the street for the first time, it was evident that the venue would likely only be known to those with prior knowledge of its existence. The bar's street-level entrance provided few clues for those uninitiated regarding the venue below them. Overhanging the entrance was a small square canopy with three words printed on its front facing edge: *BEER ESPORTS BURGERS* stylised in a red and blue colour scheme, matching the soft neon glow spilling onto the footpath from inside. By the open glass front door were a collection of posters, each advertising upcoming esports screening events at the bar. Among these posters was a simple list of all the live esports that will be shown at the bar throughout the week. As I walked down the stairs towards the basement I was finally met with the bar's branding: the letters GGEZ painted onto the side of the wall in the venue's trademark neon red and blue. Continuing down I was met with more branding: a neon light sign depicting the bar's mascot (a jolly cartoon caricature wearing a gaming headset) accompanied by the letters GLHF. These letters are an acronym for the term 'good luck have fun,' a friendly and sportsmanlike term often said between opponents in competitive videogaming. When later speaking to the bar's owner, I learned that the inclusion of GLHF in the bar's branding was to offset the somewhat negative connotations associated with the term 'GGEZ' that was used as the bar's namesake. In contrast to the sportsmanlike term GLHF, GGEZ infamously stands for 'good game easy' and is used mockingly in competitive gaming to imply that one's opponent was trivially easy to beat.

Entering through the sliding glass door next to the pile of empty beer kegs at the bottom stairwell I found myself within the bar. I was met with MF DOOM's (2004) *Rap Snitch Knishes* playing over the bar's sound system; a taste of the style of urban hip-hop grooves that would colour the bar's audible ambience each time I visited. The bar itself appeared somewhat purposefully worn, as if the presence of the space's

previous occupier had been hastily torn out, painted over and repurposed ad hoc. Bare, filament light globes hung from the ceiling on long black cables, bathing the bar in a dim warm glow which emphasised the coarse texture of the roughly painted black walls, behind which glimpses of the their previous goldish-yellow colour sometimes poked through. As I reached the bar's counter, I was met with the drinks menu. Beyond the typical selection of Australian beers, the menu heavily featured themed cocktails and drinks inspired by videogaming and esports references. A particularly popular drink that I noticed throughout my time at the bar was their recreation of *Fortnite's* (Epic Games, 2017) 'slurp juice' healing item, brought to life as a fluorescent blue cocktail and served faithfully to the source material in a mason jar. Although labelled as an esports bar, GGEZ clearly also sought to present itself as inviting and inclusive, catering its appeal also to fans of gaming and pop culture more broadly, as well as presenting itself as a trendy bar against other competitors in the Melbourne bar scene. The bar's patronship often reflected this; although there were almost always spectators present in the bar, other patrons included videogame fans enjoying the novelty of the bar's theme and those simply enjoying the venue on its merits as a bar. The demographics of the GGEZ's patronship was also similarly varied, with groups of university students and suit-clad businessmen commonly present in the venue at the same time for evening drinks.

The bar's visual aesthetic shared a close resemblance to those I observed at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney in Study 2. This was most evident in the lighting of the venue. As mentioned earlier in this section, the bar emits a neon red and blue glow that was visible even from the street, spilling out from skylights adjacent to the footpath outside of the bar. This choice of lighting cast the bar in a warm, purplish hue of similar intensity as the light at the stadium events. In this way, a sort of consistent esports aesthetic style had been affirmed. This use of red and blue in esports aesthetics and iconography is not a coincidental design choice. Rather, it draws influence from the embedded meanings these two colours represent in competitive multiplayer gaming culture. As Sutantio, Poedjioetami and Widjajanti (2019) discuss in relation to the architectural design of purpose-built esports buildings, the use of stark shades of red and blue reflect the use of these colours within competitive games to differentiate opposing teams. This colour binary has

come to be indicative of competitive player-versus-player videogame play, becoming iconic of its practices and cultures.

As I ordered a drink, I was enthusiastically asked by the bar tender if I was there to watch the upcoming matches of IEM Sydney 2018. It seemed that the venue's staff were also expecting spectators to attend the bar with the intention of watching IEM. In the week leading up to IEM, the bar's management advertised on their social media platforms a promotion offering a free pint for those who turned up to GGEZ in their favourite team's jersey. GGEZ's management had evidently banked on IEM to boost their business for the weekend. When I later talked to the bar's owner, he described how advertised screening events of major esports tournaments played an important role in the bar's business model to draw in additional patrons.

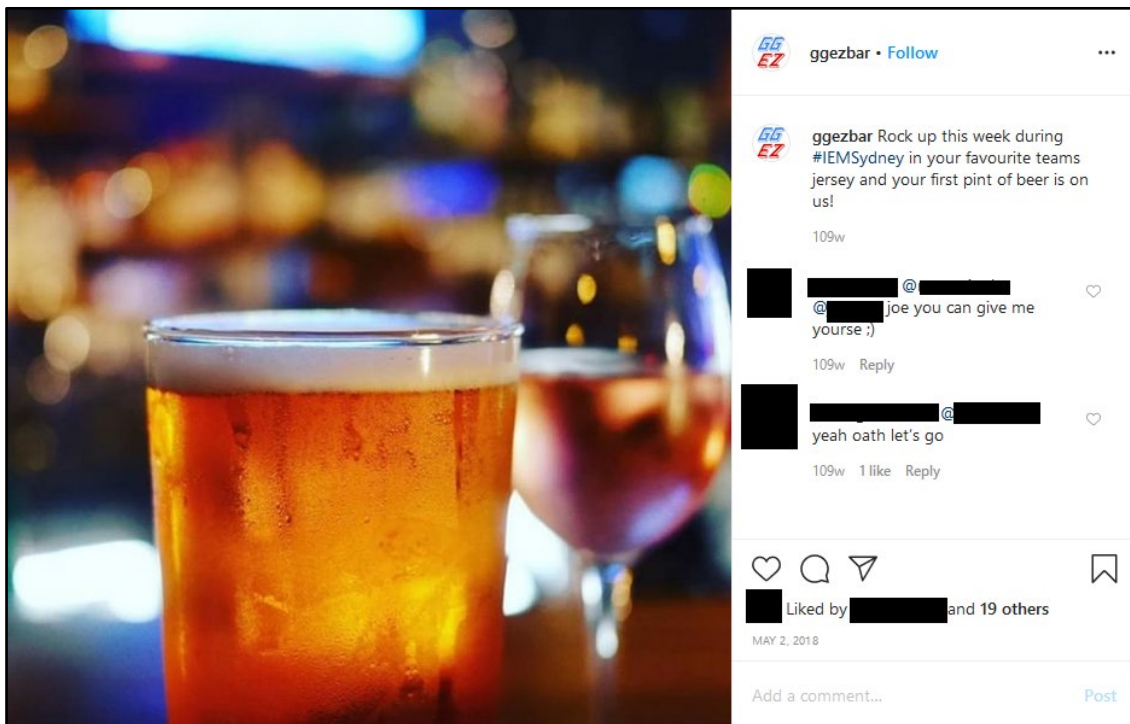


Figure 4 A post from GGEZ's Instagram account announcing a free first pint for those attending the bar in team apparel during the week of IEM Sydney 2018.

With a drink in hand, I walked to the back of the bar where IEM was being streamed from a large TV mounted in the centre of the bar's west-facing wall. This large TV acted as the centrepiece for most of the focused spectatorship in GGEZ, being significantly larger than the other screens around the bar. Roughly 10 smaller TVs lined the upper portion of the bar's other walls, mounted approximately 10 centimetres from the venue's ceiling. On most nights, these smaller TVs usually

showed live or pre-recorded esports of various leagues and videogames, while the large centrepiece TV would often be showing the ‘main event’ of the night, which was normally advertised in advance on the bar’s social media accounts. For example, weekly Oceanic Pro League matches would often be shown on the large TV as the main event, drawing a consistent gathering of roughly 10-20 spectators. Meanwhile, the bar’s other TVs would continue to show a variety of other esports, attracting either a small number of spectators or incidental glances from those in the bar not actively partaking in focused spectatorship.

Alongside me, there was only one other group of spectators present, consisting of five men who appeared to be in their early 20s sharing a tall pitcher of beer. The sole group, although alone in their spectatorship, evidently did not need the presence of anyone else in order to enjoy themselves. The men chanted and yelled fanatically in response to the action on the screen. Unsurprisingly, important and suspenseful plays executed during the matches elicited many audible responses from the group, often accompanied by a proportionate bodily response of tossed up arms and lurching torsos. But perhaps more interestingly, a great number responses were also elicited during periods not focused on the matches. In one notable example between matches with the broadcast covering the cheering crowd, the group were quick to join in with the ‘Aussie Aussie Aussie, Oi Oi Oi!’ chant reverberating in the stadium as captured in the broadcast of the event. Although I initially dismissed this recital of the iconic Australian sporting chant as a simple expression of national pride, it would later become clear in further spectating sessions that there was more to this mimicry than patriotic support alone.

Despite the Australian significance and temporal convenience of the Sydney-based IEM event, why was there such minimal turn out? In retrospect, the bar’s owner speculated that IEM may have been too local. He suspected that the demographic of spectators that would normally come to the bar to watch such an event were those dedicated enough to consider a weekend trip to Sydney as reasonable to experience IEM in-person. Although this sentiment was merely speculative, it highlights a notion that became prevalent throughout the fieldwork: a desire for attending a spectating place to partake in an authentic esports spectating experience. As will become apparent in forthcoming sections, this desire played an important role in the construction of spectating experiences at GGEZ.

7.5 Dynamics of GGEZ

Although the bar promoted itself as a venue dedicated for the spectatorship of esports, it became evident over the course of the fieldwork that not all patrons who frequented GGEZ necessarily engaged in spectatorship. While GGEZ perpetually streams live and recorded esports, if you were to go there on an average night you would have found many patrons not actively watching esports. Although some occasionally glanced towards a screen, the patrons largely chatted among their friends, with discussions ranging from gaming related topics like the latest videogame releases and recent esports results, to pop culture and mundane topics like work, study, and family. While the pervasive presence of streamed esports in the bar often steered the patron's discussions, particularly during lapses in conversation, it became clear that the active spectatorship of esports was not necessarily patrons' focus.

While it was fairly common to watch a group of friends momentarily shift their gazes to a nearby TV, they soon often returned inwards and conversation would strike up about the esport they had just briefly witnessed. Esports at the bar on an average night often resided in the peripherals of patrons; it was not fully engaged with nor completely ignored. Esports at GGEZ in part functioned as ambience and atmosphere, alongside other elements of the bar's aesthetic such as stylised wall murals, lighting, music and gaming-themed menu. Although GGEZ was promoted as a specialised venue for watching esports, on an average night the bar more so resembled an esports themed bar. Although the bar remained physically the same in terms of layout, it were the activities and behaviours that patrons engaged in which truly fulfilled GGEZ's title as an 'esports bar'. Through patron's efforts to construct their spectating experiences, the site of GGEZ was transformed into a place of esports spectatorship.

7.6 The International 8 at GGEZ

At around 1am on Sunday the 26th of August, 2018, I drove to GGEZ to watch The International 2018, the concluding tournament of the Dota Pro Circuit and one of the largest annual esports events at the time, boasting a total prize pool of roughly USD \$25 million (The International Battle Pass, 2018). Unlike IEM Sydney 2018, TI8 took place internationally in Vancouver, hence the early morning start for those

spectating in Melbourne. Yet, it was clear that this didn't deter many fans; when I entered at the bar at around 1:40am there was already a few small groups of fans in the bar excitedly discussing the upcoming semi-final matches, among other patrons wrapping up their night of drinking. Many of these fans had prepared themselves for the lengthy overnight viewing session, with one couple snuggled up together with a blanket against a wall and a group of five men in their early 20s fortified with an immense stockpile of snack foods they had brought with them. Over the next 20 minutes the bar would quickly fill up with keen spectators while other patrons who were not there for TI8 finished their drinks and eventually left. Despite the matches starting at 3am Melbourne time, the bar had to enforce a mandatory lockout between 2am and 7am; a condition of their venue licencing contract. With this in mind, roughly 30 spectators had gathered in the back of the bar by 2am, patiently awaiting 3am when the large central TV would be switched over to the TI8 livestream. This hour of waiting was not uneventful however, as the atmosphere and patron behaviour in the bar began to shift.

7.6.1 Sociality

As the matches began, the boundary between groups of people became increasingly less defined. Patrons were readily moving around and chatting to strangers about the upcoming matches, often attempting to glean a person's team loyalty and fandom. I was not exempt from this. Having arrived relatively early I was able to secure a well-positioned table by the large TV on the west-facing wall all to myself. Once the bar had quickly filled, I was unsurprisingly approached by a fairly large group of five men and two women, who asked me if they could join me at my table, to which I agreed. While I initially thought that I might simply sit awkwardly at the table with them minding my own business, I was pleasantly surprised when the group started chatting to me about TI8. Eventually, I found myself well incorporated into their discussions. I learned that they had been out on a big night of drinking, which they planned to conclude with a trip to GGEZ to continue drinking and watch as much of TI8 as they could before exhausting themselves, despite a bit of initial confusion among the group.

“Are we going to watch it?”

“Yes! That's why we're here!”

It appeared that the group had been led to GGEZ by four of the men who were particularly keen to watch TI8, with the rest more moderately curious of the event. It would eventually be these enthusiastic four that stayed at the bar for the longest, with the other three leaving roughly 90 minutes later to conclude their big night out. Despite my status as a stranger to them, they actively endeavoured to incorporate me into their group and treated me as one of their own, pulling me into their half-drunk speculation of strategies that would be used in upcoming matches. The group even started buying me alcoholic drinks “courtesy of the boys,” despite my declination of their offers in an effort to stay sober and remember my experiences of the night for the sake of the ethnography. However, once they caught onto my efforts to stay sober, they instead started buying me energy drinks instead.

As the semi-final matches commenced, the group soon realised that I was not a seasoned *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) spectator or player and made concerted efforts to explain key moments in the matches for my sake of comprehension and enjoyment, something I had previously observed other groups do with their less experienced individuals. GGEZ was often used as a ground of initiation for those new to the esports, whether voluntary or under pressure from their friends already well engaged with esports fandom. The social atmosphere of the bar and the face-to-face nature of attendance made explaining esports to novice spectators an engaging yet casual activity. At this point, I found myself to subject of this dynamic that I had previously observed.

Besides me, the group at my table was also chatting and bantering with others around the bar, while others at tables nearby conversed with me regarding the matches. Interactions with others were friendly and enthusiastic, and I was treated almost like a known acquaintance simply because I was at the bar sharing the experience of watching TI8 as it happened. I was even casually offered a “dexy¹⁹” from a complete stranger who I had only spoken to for roughly a minute, which I declined.

The bar’s staff were also engaged in the sociality of the bar, blurring the lines between their work and their own personal enjoyment of the event as esports fans.

¹⁹ Slang for a tablet of dextroamphetamine, a prescription drug used to treat narcolepsy and hyperactivity disorders. Often traded illicitly and taken as a recreational stimulant.

There were two staff members present at the bar for the entirety of the event: a bartender and GGEZ's owner. Unsurprisingly, both were keen esports fans who had been looking forward to TI8. I learned from the owner that GGEZ was more than just a simple business venture for him. With previous experience running and promoting bars in Melbourne, he admitted that opening of an esports bar was not the most lucrative way to make money. Rather, it was a passion project birthed out of his love for esports. Both the owner and the bartender would periodically roam around the bar and engage in the theatrics and conversations that filled the venue. At times, particularly during intense moments in the action, the owner and bartender could be found in the midst of the densely packed crowd of patrons seated in front of the big TV, leaving the bar's counters unattended. But no one seemed to care, as practically everyone present were glued to their seats as they watched what would eventually turn out to be one of the most thrilling finals in the history of esports. The owner even went beyond his regular duties to ensure the comfort of his patrons. With the bar's kitchen closed during the lockout and knowing that patrons would not be able to re-enter the bar if they left to get food, the owner made a quick trip to a nearby fast food restaurant and bought each patron a few hash browns to tide them over, free of charge. In a similar gesture of solidarity as esports fans, the conclusion of the event was celebrated with a round of shots on the house.

7.6.2 Fandom

There was a great sense of communality built in the bar, which was eventually amplified when it became clear that most spectators were supporting OG, a Europe-based team largely considered the underdogs of the competition. In contrast to predictions made by esports analysts, OG had beaten a collection of teams on their way to the finals that were favoured to win the tournament. As it would turn out, OG's team roster for TI8 included Anathan 'ana' Pham, a 19-year-old from Melbourne and the only Australian competing in the tournament's final stages. By virtue of ana's presence on OG's roster and his status as a 'hometown hero', OG became something close to an Australian team for GGEZ's patrons. These aspects alone were enough to sway the opinion of less knowledgeable spectators at the bar whose loyalty were not strongly cemented with any particular team. A conversation I overheard from a group of men in front of me concisely illustrated this.

“That ana guy, is he Aussie?”

“Yeah, he’s from Melbourne actually.”

“Oh sweet, now I know who I’m going for!”

I also found myself being swayed towards supporting OG for these reasons that night, not having any previous team affiliation. But beyond this sense of wanting to support OG on the basis of local representation and patriotism, I felt a sense of not wanting to be an outsider. It was decisively evidence from the cheering and chants throughout the bar that OG were the patronship’s clear favourites. The few that weren’t supporting OG, such as a small group of three men seated behind me who supported the China-aligned team LGD (who OG would eventually face in the grand final), often became the butt of jokes and banter among the majority OG supporters. However, it was clear that this was done in a jovial rather than menacing manner, to which the LGD fans responded with their own friendly banter. When speaking to those around me about this back and forth banter, I was reassured that there was no animosity.

“No matter who wins we’re all still friends! We all love *Dota*!”

7.6.3 The next best thing

While team loyalties were expressed among spectators, they ultimately were united over their shared love for *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013). As the night continued, it became apparent that the act of watching TI8 in the presence of other *Dota 2* esports fans was an important element of spectatorship within the bar. However, it is important to note that GGEZ was not the only venue in Melbourne where esports fans could experience a live, shared, and public communal experience of spectating TI8. A national cinema chain also offered a live screening of TI8 in their theatres. In many ways, the spectating experience of esports could be arguably better in a cinema, offering large comfortable chairs, a massive screen, and a surround sound system to take in all the action. Yet, I spoke to a late arrival to the bar who had started off spectating at a nearby cinema and ended up relocating to GGEZ for the remainder of the matches. Although he had originally chosen to go to cinema with his group of friends for the “big screen experience,” he later regret his decision as he felt the crowd there wasn’t getting as “involved” as he wanted; most were simply watching in relative silence, glued to their seats and shrouded by the darkness of the theatre. According to him, while spectators at the cinema were watching in unison,

there was not a sense of communality and comradery that he sought out in his experience of spectatorship.

In coming to GGEZ, the latecomer sought to construct and partake in a spectating experience which encapsulated these valued qualities, quickly chatting up other spectators and participating in the coordinated cheering that persisted throughout the night. Although patrons initially sat at their tables in the bar's prescribed seating configuration, as the night progressed chairs and stools were been moved and reorganised in a rough semicircle around the large TV for a better view, each individual group seated shoulder to shoulder as a broader collective. As individuals came and left for the sake of ordering drinks or taking bathroom breaks, the semicircle shifted and reconfigured itself to ensure that all could clearly see the screen. Cheers and chants continued to roar throughout the semi-finals and into the grand final where OG took on LGD for the title. When I next spoke to the latecomer during a break in the matches, he happily confirmed that his expectations been of spectatorship in the bar had been met.

“Yeah nah it's great, it's like I'm really there! It's essentially like the next best thing!”

This notion of the bar being ‘the next best thing’ to being at TI8 in person was shared among many other patrons. The majority of those I spoke to mentioned that they would have been there in person if it was feasible; a trip to Vancouver proved too much of an investment in terms of money and time. This was reinforced when it was revealed on the livestream that TI9 would be held in Shanghai. The amount of cheering and rejoice this announcement garnered from those in the bar was second only to OG's eventual win in the grand finale. As the cheering subsided, I began to hear tentative travel plans circulating among friend groups throughout the bar.

“Well boys, looks like we're going to China next year.”

“We actually?”

“We have to! It's so close!”

The geographical isolation of Australia from the predominately Northern hemisphere-based international esports scene acted as a barrier that prevents most Australian esports fans from attending major esports events like TI8. Although still

not local, TI9 in Shanghai brought the tournament the closest it had even been to Australia, with previous iterations taking place in North America and once in Europe. The shorter travel distance appeared to make attending the TI9 in person a more feasible feat for those at the bar. Although it was evident that the patrons would choose to spectate at the site of play if realistically accessible, attendance to the bar as “the next best thing” was not merely a compromise.

7.6.4 Stream mimicry

During the high-intensity semi and grand final matches I began to notice some intriguing aspects about how patrons were cheering. While the intensity and frequency of the cheering in the bar would predictably shift with the intensity and momentum of the matches, I eventually noticed that there was more correlation with the TI8 livestream than just this observation. Not only did the timing and intensity of cheering match that captured on the livestream, but also the specific chants and cheers themselves. In particular, the mimicry and synchronisation of rhythmic aspects of the cheering was the most common occurrence of this and was mostly visible during the banning stage before each match. These periods, which predominantly focused on the teams within the stadium as they drafted and banned heroes for the upcoming matches, also inherently featured the visual presence of the physically-present stadium audience, in conjunction with a greater audible presence of their antics. During these relatively uneventful stages of strategic planning it was common for the stadium-situated audience captured in the livestream to engage in rhythmic clapping and chanting of increasing tempo during the anticipation of hero picks and bans. While the mimicry of these specific behaviours by patrons in the bar was not particularly surprising assuming it to be an ingrained spectating ritual, what was intriguing was the mimicry of the tempo and rhythm of these chants and claps.

In another example, the crowd in the bar participated in a wave initiated by the stadium crowd. Even though their wave would never connect with that in the stadium, nor would the cheers and jeers reach the ears of the teams and players they were directed to, the replication of these rituals and behaviours in evoked qualities of the stadium in the remote place of the bar. The patrons, whether consciously or not, worked to recreate characteristics of the stadium-situated experience of spectatorship remotely in GGEZ.

7.6.5 The climax

As the semi-finals wrapped up it soon became apparent that the looming grand final match between OG and LGD would be one of the most dramatic moments in contemporary esports. While many in the bar had placed their support behind OG by virtue of ana's presence on the team's roster, this was further compounded by OG's status as the underdog in the matchup against the favoured-to-win LGD. In essence, OG's arrival to the grand final acted as the culmination of the team's ongoing 'Cinderella story' narrative. Prior to TI8, the once successful OG suffered major setbacks when three key players suddenly departed to join other teams, which some fans interpreted as a betrayal. The loss of these key players meant that OG would no longer be guaranteed an invitation to TI8 and were forced to hastily restructure their roster to earn their way into the tournament by competing in the open qualifiers. As a part of this restructuring, ana returned to the team after a yearlong hiatus following the team's elimination in TI7, alongside the signing of the team's previous coach as a player and a newcomer who had not yet competed at a major LAN event. OG was not expected by most to reach the grand finale, let alone make it out of the open qualifiers. Yet, to the delight of those in the bar, their unlikely story of redemption came to fruition.

The last few rounds could be best described as a rollercoaster of emotions. Playing in a first-to-three format, OG's round one win was responded to confidently by LGD's subsequent wins in the second and third rounds. With LGD now at match point, the enthusiasm in the bar was quickly replaced with fearful apprehension. As the fourth round commenced, emotions were amplified. The smallest of mistakes by OG and the smallest of triumphs by LGD elicited mournful groans and cries of colourful language, while each success was met with joyous, yet nervous, rejoice. When OG managed to secure the round four win, one could have easily mistaken the calibre of cheering to be in response to an actual championship win. Almost as if the patrons had collectively taken a sigh of relief, a renewed sense of vigour swept over the bar in anticipation of the fifth and final round. Paralysed bodies sprung back into motion as tension momentarily eased while patrons shifted around the bar to use the restroom and order their last round of drinks in preparation of the decisive spectacle that would soon take place. Friendly chatter circulated the space, expressing relief and excitement that 'we' had managed to beat the odds and make a comeback. This

light atmosphere would not last long, as soon the banning phase of round 5 began. Echoing remarks made by the casters' commentary from the livestream, there was a sense of unease among the patrons as discussion spread regarding OG's choice to draft heroes they were comfortable playing, rather than ones that were optimal from a strategic perspective against LGD. As the round commenced, a period of relative silence fell upon the bar. There was no longer the familiar sustained cheering or jeering; that was now reserved for intense moments at the peak of suspense. Eyes were fixed to the screen and for the duration of the round and the bar stood almost still. Those who were able to move could not bear the suspense and looked away while others prayed to their deity of choice. Food and drinks were no longer being served; nobody dared to leave their seats anyway and the bar's staff had suspended their duties to also spectate keenly.

The moment LGD's Ancient became vulnerable following a series of pivotal plays executed by ana, the bar's patronship and staff knew in that moment that OG had essentially won and leapt into celebration, almost missing the actual end of the match which officially granted OG the title. The majority of the patrons at the bar leaped from their chairs and erupted in a cacophony of celebratory cheering, chanting, and singing. Social boundaries had completely broken down as complete strangers hugged each other while others cried tears of happiness. Even the LGD supporters behind me joined in the celebrations, acknowledging OG's rise from the ashes. Some began to discuss how they would brag to their friends who could not make it to the bar, while others were already on their phones gloating to their absent friends. After the round of celebratory shots, the whole patronship of GGEZ, many who were complete strangers upon entry, left the bar as a collective and continued their giddy celebrations as they funnelled out from the street-level entrance on a bright Sunday afternoon. Pedestrians going about their day looked on in bewilderment, unaware of the events that had just transpired.

7.7 Discussion

While many attended the bar over the course of the ethnographic fieldwork to spectate esports, at times it was hard to understand why one would do so. The competitive spectacle of esports takes place within the virtual space of a videogame and must be mediated out of necessity in order to be watched. In essence, there is no current way to watch esports unmediated. Even in the stadium, matches must be

captured, their content mediated by the production crew and projected onto large screens around the venue, as well as streamed to remote audiences. In this sense, every esports spectator shares a similar perspective regardless of spectating site.

As a multi-cited sport with no singular situated pitch, one may conclude that despite the obstacles identified in Study 1, the optimal spectating experience would be had at home. The bar was often noisy and filled with distractions that obstructed the ability to spectate esports with clarity, being commonly filled with people attending for purposes other than esports spectatorship. With TI8 freely livestreamed on Twitch, spectators could have comfortably watched from the comfort of their homes. However, as will be made apparent in this discussion, the environmental characteristics of GGEZ played an important role in the construction of patrons' experiences of esports spectatorship in the venue. In making sense of the fieldwork at GGEZ it became clear that patrons were not motivated solely for the purposes of watching TI8 in the bar. Although the feed of TI8 may have been consistent across spectating sites, I will argue in this discussion that the activities surrounding the act of watching defined experiences of spectatorship at GGEZ, appealing to constructs of authenticity held by its patrons. Due to the similarities in watching perspectives across sites of spectatorship, more emphasis was placed on the construction of valued spectating experiences than the act watching esports itself.

7.7.1 Authentication through mimicry

Looking at spectators at GGEZ, the mimicked ritualistic behaviours acted both as authenticating acts and authoritative performances. As authenticating acts, they worked as references by participants to construct authentic personal narratives of their spectatorship in the bar (Cohen, 1988; Escalas and Bettman, 2000). Despite being dedicated venues of esports spectatorship, esports bars are not currently widely established places of esports spectatorship. Consequently, there exists very few traditions of such spaces for spectators to draw on to constitute an authentic experience; it must be negotiated by spectators. These mimicked behaviours as authenticating acts drew on the established sporting and emergent esportsing histories of the stadium (Cardwell and Ali, 2014) to transform the bar into a place of esports spectatorship. They also worked as authoritative performances by offering a sense of affiliation and community by making clear the values considered significant by those at GGEZ (Abrahams, 1986; Escalas and Bettman, 2000). Not

only was authenticity affirmed on an individual level, but a consensus of authenticity was adopted across the broad patronship of the bar. Whether or not this sense of authenticity was ‘original’ or not was irrelevant to the patrons at GGEZ; the experience was inherently ‘authentic’, for they had constructed it from elements which they perceived original and genuine (Bruner, 1994; Schawandt, 1994; Wang, 1999; Urry, 2002; Fairley and Tyler, 2012).

As found in Study 1 and Study 2, many esports fans perceive the stadium as an authentic site of esports spectatorship. This was also observed at GGEZ through the mimicry of behaviours observed in the TI8 livestream by patrons. By mimicking the antics of the stadium-situated spectators, those in the bar worked to authenticate their remote spectatorship by evoking qualities of the stadium. These stadium-native behaviours and rituals can be considered as being reappropriated by spectators to authenticate their spectatorship. Although patrons evoked a sense of what they thought the authentic experience of spectating TI8 in the stadium would be like through the engagement in these rituals and behaviours, this alone did not entirely constitute the spectating experiences within the bar. Rather, the mimicry was interwoven with other elements within GGEZ, constituting a distinct and unique spectating experience. Although patrons worked to replicate rituals and behaviours accurately to how they were presented in the livestream, they functioned differently in the bar than at the stadium. The mimicked rituals and behaviours in the bar could not fulfill the intended purposes they were enacted for in the context of the stadium. Cheers and jeers towards players would not reach the ears of that they were directed to, and the wave could not sustain itself in the small, rectangular confines of the bar. In light of this reappropriation, it can be said that the event organisers of TI8 had successfully staged and audienced (Nick Taylor, 2016b) spectators physically present at the stadium as authentic artefacts to be consumed by remote audiences. In this way these findings harmonise with those of Study 2 pertaining to the audienicing of spectators for remote viewers and investors at the two 2017 Sydney esports events.

Rather, these behaviours were reappropriated within the context of the bar, instead becoming representative the stadium spectating experience. With the patronship of the bar largely viewing the stadium as an authentic site of esports spectatorship, the replication of these rituals and behaviours worked to authenticate their TI8

spectating experience at GGEZ. However, an exact replica of a stadium experience could not be constructed in GGEZ; although behaviours could be mimicked, they couldn't be replicated to scale within the confines of the bar, and the bar space itself in terms of seating, lighting, services, functionality and location were inherently different from that of the stadium. This 'imperfect' copy of the stadium spectating experience could be thought of as simulacrum, merely resembling salient elements of the stadium experience and existing outside of the context from which it was shaped and given meaning (Smith, 2005).

However, such a stance would imply that the patrons equated spectatorship at the bar and at the stadium as the same. Although it has been argued that the replicated behaviours rituals no longer perform their original purposes and were reappropriated as a way to evoke a sense of the stadium spectating experience, it is inaccurate to suggest that patrons came to perceive experiences of spectatorship at GGEZ as exchangeable with those in the stadium. Patrons shared a consensus that the experience of spectating at the bar was "the next best thing" to being there in person, indicating a clear distinction between the two. Rather than GGEZ acting as a replacement for the stadium, the bar acted as an ideal site where stadium-like qualities could be constructed into experiences of esports spectatorship (Patton, 2010). Remote sporting places evoke certain elements of the 'original' spectating experience to create certain experiences that appeal to target audience's perceptions of authenticity (Bruner, 1994; Fairley and Tyler, 2012). With authenticity being relative to the individual, the variations of between spectatorship sites provides alternative places to construct a desired experience of spectatorship. While the cinema spectating experience of TI8 may have been be authentic to some, the spectating experience at GGEZ appealed to the senses of esports authenticity held by those who attended the bar.

While the spectatorship of TI8 by local Melbournians in a Melbourne esports bar likely did not hold the same level of prestige as spectating it in person at the stadium in Vancouver, it would be inaccurate to claim that the bar spectatorship was not a "defining moment" (Rogerson et al., 2019; Weed and Bull, 2009) for the patrons and their engagement with esports fandom. The retelling of an event through the gathered stories and artefacts from one's attendance demonstrates a strong commitment to a hobby. This act of "collecting places" offers a sense of creditability

to an individual's knowledge of their respective hobby or fandom, indicating their membership to a privileged and exclusive group of similarly experienced others (Urry, 2002). Through this membership, admiration can be sought from others within their hobby or fandom, as well as those within one's broader social and personal life (Maslow, 1954).

In some cases, the appeal of being at an event itself becomes the primary motivation for attendance and travel. Rogerson et al. (2019) notes that among serious leisure (Stebbins, 2015) hobbyist boardgamers, the desire to play games at large international boardgaming events is often supplemented by the desire to attend. For some, this is simply due to the prestige such events hold in the boardgaming community and the cultural capital it reflects. The attendance to such events acts as a defining moment for hobbyists and fans (Weed and Bull, 2009). Much like how Wolf (1978) describes how some tourists cross international borders simply for the prestige associated with having been in a foreign country, these 'destination' events are esteemed in a similar sense. However, such cases are not indicative of each individual's motivations; Rogerson et al. describe others who seek the pleasure of both attending large destination events and playing boardgames at them. Regardless, the key point they demonstrate is that the act of attendance has the potential to be a major motivator alone.

The significance of attending GGEZ to watch TI8 was largely constructed by the patrons themselves. Although GGEZ advertised that they would be adjusting their opening hours to show TI8 live and actively promoted the event, the bar acted as a foundation for patrons to build their desired experiences of spectatorship. As previously mentioned, GGEZ catered to and was enjoyed by fans of broader videogaming and pop culture despite being promoted as an esports bar. Only when fans attended the bar to spectate and engage in spectating rituals and behaviours was GGEZ transformed into a place of esports spectatorship. In doing so, the unique and exclusive experience of spectating within the bar became a collected experience that could later be retold to others. People tend to think of and communicate their ongoing personal history as a collection of narratives, wherein the individual is central (Escalas and Bettman, 2000). By locating themselves within these constructed narratives, individuals construct their identities (Somers, 1994). An individual's location within narratives of attendance to events works to constitute

their identity as an authentic fan. These narratives do not only signify one's attendance to an event, but also the emotions and meanings associated with it. Strong feelings of emotion imbue self-narratives with a sense of authenticity (Abrahams, 1994). In sharing these stories, fans do not only establish their attendance, but also establish the event as authentic among others in the fandom. Patrons' at GGEZ not only strived to construct authentic experiences of esports spectatorship, but also endeavoured to be authentic esports spectators.

7.7.2 Fandom

Fairley and Tyler (2012) suggest that team fandom is an additional factor which contributes to the construction of authenticity across sports spectatorship experiences in non-sporting spaces. Similarly, Boire (1980) notes that a valued quality of sports fandom is a sense of belonging to the team and being able to vicariously experience the glory of its triumphs and the despair of its defeats. Although there was an eventual near-unifying sense team loyalty driven by overwhelming support for OG at GGEZ, it was not initially apparent and built up over the course of the night. Unlike in Fairley and Tyler's study of baseball spectatorship in a cinema where fans clearly expressed their partisan fandom visually in the form of team apparel, most at GGEZ wore nondescript, regular clothing. Only a minority wore jerseys of varying esports teams, many of which belonging to teams that were not taking part in TI8. This observation reflects unifying sentiments among patrons that they were fans of *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) as an esports team firstly, and fans of teams and players secondly.

The grandeur of TI8 as a championship *Dota 2* event likely played a role in this. Much like how one may watch the Superbowl despite not being a fan of either team playing, the culmination of the drama, skilled play, and spectacle that major esports events like TI8 embody provides motivation to spectate (Fink and Parker, 2009). Another consideration is the historic lack of regionality of esports teams. While there are esports teams with a clear locational allegiance, many exist as a collection of skilled players united under a team brand with minimal geographic or regional identity. Such prevalence of teams without a clear locational allegiance complicates the conventional fan relationship between teams and the locations they would typically represent. Despite OG being a team without an explicit regional connection, almost everyone in GGEZ came to support them by the end of the night. Although

teams often harbour fans in the locations they represent, this fandom is less inherent on the physical location itself and rather on the community the team represents (Mason, 1999).

Although OG does not have a home city or country, its founding history and team composition can be said to be representative of western nations and culture, with their entire roster outside of ana having originated from European countries. On the other hand, LGD had an entirely Chinese roster and was an outrightly China-aligned team. It would be inviting to suggest that an Australian audience would tend to side with the team that best represents their western values and identity (Mason, 1999; Horton, 2000), the obvious choice being OG. While this may partially be the case, it was evident that the patrons were able to self-identify themselves in ana. Such unanimous support of OG through ana's representation and the ensuing sense of group association it spawned also helps understand the jovial marginalisation of the LGD supporting minority. As Snow and Oliver (1995) describe, collective group identities strengthen and define their own borders by identifying 'us' from 'them.'

Although it was evident that many entered and left the bar celebrating *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) as an esports rather than any enduring loyalty or animosity to a particular team and its followers, in the heat on the moment it became evident that a clear line had been drawn between 'us' (the OG supporters) and 'them' (the LGD supporters). Both ana's status as a local and the first Australian to make to the finals of TI were clear achievements to celebrate and ended up earning the loyalty of those who arrived at the bar without any clear allegiance, including myself. In this sense, ana acted not only as a representative for the local Melbourne community, but also as an entryway for those at the bar to "be a part of the team" (Boire, 1980). Through ana, OG came to resemble something close to an Australian national team for those in the bar. According to Lazarus (1991), having a personal investment in an event leads to heightened emotional impacts (Escalas and Bettmann, 2000). Such emotive experiences form the foundations of self-narratives and imbues them with a sense of authenticity (Escalas and Bettmann, 2000). In sharing these retrospective stories, individuals can establish and legitimatise identities within social groups (Fairley and Tyler, 2012).

7.7.3 Enculturation of novices

Not all patrons were well versed in these esports narratives, however. Both during TI8 and other instances of esports spectatorship at the bar, there was a mix of experienced and novice esports spectators. The dynamics between the experienced and novice spectators at GGEZ further highlights the venue's third-place characteristics. As Oldenburg (1989) describes, one of the defining aspects of third places is the presence of experienced regulars who are well-versed in, and to an extent define, the norms and communal knowledge of the place's culture. As living compendium of their place's standards, these regulars play an essential role as initiators for newcomers, inducting them into the place's culture and helping them feel welcomed. Likewise, at GGEZ the experienced spectators played a similar role for novice spectator. Besides introducing them to the cultural norms of the bar, they also helped initiate them into the esports fandom and lore. During TI8 I experienced this firsthand when I was 'adopted' by the group of spectators that occupied my table. Although I have an interest in competitive gaming and esports, I did not follow *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) and its esports at the time. I initially became aware of OG's status as the tournament's underdog and the context behind their 'Cinderella story' through the group of enthusiast spectators I was sitting with. Now with an understanding of the narrative behind the tournament, I felt compelled to support OG in the finals along with the majority of patrons in the bar. My intention to watch TI8 had transcended beyond simply research interest, becoming personal investment. I had grown excited to see if OG would make a historic, odds-defying win.

Furthermore, enthusiast spectators also assisted novice spectators on a fundamental level, helping them understand how to watch esports. As Kow and Young (2013) note in relation to *StarCraft II* (Blizzard Entertainment 2010), an understanding of not only basic game mechanics but also the metagame surrounding the competitive play is necessary to spectate in a meaningful manner. Predominantly, this essential *StarCraft II* knowledge is obtained from personal play. They argue that this literacy is transferable between similar esports titles, describing how *StarCraft II* and *StarCraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 1998) exist "within the same learning ecology." T.L. Taylor (2012) similarly observes that esports titles are often spectated by those who also play them game themselves, with entry into a videogame's esports fandom commonly coming from incidental exposure to esports content online.

These perspectives culminate in a perception that a spectator needs a strong understanding of the core mechanics of an esports, as well as competitive strategies and metagames which surround it, to partake in an enjoyable spectating experience. As Hilvoorde and Pot (2016) assert, a strong background knowledge of the game being watched is required to spectate and understand an esports in a meaningful way. Alternatively, Zimmerman (2009) describes this type of gaming knowledge as “gaming literacy”. In a similar manner to digital and media literacy, gaming literacy refers to “the ability to understand and create specific kinds of meanings” (Zimmerman, 2009) from the design and cultural conventions of videogames. In essence, scholars argue that a strong grasp of an esports’s specific gaming literacy is required to spectate it in an understandable and nuanced manner. There is not one universal gaming literacy, but rather various, overlapping gaming literacies that pertain to individual games and the genres they belong to. This is a particularly important aspect to note in relation to esports, as while esports is often studied as a holistic entity, it consists of various game titles which each have their own gaming literacies; these literacies have developed to the extent where one can no longer claim to understand all esports by focusing on only one esports. In this way, those at GGEZ needed specific *Dota 2*, and by extension, MOBA literacy to comprehend and enjoy the spectacle of TI8. Prolonged personal play proves central to the building of this gaming literacy through lived experiences. However, as observed at GGEZ, experienced spectators worked to bridge the gaming literacy gap of novice spectators for the sake of their spectator experiences.

Although strangers met and were united as fellow fans under a strong sense *communitas*, the bar also acted as a venue for existing friendships to flourish, with groups of friends frequenting the bar to enjoy a night of esports spectatorship with the comforts of drinks, food, and a warm atmosphere. It was within the dynamics of these existing friend groups that another form of laborious spectatorship was observed. Although these friend groups typically attended the bar to watch esports, not all members were esports fans. Groups were usually led by one or two enthusiast fans, while the others held varying lower levels of esports interest. Some were simply not as invested as the leading enthusiast fans, while others were more broadly interested in videogaming or simply had no existing interest in esports at all. As the most knowledgeable of esports in the group, the enthusiast fans adopted the

responsibility of assisting their novice friends in understanding the esports content they were watching.

The enthusiast fans took the role of a teacher or instructor, filling gaps in the others' gaming literacy. For some, this took the form of gentle guidance, giving prompts as to where and when to pay attention and breaking down key moments in detail to provide context as to why they had occurred. For those with almost no gaming literacy, this guidance was more intensive, with the enthusiasts comprehensively breaking down the core mechanics of the game. In some instances the enthusiasts ran up to the TV at points during a match to directly point out areas of interest for their novices.

This educational aspect of the enthusiasts' laborious spectatorship was not the only way that novices were initiated into esports fandom. Enthusiasts also worked to entertain the novices. Although GGEZ is a self-proclaimed space to spectate esports in, only on dedicated screening nights could the esports broadcasts be clearly heard. On normal nights, the combination of music and chatter among patrons drowned out much of the sound produced by the TVs. This essentially made the spectatorship of esports at the bar an almost entirely visual experience most of the time. This further complicated the act of watching esports for the novices, as they were unable to listen to accompanying commentary tracks. Much like in conventional sports, commentators play an integral role in esports broadcasts, acting as a sort of punctuation to the visual footage (Turtiainen, Friman and Ruotsalainen, 2020).

Through their remarks and reactions, commentators provide cues that prime spectators to notice key moments in the match (Byrö, 2017) Furthermore, colour commentary adds a jovial and performative side to the analysis, crafting together narratives in real-time as outcomes become apparent to help fill in gaps in the action (Morris and Nydahl, 1985). Others have argued that commentary is more essential in esports than conventional sports, suggesting that videogames played as esports are predominantly developed with the player in mind and rely on a commentators to translate the action for spectators (Kempe-Cook, Sher and Su, 2019). This importance of commentary further compounds difficulties relating to gaming literacy that novices face when spectating esports.

With professional esports commentary drowned out by other noises of the bar, the enthusiasts produced their own commentary to guide their novice friends. Although not an exact replication of the style of commentary that would accompany the broadcast, the enthusiasts similarly speculated and offered informed insights into the match. This commentary was often humorous, poking fun at the misfortune of players and emphasising the absurdity of matches in some instances. This humorous element was perhaps the most important aspect of the enthusiasts' commentary. While knowing what is happening is key to spectating esports, fans seek to be entertained by engaging in spectatorship. Even if the novice spectators knew with clarity what was happening on screen, it was unlikely that they would have cared without a vested interest in the match and its stakes. The introduction of colour commentary filled this gap, providing exposition and humour that created a reason for the novice spectators to care about what they were watching. In particular, the enthusiasts were keen to explain the background context surrounding the matches.

Although the commentary track could be heard in GGEZ during the night of the TI8, the guidance and self-produced commentary of the experienced spectators at my table played a fundamental role in my understanding of the matches. The official commentary of TI8 was produced for those holding a strong degree of *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) literacy in mind; an unsurprising observation when considering TI8 stood as the premier *Dota 2* esports event of the year. Although suitable and engaging for an experienced spectator, I found the vocabulary and slang used in the commentary unhelpful, even alienating, as a novice spectator with little *Dota 2* literacy. When it became evident to the enthusiast spectators at my table that I lacked the level of *Dota 2* literacy needed to comprehensively understand the matches, the commentary they performed for me was based more around the fundamentals of the game. Whereas the official professional commentary generated a sense of 'hype' and highlighted important moments of play, the self-produced commentary of the enthusiasts at my table worked to highlight *why* these key moments of play were considered important in relation to the core mechanics of the *Dota 2*.

This novice-targeted commentary performed by enthusiast spectators at GGEZ functioned similarly to newcomer livestreams analysed by Georgen et al. (2015). As previously mentioned in Chapter 6.8, Georgen et al. focused on TI4's "noob stream,"

a separate feed of the event featuring commentary with an educational focus for novice spectators, “teaching the mechanics of the game, strategies, and discourse of *Dota 2* and eSports” (Georgen et al., 2015). They note a descriptive approach to commentary in the noob stream, noting how commentators begun by outlining mechanical aspects of the game before moving onto the evaluation of outcomes and the discussion of hypotheticals. Georgen et al. assert that newcomer streams like that of TI4 play an important role in enculturating those seeking membership into the esports community, offering them a rare opportunity to learn an esports without partaking in extended periods of personal play, somewhat alleviating the steep learning curve of mastering a requisite gaming literacy.

Likewise, the novice-focused commentary and banter of the enthusiast spectators at GGEZ achieved a similar effect. Firstly, this self-produced commentary worked to enculturated novice spectators into the community of the bar, imparting them with the norms and knowledge required to experience GGEZ as a third place. Secondly, it enculturated spectators to esports and competitive gaming community more broadly, offering them an opportunity to partake in an enjoyable experience of esports spectatorship curated to bridge gaps in their gaming literacy. In doing so, novices were able to build knowledge of the spectated esports and encouraged to partake in future spectatorship and community engagement.

7.7.4 *Communitas*

Patrons at GGEZ sought to create a spectating experience within the bar embodying a sense of authenticity through the reappropriation of behaviours and rituals observed in the mediated portrayals of the stadium. Working within the spatial boundaries of the bar and the communal gathering of like-minded fans, elements of the stadium spectacle were mimicked and recreated in GGEZ. This was most evident in the attendance motivations of the latecomer, who had left the cinema to seek an experience within the bar which aligned more closely with what he envisioned spectating TI8 *ought to be*. For him, authentic spectatorship centred around the atmospheric communality found at GGEZ, which saw the free movement of patrons and lacked any restrictions on noise. This enabled the formation of *communitas*. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these experiences of *communitas* are often considered sacred or special, wherein “the individual enters a transcending community of camaraderie” (Hopkinson and Pujari, 1999).

In relating the spectatorship of TI8 at GGEZ to *communitas*, the spatiality of the bar itself and its identity as a site of esports spectatorship stands as an important enabler of a “shared communal experience” (Weed, 2006). Researchers of conventional sports have long discussed travel to the “hallowed grounds” of a sport for the sake of both play and spectatorship as a key form of hedonic consumption (Hopkinson and Pujari, 1999). For some, the act of entering such a location is enough to place them in a space beyond their daily life. For example, Cardwell and Ali (2014) describe how the nostalgic value held by Lord’s Cricket Ground in London as “the home of cricket” positions the venue as a site of pilgrimage for some Australian cricket fans.

Although perhaps not as prestigious as spectating TI8 at the site of play, the liminoid experience of spectating TI8 in the GGEZ in the company of other esports fans worked to construct a spectating experience that was beyond mundane. Spectatorship at the bar occurred past the boundaries of normal life. The awkward timing of the event and the small space of the bar, combined with the comparatively large number of patrons, expedited the formation of *communitas*. In doing so, a temporally unusual and physically intimate context was constructed in which the dissolution of social boundaries became almost a physical necessity. Furthermore, the bar’s status as a third place flattened the social hierarchy, uniting the patrons in the moment as *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) fans, and later as having shared the same communal experience of spectating and celebrating OG’s ‘Cinderella story’ win as it happened. As also noted in Chapter 5.5.3, the act of spectating live is another important factor to consider in establishing a sense of exclusivity and detachment from the bounds of society, introducing an element of indeterminacy that is inherently unachievable in subsequent recorded viewings (Vosgerau, Weretenbroch and Carmon, 2006). Overall, such exclusive and unique experiences are valued by esports fans, as the stories and artefacts retrieved from them can be later used to retell the experience of the event to others, accruing cultural and gaming capital (Consalvo, 2009). To patrons, the extraordinary liminoid experiences of spectatorship within the bar became memorable moments to be used when crafting their stories of having authentically spectated TI8.

7.8 Conclusion

To reiterate, Study 3 sought to explore the experiences of esports spectatorship at an esports bar; a public communal site of esports spectatorship. To do so, I engaged in a five-month long ethnography at GGEZ esports bar to gain a firsthand perspective of the experiences of spectatorship in the venue. At GGEZ, patrons valued predominately social characteristics reminiscent of those present at the stadium as authenticators for their spectating experiences. Furthermore, notions of other venues accommodating different experiences of spectatorship became salient, such as the cinema where it was inferred from the latecomer's comments that a different set of authenticators was present. The notions of authenticity found in esports spectatorship experiences at GGEZ were derived from the stadium, harmonising with the findings of Study 1 and Study 2. Faced with the barriers of geography, cost, and time, fans turned to GGEZ as a local and accessible venue to engage in authentic esports spectatorship.

To authenticate their experiences, patrons sought to engage in practices and rituals associated with stadium spectatorship. Seeking to enjoy a shared communal spectating experience with like-minded fans, the collective fandom of *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013) as an esports was pushed to the forefront and flattened the social hierarchy. In a further effort to replicate a sense of being at the stadium, patrons mimicked stadium-situated spectator behaviours portrayed through the mediated broadcast of TI8 within the confines of the bar. In doing so, the original functionalities of these behaviours and rituals were discarded, instead being reappropriated as authenticators by patrons at GGEZ. In doing so, these replicated elements became essential to patron's authentic lived experiences of esports spectatorship in the bar. Set in a context beyond regular time and life, patrons shared an exclusive experience of TI8 that could only exist on that night at GGEZ. In doing so, they transformed the mundane act of watching into authentic spectatorship.

Additionally, Study 3 further demonstrates that videogaming practices exist beyond the bedroom and are not inherently anti-social or solitary. Much like how online activities often support offline practices and hobbies (Rogerson, Gibbs and Smith, 2017), situated spectatorship activities surrounds the virtual practices of esports and play key roles in the reinforcement of fan identities. While everyone watching TI8

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shared the same perspective of its matches, only those at GGEZ partook in the unique experiences of spectatorship constructed in the venue.

Chapter 8 – Discussion

8.1 Introduction

The central objective of this thesis was to develop a nuanced understanding of esports spectatorship experiences. As established in Chapter 3.6, it was crucial to expand the scope of existing esports research by considering how different sites influence experiences of esports spectatorship. To achieve this, three studies were conducted to address the research questions, each exploring experiences of esports spectatorship in the home, the stadium and the public communal place of the esports bar. These three studies have shed light onto the qualities which characterise esports spectating experiences (Overarching RQ), how different sites of spectatorship influence experiences of esports spectatorship (RQ1), how esports spectators construct their experiences of spectatorship (RQ2), and what spectators value in their experiences of spectatorship (RQ3). Despite their differences, a number of common themes were generated across the studies which reflect on esports spectatorship as a whole. Thus, this chapter brings together findings of Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3 to engage in a synthesised discussion comparing the similarities and differences between the three studied sites of spectatorship. In particular, this chapter will bring perceptions of authenticity in esports spectatorship to the forefront, exploring how spectators worked to stage and affirm aspects of authenticity in their constructed spectating experiences. Such discourse is pertinent to understanding esports spectatorship, as I will argue Section 8.5 that its supposed placelessness casts doubt on whether authenticity can truly exist in esports. Four central concepts which were generated across findings will be discussed: *staging*, *laborious spectatorship*, *authenticity*, and *sameness*.

The order of ideas in this chapter presents a narrative of the findings. Section 8.2 begins this account by discussing the *staging* of esports spectator experiences across participants' homes, the two stadium-situated Sydney esports events, and GGEZ esports bar. At each of these sites, esports spectators worked to compose their surrounding environments in concerted efforts to stage for specific experiences of spectatorship. In exploring how the staging of spectatorship in these sites influenced the experiences of esports spectatorship they facilitated, it was found that the home was the most restrictive of the three sites, with a wide range household compromises

restricting spectators' autonomy to construct valued qualities into their experiences of spectatorship. Conversely, GGEZ esports bar was in many ways more homely than the home by virtue of its status as a "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989) of esports spectatorship. Offering a less restrictive set of compromises than that of the home, patrons at GGEZ held a greater level of authority over the staging of valued qualities in their experiences of esports spectatorship. In particular, the social characteristics of the bar and its flat social hierarchy allowed patrons to replicate aspects of being at the site-of-play in the stadium, working to authenticate their remote experiences of spectatorship. While spectators worked to stage their own experiences of esports spectatorship at the home and at GGEZ, spectators were themselves the subjects of staging at IEM and OWC Sydney. Treated as props by the events' stage mechanists, the visual presence of the audiences at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were manipulated to present the stadium-situated events as authentic spectacles to those spectating remotely. In doing so, the experiences of remote audiences and those in the stadia had to be considered and balanced by the event organisers. However, spectators at the two events were aware of their status as props and worked to not only construct an authentic experience of esports spectatorship for themselves, but endeavoured to present themselves as authentic esports spectators in the mediated broadcasts of the two Sydney esports events.

Section 8.3 expands on motivations behind the staging of spectator experiences, revealing how spectators' staging endeavours often constituted a form of spectatorship that was no longer engaged in purely for leisure, becoming *laborious*. Across instances of *laborious spectatorship* in the three studies, the work of spectating esports satisfied desires beyond simply watching. Stadium-situated spectators' efforts to portray themselves authentically was one instance of laborious spectatorship. Portraying themselves as ideal, enthusiastic, and patriotic spectators, those at the stadium worked to establish Australia as a destination worthy of future major esports events. Similarly, some participants in the home worked to stage their spectatorship in a way that would leave a positive impression on their non-fan cohabitants, endeavouring to establish esports as legitimate and professional to those outside of the esports community. Conversely, esports enthusiasts at GGEZ sought to initiate new spectators into the esports fandom, working through their spectatorship to bridge gaps in novice spectators' gaming literacy. In doing so, the

enthusiasts endeavoured to construct an experience of what they perceived an authentic experience of esports spectatorship ought to be for their novice spectators.

The concept of *authenticity* will be returned to in Section 8.4. In particular, discussion will centre around the stadium as an authentic site of esports spectatorship. Across all three studies, spectators referred to the stadium when conceptualising notions of esports authenticity. Those spectating in their homes or at GGEZ worked to recreate aspects of being in the stadium to authenticate their remote spectatorship in lieu of being at the site of play in person, while the expectations of esports authenticity by those attending IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were largely affirmed in their situated experiences of spectatorship. The stadium as source of esports authenticity is an interesting concept, as it is not a native site of esports spectatorship. Rather, esports events have only recently been consistently held in stadia as a result of the broad sportification of esports. Although this sportification is largely the work of esports organisations and tournaments organisers, it is spectators who hold the authority to affirm this sportified notion of authentic esports. Through their laborious spectatorship, esports spectators work to portray and emphasise broadly accepted notions of professionalisation and legitimacy reflective of those in conventional sports, particularly to individuals new to esports and laypeople outside of the esports fandom. In doing so, spectators establish a convention of esports authenticity. While authenticity was a valued quality in experiences of esports spectatorship across the three studies, it is nevertheless important to express that some instances of esports spectatorship were not constructed or engaged in with authenticity in mind.

Section 8.5 concludes the chapter with a discussion concerning esports' status in a landscape of *sameness*. The findings of the research presented in this thesis will be contrasted with the pessimistic predictions of future sports presented by Bale (1998) and Virilio (1992). In their writings, both authors ponder the future of sport, presenting an entirely virtual and representational iteration lacking the varied spectator perspectives that normally affords sports spectatorship a dimension of authenticity. In doing so, Bale and Virilio inadvertently envisioned a sporting future that uncannily resembles contemporary esports. The findings presented in this thesis contests a notion extrapolated from Bale and Virilio's writings that the supposed placelessness of esports voids its spectatorship of authenticity. While a

virtual and computerised practice that relies on no specific site to be played or spectated in, esports spectatorship and play nevertheless occurs in situated places. In constructing experiences of spectatorship, particularly those with authenticating elements, spectators employ their place-making qualities to establish a sense of esportsing place in sites of spectatorship. While particularly multi-sited in comparison to conventional sports, esports fans work to transform these varied sites into esports places through their spectatorship and efforts to authenticate.

8.2 Staging the experience of esports spectatorship

The first major theme that was generated across the three studies relates to how experiences of esports spectatorship were staged. The sites of the home, the stadium, and the esports bar were consciously composed to construct idealised experiences of esports spectatorship. Notably, efforts to stage experiences of esports spectatorship were largely driven by spectators themselves. Working with not only physical elements of their surroundings, but also non-corporal factors such as scheduling and software, spectators staged the three sites to construct valued qualities into their spectating experiences. While staging took place across all three sites of spectatorship, the ways staging manifested were largely unique to each site. For this reason, the discussion in this section will progress systematically through one site of spectatorship at a time, with the concepts arising from each being brought together and synthesised in later sections pertaining to authenticity (Section 8.4) and esports' status in a landscape of sameness (Section 8.5).

Staging is an integral aspect to most forms of entertainment spectacle. As discussed in Chapter 2, staging is central in conventional sports spectatorship and tourism, working to create experiences catered to the desires of a target audience. Unsurprisingly, the spectator experiences of esports across the three studies were also often highly composed and staged. This is reflected in existing esports literature, which demonstrates how esports events are organised in consideration of audiences and their demands (Seo, 2013). The findings generated across the three studies in this thesis all supported this observation. While the staging of esports is in part influenced by the work of event organisers, this section will shed light on how spectators contributed to the staging of their esports spectating experiences.

Although expectations point towards the spectator having the greatest amount of autonomy to stage in their place of residence, the findings of Study 1 show that domestic spectatorship was often limited by various sources of compromise. This contrasted Study 3's findings of GGEZ esports bar, which acted as flexible and accommodating foundation for spectators to stage spectator experiences on, despite being a public place shared with strangers. With the bar's patrons looking to representations of stadia in esports broadcasts to shape their remote spectatorship at GGEZ, esports fans in the stadium itself functioned both as spectators and as props in the construction of these mediated broadcasts. Spectators at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney 2017 were aware of this duality and had to balance both of these identities in the staging of their spectator experiences.

8.2.1 Staging the home: compromise

The home is thought of in recent academic literature as the most accessible and therefore typical site to spectate esports. Although this is rarely explicitly said (see van Ditmarsch, 2013; Gibbs, Carter and Witkowski, 2017), the spectatorship often indirectly framed in academic research as an activity that takes place in domestic environments on private screens via online livestreaming platforms. For example, Rambusch, Taylor and Susi's (2017) "A pre-study on spectatorship in eSports" stands as a good illustration this assumption. They present a study designed to identify factors that constitute experiences of esports spectatorship and the possible implications such factors have for game design, conducting observations of participants' esports spectatorship in a synthetic "home-like environment." No rationale is given to the choice of this setting, being presented as the *status quo* site where esports is spectated. The choice to create a synthetic environment to replicate a domestic spectating environment in this study demonstrates that the home is not seen as an incidental site of spectatorship, but rather as the site indicative of esports spectatorship. Such assumptions are unsurprising when considering the sheer number of online spectators that major esports events garner as described in Chapter 3. A major characteristic of esports that plays into the assumption of its domestic nativity is its perceived placelessness as a largely virtual practice, being tied to no inherent site for play or spectatorship.

The interconnectivity offered by communication technologies and widespread adoption of the internet has long been seen as the herald of a promised age of work,

play, and society where daily activities can be conducted from the comfort of one's home, eliminating barriers of geography and temporality that once constrained our lives. From as early as the 1980's, post-Fordist excitement surrounding the emergence of teleworking (Wellman et al., 1996) presented a future where the home becomes the ultimate site of labour and leisure, offering workers unparalleled autonomy and flexibility over how and when they engage in their duties (Haddon and Lewis, 1994). The characterisation of esports by its computerised and networked practices similarly presents the home as the ideal site of spectatorship, granting the spectator a great degree of autonomy over the staging of their spectator experiences. This is particularly apparent when contrasting the home to the stadium and public communal places, where factors beyond of the control of the spectator, such as the staging efforts of venues' organisers and the actions of other co-present spectators, can obstruct the act of watching.

These assumptions position the domestic spectator as having near complete autonomy over the staging of their spectatorship experiences, save for perhaps the architectural design of the dwelling. As found in Study 1, respondents often chose and composed their domestic spectating spaces to create an ideal spectating experience. For some, this manifested in the clearing of all distractions and the preparation of comforts to ensure they could have a fully immersive and uninterrupted experience of spectatorship. Others set up intricate multi-monitor configurations in their home office so they could perform menial administrative tasks when working from home while passively spectating esports in their peripheral vision. Domestic spectators worked to stage a great variety of spectator experiences in their homes to suit their desires and contexts. Although diverse, it was evident that these efforts to stage domestic spaces for esports spectatorship were underscored by sense of compromise, defying the supposed autonomy granted by the home as the typical site of esports spectatorship.

Much like how contemporary studies into teleworking uncovered tensions that emerged when structuring work activities around the lives of household cohabitants (Fonner and Stache, 2012), domestic esports spectators in Study 1 also commonly had to make compromises when staging their spectator experiences around other people living in their homes. Interviewed participants were often the sole esports spectator in their home. In cases where there were other esports fans, they were

often closely aged siblings. Commonly, it was one or two other older non-fan parental authority figures with whom compromise was needed to be made. The dominance of this household dynamic in the sample reflects that the majority of participants were between 18 and 28 years old, with half still living with their parents. Respondents would often choose to watch esports where their parents were not; if the living room was occupied, spectatorship would have to be engaged in a private bedroom. Interestingly, this compromise was not something ever discussed between the two parties. Rather, parents and their esports spectating offspring had an unspoken agreement that the spectatorship of esports would be given secondary priority to the media spectating activities of others in the household. Participants often felt that their parents perceived esports as a trivial and childish activity, seeing esports spectatorship as undistinguished simple videogame play. However, as will be discussed in detail in Section 8.3.2, some spectators made attempts change their parents' attitudes towards esports through their spectating habits. To do so, they performed laborious spectatorship to stage esports as a professional activity distinct from leisurely, hobbyist videogaming.

Those living alone had the most autonomy over the staging of their domestic esports spectating experiences. Nevertheless, the need to compromise was still apparent. Participants commonly had to work around technological constraints in the staging of their spectatorship. For example, Participant 11 described how she had to shift from spectating live esports on Twitch to YouTube Live due to buffering and connectivity issues with the former. Although a non-corporeal element of esports spectatorship, the choice of streaming platform represents an important staging decision when accounting for the potential influences it has over the experience of spectating esports. In the case of Participant 11, YouTube Live lacked the more robust social and technical qualities of Twitch that she valued in her spectating experiences. Nevertheless, she had to make this compromise to watch esports without interruption, sacrificing valued social qualities for the ability to spectate without interrupted playback.

Other non-corporeal elements presented themselves as compromising factors in the staging of domestic esports spectating experiences. The time of day proved to be major factor of compromise across participants. With most major international esports events taking place in the northern hemisphere, Study 1's participants (who

all lived in Australia) had to decide if they would stay up into the early hours of the morning to watch such events live. Although almost every respondent valued the sense of uncertainty associated with watching an esports event as it happens, they were left to decide whether they would compromise their schedules or compromise their overall spectating experience in order to do so. Some went to great lengths to reschedule their work, study, and other commitments around their spectatorship habits to ensure they could watch certain esports events live. Others simply conceded that such staging would be too disruptive and instead chose to watch recordings of esports events at more convenient times, positioning temporality as a necessary factor to stage around and thus inevitably creating a sense of geographical place.

Although intangible, the construct of geographical time zones made Australian esports spectators in particular painfully aware of their geographical location. Live esports spectatorship is a more disruptive activity for Australian esports spectators than their northern hemisphere counterparts. Weed (2008) makes similar observations in relation to geography and temporality in his ethnography of soccer spectatorship of the 2002 FIFA World Cup in British pubs, noting how the temporal impact of hosting the championship in Japan and South Korea lead to the restructuring of many British lives and public services. Pubs opened early to operate as sites of remote public communal spectatorship, while churches rescheduled their Sunday services from the morning to the afternoon. Alternatively, some participants interviewed in Study 1 made efforts to stage a sense of indeterminacy when unable to spectate live. For example, Participant 5 described how besides distancing himself from social media to avoid accidentally seeing the outcome of the event, he would cover the bottom half of his laptop's display so that when loading up the recorded video of the esports match so he could not see the video's timeline, the duration of which could give away the match's outcome.

While it was evident from Study 1's findings that the home was a relatively restrictive site of esports spectatorship, the contrary could be said of the esports bar. Although one may anticipate that a public communal place attended as a visitor would limit opportunities for spectator-driven staging, the findings of Study 3 demonstrated that spectators generally held a greater degree of autonomy over the staging of their spectating experiences than domestic spectators in Study 1. In stark

contrast to the restrictiveness of the home, GGEZ esports bar acted as a prime location for the construction of valued qualities in spectating experiences.

8.2.2 Staging GGEZ: foundation for authentication

The most notable characteristic of GGEZ was the diversity of spectating experiences the venue was host to. From my time spent at the bar during the five-month period of Study 3's ethnographic fieldwork, I observed that on some nights spectatorship was an auxiliary activity engaged with indirectly while patrons socialised with each other. Conversely, on other nights the esports broadcasts in the bar captured the attention of the entire patronship, their gazes fixated on the TVs mounted throughout the bar. Despite this diversity, the physical staging of the bar remained consistent almost every night. The venue was cast in a dim warm light, tables were set up neatly in groups, and TVs mounted across the bar's walls streamed a variety of esports content. As mentioned in Chapter 7, this state of the bar predominantly worked to stage esports spectatorship in the venue as a form of ambiance, auxiliary to other activities.

Experiences of spectating esports in the context of GGEZ underscored and contributed to patrons' other experiences of activities in the bar. However, as was made evident during the night of TI8, the spectatorship of esports was not always an auxiliary experience. When major esports events were being held, the bar was transformed into an authentic place of esports spectatorship. While the bar accommodated for these major events by adjusting their opening hours, the physical space of the bar initially remained the same as it was on typical nights. It was the patrons themselves who would stage the space, using the bar as a foundation on which to build their valued spectating experiences. At their discretion, spectators could modify elements of the bar to suit their desires. If they could not hear the esports broadcast, they could request that the venue's music be turned down and the TVs' volume amplified. If they wanted to watch a certain esports event on the larger centre positioned TV, the bartender was happy to change the channel. If they wanted to reconfigure the seating arrangements for a better view of the TV, no one would stop them.

As asserted in Chapter 7, patrons sought in particular to recreate the stadium spectating experience in the remote location of the bar. While the patrons'

behaviours and mimicry played a major role in this endeavour, it was in this context that the physical space of the bar saw manipulation, acting as another way for patrons to stage their spectating experience. Noticeably, the bar's seating options were arranged for a more communal spectating experience. As I observed the bar becoming increasingly packed with the arrival of more patrons as the night of TI8 progressed. Patrons began pulling up chairs from other areas of the bar to sit in front of the large TV screening the event. It soon became evident that original seating positions of individual tables was unsuitable to spectate the tournament with the amount of people in the bar. Eventually smaller tables were moved to the side of the bar while bar stools and chairs were organised in messy rows akin to podium seating, mirroring seating arrangements of the stadium. Beyond a replicated seating format, other areas of the bar were delegated functions similar to those held by areas in the stadium. For instance, the bar's counter acted as a lobby area where patrons could take a break from spectating and socialise in relative silence and order refreshments, fulfilling a similar purpose to the lobbies of the stadium-situated 2017 IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney events in Study 2.

Although these ethnographic observations found that the space of GGEZ could be readily manipulated by its patrons to stage a range of spectating experiences, they raise questions as to why the bar lent itself so freely to this dynamic. The answer lies in the degree of authority the individual spectator held in relation to those around them. In the home and at the stadium, spectators sat beneath others in their domestic social hierarchies. As mentioned in Section 8.2.1, this took the form of household cohabitants. With half of Study 1's sample consisting of young adults living with their parents, this commonly manifested through parental figures who held the authority over the media viewing activities of the household. In Section 8.2.3 I will explore similar tensions at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney between spectators and the events' organisers, which often created conflicts between the staging objectives of both parties.

In contrast, the social hierarchy at GGEZ was comparatively flat. All present in the bar, whether they were patrons or staff, treated each other as equals. This was particularly salient during the grand final match of TI8, where the bar's staff suspended their duties entirely to join their patrons as spectators to watch OG triumph over LGD. GGEZs role as a third place (Oldenberg, 1989) of esports

spectatorship made it a flexible site for staging experiences of spectatorship. United under a sense of *communitas* enabled by a shared fandom of gaming and esports, those in the bar worked with each other to negotiate and construct valued qualities in their spectator experiences. As mentioned in Chapter 2 and Chapter 7, *communitas* refers to a sense of camaraderie felt among those who share an experience that beyond regular time and life where individuals are united as equals through common interests, flattening the social hierarchy (Celsi et al., 1993). One characteristic of third places that Oldenberg emphasises are their low-profile and homely feel, acting as a “home away from home” (Rosenbaum, 2006). In this way GGEZ represented what esports experience at the home *ought to be* like. While domestic spectators were assumed to have a high degree of authority over the staging of esports spectating experiences, Study 1 demonstrated this to be inaccurate, with various compromising factors identified across participants’ responses. Conversely, GGEZ offered spectators a high degree of autonomy to stage esports spectating experiences by being an accommodating and homely site which lacked many constraints commonly found in the home, notably non-fan cohabitants.

8.2.3 Staging the stadium: balancing audiences

The key characteristic which distinguished the experience of spectatorship at the stadium from the those in the home and GGEZ was the staging for two distinct audiences. While staging at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney was conducted to shape the experiences of spectatorship for those present at the stadium, it was also done so for those spectating remotely through the mediated broadcasts of the events. In doing so, the expectations of both audiences needed to be considered, with optimisations for one audience potentially jeopardising an enjoyable experience for the other. Unlike in the home and at GGEZ, where spectators were the predominant stagers of esports spectatorship experiences, efforts to stage were conducted by both spectators and the events’ organisers at the two Sydney esports events. While both parties worked to achieve different objectives through their staging endeavours, both spectators and the events’ organisers worked to stage IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney as an authentic esports event for remote audiences.

As previously explored in Chapter 3.5 and Chapter 6.8.4, Szablewicz (2016) makes relatable observations from a Chinese esports event where the physical audience was only present in the stadium during the opening and closing ceremonies. In this case,

spectators physically present in the stadium were props in the staging of the broadcast text, constructing an image for remote spectators of a stadium packed with enthusiastic fans. This case of the Chinese esports event detailed by Szablewicz can be considered an extreme case of this strategy, as she mentions that the spectators physically present in the stadium were brought in almost solely for the intention of using them as props with little consideration for their own experiences of spectatorship. Conversely, a more balanced approach was employed at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney. Rather than the use of an artificial crowd to create the façade of an energetic stadium event, organisers of the two Sydney events drew on the genuine reactions, behaviours, and passion of the physically-situated audience. In doing so, fans in attendance of the two Sydney events acted both as spectators and as props in the mediated broadcasts of the events.

Literature regarding conventional sports spectatorship has observed how the presence of audiences at the site of play in mediated broadcasts create what Cummins and Gong (2017) describe as “intra-audience” effects that positively enhance the experience of spectatorship for remote spectators. Similar to the effects of laugh tracks in sitcoms (Bore, 2011), the visual and audible presence of spectators at the site of play punctuate the dramatic elements of a spectacle event (Raney, 2006). Thus, the staging of audiences has become focus of sporting event organisers. As Clarke and Clarke (1982) discuss, the profession of “stage machinist” has emerged around the work of staging audiences to generate an amplified sense of drama and excitement in broadcast sports.

The staging of the two Sydney events reflects these observations detailed across conventional sports spectatorship and broadcast. For example, the restricting of available seating positions and the shepherding of spectators into the centre of the seating areas at the two Sydney events worked to present the events as being full to capacity with enthusiastic fans. While this attractively presented the events to remote spectators, it compromised the stadium-situated spectators’ experience by limiting their ability to sit in optimal locations to view the matches. By making the peripheral seating areas inaccessible, the event organisers simply removed the opportunity for spectators to indirectly create a sense of sparseness, redirecting them to desired and visually pleasing central seating arrangements. Much like at the

home but unlike at GGEZ, figures of greater authority compromised the spectators' freedom to stage their spectating experiences.

However, this did not entirely deter spectators' staging efforts. While spectators are largely presented in academic literature concerning conventional broadcast sports as unaware of their roles as props purposefully composed by stage machinists (see Keene, Berke and Nutting, 2017; Cummins and Gong, 2017, Clarke and Clarke, 1982), spectators at the two Sydney esports events maintained an awareness of their status as props, harnessing the representational power of their visual presence in efforts to stage their experience of spectatorship. The staging endeavours of the spectators presented a contrasting agenda to that of event organisers and their stage machinists. As will be explained in Section 8.3.1, spectators at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney demonstrated awareness of how their prevalent visual presence in the mediated broadcasts would shape how remote spectators would perceive the events. Through their laborious spectatorship, the stadium-situated spectators worked to present to international audiences and stakeholders that Australian esports spectators are authentic enough to deserve future major esports events to be held within their country.

8.3 Beyond leisure to laborious spectatorship

Having examined how experiences of esports spectatorship were constructed through spectators' staging across the home, stadium, and esports bar, I will now turn to how these efforts to stage often constituted a form of labour. In exploring these staging efforts, how spectators performed *laborious spectatorship* will be explored. Currently, the engagement in esports activities, including spectatorship, is predominantly characterised and examined in existing literature through frames of leisure (see Wood et al., 2019; Lee, 2019; Hou, 2019). Even in literature regarding professionalisation and esports careers, the pursuit of esports play is often framed as a form of serious leisure (Seo, 2016; Cunningham et al., 2018; Kauwelo, 2019). There exists a few notable exceptions to this trend. Egliston (2016) works towards developing an understanding of esports and competitive gaming as labour rather than leisure. In *Raising the Stakes*, T.L. Taylor (2012) touches on the notion that high-level esports players have come to treat their professions as a career and partake in non-leisurely, laborious activities to progress within it like any other. Through Smythe's (2006) frame of audience commodity and audience power, Nick

Taylor (2016b) notes how the spectatorship of esports is captured as a type of labour through audiencing techniques to produce value for esports producers. Likewise, in this section I intend to look at esports spectatorship beyond frames of leisure.

While the spectatorship experiences across the three studies were largely leisurely, some instances of spectatorship were not engaged in for leisurely purposes alone. As alluded to previously in Section 8.2.3, attendees at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney laboured through their spectatorship to draw future esports events to Australia. Spectators in the home similarly laboured through their spectatorship and staging portray esports positively to their non-fan cohabitants. Furthermore, enthusiast spectators at GGEZ laboured through their spectatorship to introduce esports novices in hopes they would eventually become engaged with and grow the esports community. Although distinct in their manifestations, these examples of beyond-leisurely spectating experiences were united as instances of *laborious spectatorship*.

The concept of spectators and audiences performing work is not new. Audiences have long been the subject of commodification. In the classic example under Smythe's (1977) audience commodity theory (Fuchs, 2015), the labour of television audiences' ability to "pay attention" is sold to advertisers, producing value for television networks. Here, the activity of content consumption itself is the exploited labour. In a more contemporary example, Situlia (2019) observes how livestreamers on platforms like Twitch encourage their audiences to monetarily invest into their streams through purposefully gamified aspects of spectatorship. In these examples, the value generated by the spectator occurs from situations that arise by engaging in spectatorship. For Situlia, spectators are motivated by sense of achievement and the building of social capital by partaking in and progressing through the gamified elements that surround Twitch streams. For Smythe, spectators inevitably expose themselves to advertisements when watching commercial television. This tried form of audience commodification can even be said to be a major element of the contemporary esports business model. A report produced by market research firm Newzoo (2020) found that roughly 58 per cent of the esports industry's market revenue is derived from sponsorship and advertising deals.

With this in mind, most esports spectatorship could therefore be construed as laborious, with spectators being exposed to sponsors and advertisements. This

perspective reflects the *audience labour* discussed in Smythe's (1977) work; the idea that audience members' attention as spectators is captured and monetised. However, in the instances of beyond-leisurely spectatorship which appeared across the three studies of this thesis, the labour performed by spectators was not derived from the situations they were placed in by partaking in spectatorship. Rather, the act of spectatorship itself was laborious. *Laborious spectatorship goes beyond spontaneous leisure, making concerted efforts to achieve a specific spectating experience.* Often, an underlying aspiration motivates laborious spectatorship. In the home, participants' laborious spectatorship sought to legitimise esports for non-fan household cohabitants. In the stadium, it sought to attract future esports events to Australia. At the bar, it sought to grow the esports community.

These examples of laborious spectatorship were largely conducted as a way to assist esports. Spectators felt a sense of loyalty, almost an obligation or a sense of indebtedness to esports for the entertainment and happiness it had provided them in the past. By engaging in laborious spectatorship, spectators felt that they were 'giving back' to esports and played an active role in its promotion. In this sense, these instances of laborious spectatorship were motivated by a sense of advocacy. This was most explicit at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney in Study 2, where spectators sought to present themselves as authentic spectators through their laborious spectatorship, aspiring to convince event organisers to host future major esports events in Australia.

8.3.1 The stadium: spectating to set precedence

Laborious spectatorship at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney consisted of endeavours to make Australia appear as an attractive location for the hosting of future esports events. The status of the two Sydney events in the context of the Australian esports landscape was central to this laborious spectatorship. Prior to 2017, Australia was considered to lack a substantial or noteworthy national esports scene, particularly in comparison to those overseas. Carter et al.'s (2017) "eSports Futures in Australia" concisely illustrated this local underdevelopment in the context of 2016, describing that:

"Australia currently lacks a dedicated eSports service, channel, or broadcaster providing any real sense of the scope of eSports worldwide. The absence also creates problems for research methodologies as the lack

of organisational structure for eSports in Australia means that there are few, if any, opportunities to identify Australian eSports athletes or to survey Australian eSports audiences. Limited data obtained from publicly available tournaments suggests that there are likely to be hundreds of thousands of Australian spectators for international events. Yet these communities are largely invisible and are currently inadequately serviced by Australian commercial services”

The sudden appearance of IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney signalled a shift away from the Australian esports landscape described by Carter et al. (2017). Not only were these two events major international esports tournaments, but they were also among the first major contemporary esports events to be held in Australia. This granted many Australians a rare opportunity to attend in person an event of comparable calibre to those they would typically spectate remotely online. Likewise for the majority of participants interviewed, these esports events were the first they had attended as a spectator. Although drawing a modest physically present audience in comparison to tournaments held overseas, fans from across Australia travelled to attend these landmark events. With Australian fans yearning for a major international esports presence in Australia, IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney represented something close to a coming of age for the Australian esports scene. The destination of Australia had become notable enough for international esports organisers to deem the country as a suitable location to host a major event, despite the complicated logistics of bringing such an event to a location geographically distant from its predominantly northern hemisphere-based remote audience and the associated time zone difficulties.

While these events had made it to Australia for the first time in 2017, there was no guarantee that events of similar calibre would continue to be held in Australia in subsequent years. Participants felt that IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were pilot events intended to gauge the suitability of Australia as a consistent host of future major esports events. To help ensure this would happen, some participants felt an obligation to attend the two Sydney events as spectators. These participants asserted that by attending these events, they would help constitute a substantial audience that would therefore signal to international esports organisations that a demand for esports existed in Australia, specifically for large stadium-situated esports events.

Specifically, these participants believed that attending the events in person would make a greater impact than contributing to an abstract viewership number if spectating at home via Twitch. Although inherently smaller than both the domestic and international online audience and restricted by the capacity of the venues, the imagery of thousands of fans packed in a stadium passionately partaking in impassioned esports spectatorship created a physically quantifiable visual impact. By doing so, spectators worked to make the “largely invisible” Australian esports community described by Carter et al. (2017) known to the world.

These participants were particularly keen to act out exaggerated expressions of patriotic support to portray Australian esports fans as having zealous appreciation for the events and esports as a whole. As a part of these efforts, spectators were also keen to perform iconic Australian rituals and behaviours often associated with conventional sports to introduce an element of patriotism in their displays of esports support. The iconic Australian sporting chant ‘Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi’ and the performance of the infamous shoey were examples of these patriotic expressions. Such boisterous expressions of national pride are not unique to Australia esports fans, however. The spectatorship activities of esports fans belonging to other nations have also been tied to expressions of national pride.

In particular, research attention has notably been directed towards the nationalism of Chinese esports fans. Much of this research describes how esports came to be a source of national pride among young people in China due to the sporting prowess the nation exerts in terms of professional play and industry. For example, Yu (2018) notes how the triumph of Chinese esports players in international tournaments acts as a strong source of national pride; a reflection of China’s successful push to poise itself at the forefront of “the world’s digital frontier.” On a similar note, Zhao (2019) describes how the expression of Chinese nationalism through esports fandom reflects a sense of “strong self-confidence and pride” aligned with China’s emergent focus on “cyber-nationalist” activities. In the case of China, fandom and expressions of patriotism in esports are conducted as a form of nationalism²⁰, representing a sense of prowess and dominance in the digital playing field of esports and beyond.

²⁰ Although nationalism and patriotism are commonly used as synonyms of each other, they each describe two similar yet distinct concepts. According to Kosterman and Feshbach (1989), patriotism is tied to affective aspects of feelings that one holds in relation to their

The expressions of Australian patriotism at the two Sydney events were also engaged in for nationalistic purposes, albeit in different manners. Patriotic expressions performed by Australian esports fans at the two Sydney events celebrated the fact that a major esports event was being held in Australia, a sign that the country had become a noteworthy esports region. Furthermore, this patriotic support also helped to distinguish Australian fans from those in other countries. Spectators at the two events did not want to be seen as just good fans; they wanted to be the best. To do so, the spectators worked to show that this Australian brand of support and enthusiasm was unique to the country and surpassed other ‘tamer’ countries. In doing so, those at the two Sydney esports events worked to portray Australian esports fans in a nationalistic sense as superior to those of other countries, providing a perceived compelling reason for event organisers to host future major esports events in the country. By labouring to present themselves through their spectatorship as *the best* spectators, fans at the two Sydney esports events aspired to epitomise themselves as the model of authentic esports spectatorship for others to shape themselves after.

These observations at the two Sydney events harmonise with those made in other studies focusing on related topics. Butt and de Widlt (2018) refer to the exact same performance of a shoey at IEM Sydney 2017 in “Beer & Pixels: Embodiment, drinking, and gaming in Australia.” They discuss the intersection of drinking and gaming culture “as an ecology of complex entanglements”, pointing towards performances of “gamer,” Australian nationalism, and Australian drinking culture as interconnected acts of masculinity. Indeed, the demographics of both IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney were dominated by young white men in their late teens or early twenties. In this light, the performance of shoey is a particularly important point to highlight, as it not only conveyed a sense a nationalism to a largely foreign audience, but also an appeal to notions of masculinity deeply entrenched in videogaming, and by extension, esports culture (Nick Taylor, 2018; Voorhees and Orlando, 2018).

It is unable to be ascertained without speaking directly to tournament organisers whether the laborious spectatorship at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney influenced the

country, encompassing attachment to a nation on the basis of love and honour of one’s country. On the other hand, nationalism refers to a sense of national superiority and dominance in relation to other nations.

subsequent arrival of major esports events to Australia noted in Chapter 6.10. Nevertheless, the spectators at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney strongly felt that their performances of dedication, fandom, and nationalism were necessary to ensure that these types of events would return, setting a precedence of Australia as a premier esports host. At the two Sydney events, spectators worked to present themselves as worthy of future esports events they deemed as authentic, legitimate and professional. Alternatively, laborious spectatorship in the home remotely staged esports events with similar qualities, aspiring to improve the perception of esports among non-fans.

8.3.2 The home: spectating to legitimise esports

Study 1's participants believed that their cohabitants, particularly parents, either did not fully understand the concept of esports or felt that it was a trivial and childish pursuit. Based on these perceptions, participants felt that they as esports spectators played an essential role in helping improve the image of esports in mainstream discourses. Specifically, participants believed that the gaming heritage of esports was a main factor contributing to negative perceptions of esports among non-fans. Videogaming practices have long been associated with negative stigmas, being at the centre of numerous moral panics (Bowman, 2015) and commonly attributed with encouraging violent and anti-social behaviours (Przybylski, 2014). More recently, the World Health Organisation's formal classification of a "gaming disorder" (World Health Organization, 2018) reflects poorly upon serious leisure pursuits of esports which sees players dedicate themselves to the mastery of competitive play, often at the expense of other activities (Kauwelo and Winter, 2019). Notions of videogaming as a childish and amateurish activity clash with contemporary esports, a highly professional and composed spectacle where players compete for high stakes prizes and social capital (T.L. Taylor, 2012).

Although participants claimed that the copresence of non-esports fans in the household usually did not impact *when* they would spectate esports, it was evident that the presence of others affected *how* esports was spectated. In an effort to combat these negative stigmas, some domestic spectators laboured to stage their spectatorship experiences ways that would portray esports positively to others in their household. This behaviour diverged from examples of compromise discussed in Section 8.2.1, which saw spectators staging their spectatorship away from

communal areas of the household, such as the living room, to not disturb their cohabitants who held little interest in esports. In contrast, laborious spectatorship in the home endeavoured to stage esports in ways that would be noticed by non-fan cohabitants and perceived by them in a positive manner. In doing so, domestic spectators' laborious spectatorship aspired to improve perceptions of esports among non-fans.

To distance esports from other forms of gaming perceived as amateurish and childish, participants worked to ensure that their cohabitants would come to see esports as a professional activity. For example, Participant 4's choice of spectating room hinged on whether she felt that the esports event she was going to watch had high production values or not. Her rationale was motivated by a desire to only expose her parents to highest quality events so that they would develop a perception of esports as being a highly composed, intricately staged, globally enjoyed phenomenon with vast amounts of funding. In doing so, Participant 4 intended for esports to be portrayed as a legitimate activity and its spectatorship legitimised as an acceptable hobby. If her parents were present in their apartment while a major esports event like The International was occurring, Participant 4 would purposefully choose to spectate in the communal living room on the large, near-unavoidable screen of the TV. Conversely, more amateurish, grassroots events occurring online outside of a stadium were selectively watched in the Participant 4's bedroom to shield her parents from this perceived less prestigious side of esports.

Other participants similarly living in shared housing with family members engaged in comparable behaviours, choosing to spectate on screens in their private domestic spaces to prevent cohabitants from seeing content that could be unflattering to the image of esports. Participant 8 in particular took this approach further than others, working to ensure that his family members would never see him spectate esports. He felt almost all of esports would be perceived as childish due to its associations with videogaming, concluding that his parents would likely never fully understand the concept and appeal of esports. Ultimately, Participant 8 believed it would be best if his parents did not see any esports content at all, which may make them feel vindicated in their preconceived biases.

These instances of laborious spectatorship provide insights into how fans perceive esports. In particular, they draw on conventional notions of professionalism in constructing legitimacy and authenticity in esports. In doing so, esports spectators worked to stage their esports spectatorship in a way that would align with conventional notions of entertainment and sporting legitimacy held by their non-fan cohabitants. Drawing on professionalised and sportified versions of contemporary esports (Heere, 2018), it was through the presence of large crowds, high production values, and intricate event organisation that esports was perceived to be professional and therefore acceptable. Although participants took pride in working to improve the image of esports among non-fans, this laborious spectatorship demonstrates that many of the negative perceptions of esports were acknowledged and internalised by fans. Rather than legitimising esports to non-fans based on its novel videogaming-related virtues, participants engaging in laborious spectatorship worked to portray esports to their cohabitants in ways that aligned with broad, generalised notions of professionalism and legitimacy not unique to esports.

In essence, laborious spectatorship in the home made esports appear less game-like to non-fans, thus distancing the practice from stigmas associated with videogaming. These findings align with those of Whallen's (2013) work on the lived experiences of professional esports players. He notes that despite their successes and achievements, esports professionals still express a sense of shame over the amount of time they dedicate to the play of videogames. Even among those who play videogames at the highest level as a career, esports and videogaming is still perceived as detractive from other, more productive endeavours. Fitzgerald (2016) asserts that such internalised stigmas among gamers manifests from "neoliberal, moral discourse of productivity." She argues that the shame of gaming is not intrinsic, but rather, stems from a lack of understanding among non-gaming communities of the motivating factors of gaming activities. What could be seen across instances of laborious spectatorship in Study 1 were aspirations to improve the perception of esports among non-fans by emphasising its non-gaming characteristics. While domestic laborious spectatorship only sought to legitimise esports for their non-fan cohabitants, instances at GGEZ actively sought to grow the esports fandom.

8.3.3 The bar: spectating to initiate novices

Domestic spectators sought not to create new esports fans, but to disassociate for non-fans esports from the stigmas associated with videogaming activities. In contrast, laborious spectatorship at the bar was engaged in to actively draw in those with an existing interest and understanding of gaming into the esports fandom and community. Enthusiast spectators' laborious spectatorship at GGEZ did not need to stage a spectating experience that aligned with conventional motivating factors of engagement, for both they and the novices they were sought to enculturate held an underlying understanding of why videogaming activities are engaged in (Fitzgerald, 2016). Instead, laborious spectatorship focused on promoting more nuanced elements of esports spectacle, working to bridge the gaps in novice spectators' understanding of specific esports titles to encourage future spectatorship, thus aspiring to grow the esports community.

After observing these groups across multiple nights at the bar, it became evident that the enthusiast spectators were not attending the bar and spectating esports for their own sake, but rather for the sake of the less esports-savvy members of their friend group. As illustrated in Chapter 7.7.3, groups of friends that attended GGEZ together usually shared a common composition of 1-2 enthusiast spectators and 2-4 novices who held an elementary interest in esports as part of broader videogaming culture. The enthusiast spectators worked as experts of esportsing knowledge to ensure that their novice friends experienced esports in a meaningful and enjoyable way, working to fill gaps in their gaming literacy. These observations at GGEZ reflect those made in prior work regarding how people enter the esports fandom. As T.L. Taylor (2012) describes, "people generally do not come into the [esports] scene expecting to be fans or spectators but typically first think of themselves as players and then, after some exposure to videos on demand, websites, or podcasts come to transform their own object of leisure into one that is simultaneously about fandom." Whereas T.L. Taylor describes exposure to digital forms of esports content as entry points to esports fandom, Study 3 found that situated practices salient at GGEZ offer alternative ways for people to be introduced to esports fandom and practices of spectatorship which surround it.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 and Chapter 7.7.3, Hilvoorde and Pot (2016) assert that a substantial amount of title-specific gaming literacy is required to recognise

skilfulness in esports. This harmonises with concepts found from conventional sports spectatorship literature which conceives the spectator as “an interpreter of what he or she sees” (Arnold, 1985). Without an adequate base understanding of the sport that is being watched, the spectator is unable to interpret the happenings of the spectacle. However, in the context of esports this level literacy needed to partake in meaningful spectatorship is greater than that of conventional sports. Arnold further elaborates that spectators’ enjoyment of an athletic spectacle lies in their capacity to appreciate what is being observed. Hilvoorde and Pot argue that skilful performances of esports professionals do not clearly translate to embodied actions, becoming unintuitive to understand for those who do not already have lived experiences of playing videogames. Similarly, Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) describe how certain aspects of skilfulness in esports spectacle can be hard to appreciate, even for experienced spectators. In particular, they claim that esports lacks an analogue to the appreciation of aesthetics found in conventional sporting performances, drawing on figure skating, synchronised swimming, and gymnastics as extreme examples of how skills in conventional sports often manifest in the embodied visual beauty of athletic performances.

Researchers in the field of human-computer interaction have expressed interest in addressing the difficulties of comprehending skill in esports spectacle. For example, Charleer et al. (2018) developed a dynamic spectating dashboard that visualises key statistics and performance indicators of esports matches in the form of charts, graphs, and heatmaps to make a greater wealth of information more apparent to the spectator. Similarly, Kokkinakis et al. (2020) developed a smartphone app to aid esports spectatorship by visualising in real-time statistics and key performance indicators. These practical solutions work in a similar manner to esports commentary, which guides the spectator through the process of how to “read” the spectacle (Ford, 2017) by directing their focus to key points of action and providing illuminating information (Byrö, 2017; Olshefski, 2015). In essence, commentary and these prototype visualisation tools offload some of the work that the spectator needs to do in order to read an esports match, lowering the level of gaming literacy required to interpret a meaningful understanding of its spectacle. As found from observations at GGEZ, this offloading and literacy filling was the work that constituted enthusiast spectators’ laborious spectatorship. With the professional commentary of the esports

streams often muffled by the noise of the bar, the enthusiast spectators provided an essential self-produced commentary track that drew the novice's attention to key points of play and provided explanations of why certain events were important.

Furthermore, the self-produced commentary could be catered to the level of literacy of the novices, placing emphasis the more fundamental aspects of an esports's core mechanics when needed. This proved to be one of the key aspects of spectating TI8 at GGEZ that helped me read the matches. Although the professional commentary track was audible during the night of TI8 in GGEZ, the group that had adopted me as their novice provided a self-produced explanatory commentary which helped me understand the fundamental mechanics of *Dota 2* (Valve Software, 2013). In doing so, their laborious spectatorship assisted me in constructing a meaningful experience of spectating TI8. The commentary produced by the group also provided me with the background knowledge needed to understand the underlying lore and stakes of the tournament. As discussed in Chapter 7, the status of ana as a local Melbournian and OG's underdog narrative were reasons that motivated many patrons in the bar to support OG going into the finals. This information was communicated to less knowledgeable spectators, giving them a compelling reason to support OG based on a sense of local pride.

It was evident from the time spent at GGEZ that many become involved in esports thanks to the interests and efforts of their friends. Observations at the bar found that esports enthusiast acted as recruiters of new esports fans through their laborious spectatorship. In doing so, they aspired to grow the esports community by guiding novices through the intricacies of spectating esports. While enthusiast spectators helped novices in experiencing meaningful esports spectatorship, it was not immediately obvious why the bar acted as a venue to do so. Groups of spectators could have easily convened at one of their friend's home to perform this laborious spectatorship. Yet, this sort of domestic esports spectatorship did not appear in the findings of Study 1. The answer lies in the social atmosphere of GGEZ and its status as a third place (Oldenburg, 1989).

GGEZ esports bar was the most social site of spectatorship studied in the research course of this thesis. The bar enabled the formation of new relationships between strangers, acting as a liminoid place of *communitas*. The flexibility of the bar

positioned GGEZ as a prime location to perform laborious spectatorship with the aspiration of growing the esports community. The bar was an inherently social space, and although a space for esports spectatorship, other activities took place within the venue. Typically, the bar was filled with numerous patrons not actively watching any esports, simply enjoying the atmosphere of the bar with their friends. Others were drawn to novelty of the bar itself and its gaming-themed drinks list, without an explicit interest in esports. GGEZ was a place where novices could be exposed to esports, but not feel pressured to spectate it. This made it an attractive venue to introduce someone to esports spectatorship.

Enthusiasts were aware of this dynamic and coerced spectatorship subtly. Background information and esports narratives were discussed casually in passing conversation, with the enthusiasts careful to maintain a sense of balance between esports discussion and other topics. While the rest of the group conversed as normal, enthusiasts kept an eye on the matches, alerting and directing the others' attention to the TV during key moments. In this way enthusiasts punctuated the action much like commentators do (Raney, 2006), but rather than filling in uneventful periods with analysis and speculation they worked to curate the experience of spectatorship for their novices. By only alerting the novices to the most impactful points of the match, the novice spectators received a curated experience of only the most exciting and memorable moments. This was similar to the selective portrayals of esports in domestic laborious spectatorship as discussed Section 8.3.1, with both centred around constructing a positive perspective of esports. While this was achieved in domestic instances through the presentation of esports as a professional and legitimate practice, enthusiasts at the bar worked to create an exciting and memorable spectating experience that did not need the novices' full attention to enjoy. Important to note is that through this curation, novice spectators partook in a mediated experience of spectatorship which reflected what their enthusiast friends thought spectating esports *ought to be*. In doing so, the enthusiasts communicated and affirmed a sense of esports authenticity, passing on these notions to novices entering the fandom.

8.4 Authenticity in esports

The participants' staging efforts and their laborious spectatorship each have strong implications in the discussion of esports authenticity. They relate to constructs of

how the experience of esports spectatorship *ought to be*. Thus, they reflect interpretations of how both spectators and event organisers envision and construct an authentic esports spectating experience, and whether others perceive the same experience as authentic or not. I return to the constructivist approach to authenticity (Bruner, 1994) established in Chapter 2 in affirming the importance of perceived authenticity in experiences of esports spectatorship. To do so, the following paragraphs will explore how authenticity in esports was interpreted, staged, and constructed across the three studied sites of spectatorship. As discussed in Chapter 2, staged or fabricated authenticity refers to how experiences are constructed to appeal to individuals' subjective perceptions of authenticity (MacCannell, 1973). Although MacCannell conceived staged authenticity from an objectivist perspective and explored the concept to demonstrate how tourists were often tricked into partaking in fabricated experiences under the guise of genuineness, this section will delve into constructs of esports authenticity as subjectively staged by spectators. Perceptions of esports authenticity were varied and differed across the sites of spectatorship studied in this thesis. Despite these variations, spectators consistently referred to the stadium in their constructs of esports authenticity.

Section 8.4.1 will lead with an investigation of the stadium as an esportsing place, exploring how stadia have been constructed as authentic sites of esports play and spectatorship despite being a relatively recent addition to the esports landscape. Section 8.4.2 will then transition to an analysis of who has the authority to authenticate esports, revealing those who holds the power to affirm notions of authenticity in contemporary esports. Section 8.4.3 will then conclude with an overview of instances across the three studies where esports spectatorship was not driven by the pursuit of authenticity.

8.4.1 The stadium as the source for esports authenticity

The stadium was often considered an authentic site of esports spectatorship by spectators across all three studies. It became evident that spectators broadly perceived the stadium as an 'original', seeing the site as the source of esports spectacle. As explained in Chapter 2, the sense of genuineness that is derived from experiencing an original is one way that authenticity can be derived, particularly from an objectivist perspective (Wang, 1999). Besides fans seeking an authentic spectating experience by attending stadium events like IEM Sydney and OWC

Sydney, those spectating remotely sought to partake in an authentic spectating experience by referring to the stadium as an authentic original. Those spectating from home and at GGEZ replicated elements indicative of the stadium spectating experience, drawing on their portrayals in mediated broadcasts of esports events to authenticate their remote spectatorship. The esports bar offered an ideal site to recreate these stadium-indicative social qualities and rituals that patrons valued as authentic to esports spectatorship. Likewise, those spectating from home worked to authenticate their spectatorship by evoking elements deemed characteristic of the stadium spectating experience, inviting friends into their home to construct crowd-like social qualities or wearing team apparel despite the absence of anyone to witness them doing so.

While it was certain that spectators perceived the stadium an authentic site of esports spectatorship, questions remain as to *why* the stadium was perceived as such. Although the stadium is a native site of play for a variety of conventional sports, it is not in the context of esports. Based on the writings of T.L. Taylor (2012) as discussed in Chapter 3, native sites of esports play and spectatorship trace back to the arcades of the 1980s, then later in internet cafes and internet-networked domestic homes of players. Only recently have esports events been held consistently in stadia and similar sites like convention centres, a shift that has not been linked the technological advances which saw competitive gaming and esports transition from arcades through to online networked play. The stadium not only stands as a relatively new site of esports play and spectatorship, but also affords different attitudes to the staging and organisation of esports events. As Nick Taylor (2016b) notes in his comparison of the 2008 and 2012 Major League Gaming events, engagement at contemporary esports events has become increasingly passive in comparison to previous iterations. He notes a shift from a participatory form of engagement, which saw attendees as both spectators and players, to a more passive form of engagement with a clear demarcation between spectator and player. This shift is particularly interesting, as it presents as case which contrasts writings of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) that describe a transition from passive to participatory forms of media engagement. Esports offers a rare example of where the opposite has happened.

Taken together, the findings generated across the three studies indicate a transition towards the stadium as the dominant place of professional esports play. Its perception as an authentic sporting place relates to the sportification that esports has recently been subjected to. As mentioned in Chapter 3, esports has been noted in academic literature as a prime example of sportification, having become shaped and moulded to resemble conventional sports on an aesthetic, operational, and organisational level. While this grants contemporary esports an appearance reminiscent of conventional sports, it also attaches connotations of conventional sports to esports. As Lopez-Gonzalez and Griffiths (2018) explain, the primary motivation to sportify is to harness broadly accepted positive qualities of conventional sports to make a non-sporting activity more attractive to existing and prospective audiences. In this sense, sportification works to legitimise non-sporting activities like esports, while also performing boundary work at the line demarcating sports from non-sports (Gieryn, 1983; Carter, Gibbs and Arnold, 2015) as discussed in Chapter 3.4.2.

The professionalisation of esports has occurred through the frame of sportification. Contemporary esports has been modelled after professionalised conventional sports, mirroring its franchising models, merchandising, sponsorships, spectator rituals, competition, monetary rewards, and staging within stadium facilities. The stadium is of great symbolic importance to conventional sports. Stadia are not just sites of conventional sports competition and spectacle, but monuments of sports worship. Trumpbour (2006) describes contemporary stadia as “the new cathedrals,” replacing ancient religious buildings as the most dominant man-made structure in cities throughout the world. Besides being among the most visible structures of a city, Trumpbour also asserts that they are also the most identifiable. He claims that most New Yorkers would more likely be able to recognise Yankee Stadium than St. Patrick’s Cathedral. This status of stadia as structural and cultural landmarks is testament to their symbolic importance, existing as a physical manifestation of the value placed on sports as a pastime.

The hosting of esports tournaments in stadia harnesses the symbolic connotations of the structure and projects them onto esports. By simply taking place within a stadium, esports play and spectatorship take on a sense of professionalisation, legitimisation, and prestige. This perspective was reflected in spectators at IEM

Sydney and OWC Sydney whose laborious spectatorship aspired to draw future major esports events to Australia. Spectators specifically desired not minor events, but major spectacles situated in stadia and convention centres, to return to Australia in coming years. For these spectators, stadium-situated events represented the epitome of esports professionalism, becoming significant enough to warrant the use of these near-sacred venues. In this endeavour, spectators engaged in performative rituals to not only authenticate the experience of spectatorship for themselves, but to authenticate themselves as authentic esports spectators to esports organisers and international audiences. These performative rituals were not unique to esports, but were rather rituals originating from conventional sports fandom and expressions of patriotism. The wave, the chanting of “Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi” and the performance of shoeys have long been enacted by Australian sports spectators at both local and international sporting events (Law and MacKenzie, 2016 ;McKay, 2018). Much like the stadia that they are known to be performed in, these rituals are indicative of an authentic sports spectating experience in Australia.

Likewise, domestic spectators labouring to present esports as a professional and legitimate to their cohabitants almost exclusively exposed them to only major, stadium-situated esports for similar reasons. By presenting esports being played in the culturally significant venue of the stadium, these domestic spectators hoped that their cohabitants would come to accept esports spectatorship as an acceptable activity based on their existing perceptions of conventional sports spectatorship in stadia. Alternatively, those at GGEZ sought out the bar to watch major esports events, as the venue offered them the opportunities and resources required to replicate qualities of the stadium they valued as authentic in esports spectatorship. The co-spectatorship with likeminded fans generated a sense of liminality and communitas comparable to that of the stadium, while the space of the bar allowed patrons to enact certain authenticating rituals that would be difficult to perform in a domestic environment.

8.4.2 Shifts in the authority to authenticate esports

The positioning of stadia as sources of esports authenticity did not occur unprovoked, but was rather an outcome of esports’ broader sportification. This raises questions as to how this occurred and who hold the authority to authenticate esports in such a manner. As discussed in Chapter 2, the last of Bruner’s (1994) four meanings of

authenticity concerns the authority to authenticate, rather than originality or genuineness. In essence, this interpretation of authenticity is simply derived from the power held by entities to deem something as authentic. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into the organisational politics behind contemporary esports to reveal who exactly holds the authority to authenticate esports, the findings of the three studies of this thesis indicate that no single entity defines what is authentic in esports. While the assertion of the stadium as an authentic esportsing site is an act that can seemingly only be achieved by an entity of substantial organisational power and resources, spectators are the group of individuals who affirm such constructs. As esports became increasingly commercialised and professionalised (van Ditmarsch, 2013), formalised sports-like esports spectacles began to outshine the largely local, grassroots-driven endeavours of competitive gaming communities. This has been signalled by changes in the mode of consumption of esports events, having largely shifted from participatory to passive (Nick Taylor, 2016b). It is through this commercialisation and shift away from grassroots endeavours that some like Chao (2017) and Steinkuehler (2020) assert that esports events have come to be broadly legitimised.

Bruner (1994) asserts that while there may be a dominant entity that holds authority to authenticate, producers of experiences are not a homogeneous group. Rather, they consist of numerous competing voices seeking the authority to authenticate. In the context of esports spectatorship, it is important to consider that esports spectators are producers of esports experiences, even if the dominant mode of esports consumption has shifted from participatory to passive. Across the home, stadium and esports bar, laborious spectatorship worked to construct experiences that aligned with what spectators believed authentic esports spectating experience *ought to be*. On one hand, the event organisers can be seen as holding the authority to authenticate esports, audiencing spectators at the stadium to construct notions of what esports authenticity should look like to remote audiences. While spectators across Study 1 and Study 3 mirrored the sportified versions of esports promoted at the carefully constructed events they spectated, there still exist alternative interpretations of authenticity among esports fans.

On the other, it was up to the esports spectators themselves to affirm such portrayals of esports as authentic and communicate these notions to others. In this way, esports

spectators' ability to affirm grants them authority to authenticate esports. For example, enthusiast fans at GGEZ labouring to initiate novices into the esports community worked to curate esports content in a manner that would create an authentic esports spectating experience for their less esports-savvy friends. By virtue of their curations, the enthusiasts viewed novices as not having the gaming literacy necessary to partake in an engaging and authentic spectating experience. For the enthusiasts, valued elements of an authentic esports spectating experience were based around the recognition and awe of spectacular professional play and the associated tensions between climaxes of action. While the enthusiasts held the gaming literacy to be able to have such an experience, they worked to create a curated version of the match that would allow novices to experience esports spectatorship in this way without such requisite gaming literacy. In this sense, the enthusiasts held authority to authenticate esports for their novice friends. Likewise, domestic spectators labouring to present esports as a professional and legitimate held the authority to authenticate for their non-fan cohabitants. In doing so, esports spectators exercise authority to authenticate esports, affirming a convention of esports authenticity among themselves, as well as those unfamiliar to esports.

8.4.3 Beyond pursuits of authentic spectatorship

Although much of this discussion in this chapter concerned authentic esports spectatorship, it is important to note that authenticity was not valued by every spectator. This was mostly seen in the home, where spectatorship often occurred as a secondary activity engaged in conjunction with a primary activity like cooking, housework, studying, or gaming. In these instances, esports spectatorship was engaged in to augment other activities. For chores, this auxiliary spectatorship masked the monotony of such mundane domestic activities. Other participants noted that spectating esports while playing videogames would help them get the right mood for gaming. Interestingly, participants typically spectated replays or inconsequential matches when partaking in auxiliary spectatorship, setting aside notable major events to construct an authentic spectating experience around. In this way, spectators further defined what sorts of esports spectacles are authentic or not.

Others partook in esports spectatorship as a strictly educational experience, focusing on learning techniques and skills from the high calibre play of esports professionals. Those engaging in spectatorship for education treated recordings of the match as a

tool, rather than as a form of entertainment, transitioning back and forth throughout the recordings to observe strategies to employ in their own personal play. Others partook in esports spectatorship for social reasons. Although sociality and *communitas* were essential qualities valued by spectators in the construction of authentic esports spectatorship across the three studied sites, some spectators engaged in esports spectatorship primarily for social reasons. At IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney, some spectators stated that the esports events acted as an excuse to meet online gaming friends in person, with one case involving interstate travel. At the bar and in the home, the proposition of communal esports spectatorship motivated the gathering of friends. Although the intention was to watch esports in these scenarios, socialisation was often the dominant activity, with esports acting in the background as an auxiliary source of atmosphere.

8.5 Esports in a landscape of sameness

In “Virtual Fandoms – Futurescapes of Football”, the chapter in *Fanatics! Power, Identity and Fandom in Football* (ed. Brown, 1998) from which I drew inspiration to structure the three studies featured in this thesis around three sites of spectatorship, Bale (1998) discusses placelessness in relation to conventional sports, particularly soccer. He proposes “that the football landscape ought to be one of placelessness.” He bases this assertion on the tenets of fair play and achievement that are central to soccer and other modern, professional conventional sports. To be able to recognise achievements in sports, records must be fairly comparable to each other. Several variables may make records incomparable on the basis of unfair advantage; the pitch of a field may have a slight incline that would favour a particular side, for example. Following this logic, sports should therefore strive towards eliminating place as a variable which may influence sporting performance, working to achieve placelessness through sameness across sites of play. Efforts have been made to standardise sites of sports play for records to be more readily comparable, working to create a consistent playing field across all sites of play. It is on this basis that Bale asserts that professional sports are moving towards a sports *landscape of sameness*. Although progress towards this landscape would help shape modern conventional sports into the image of its core ideological tenets, Bale expresses concern over the implications of achieving sporting placelessness. In particular, he fears that a sport

landscape of sameness will strip sports of its authenticity based on profound effects it will have on sports spectatorship.

Bale (1998) claims spectators hold a place-making quality. Contemporary sports consumption centres around fandom, which is driven by partisanship (Dixon, 2016). Even in the most standardised, placeless stadium, the presence of partisan spectators and their fandom-based biases have the power to reclaim a sense of place. Specifically, Bale makes notes of how the conceptual and literal noise of the crowd has the potential to create a home field advantage, a phenomenon that has been observed in studies as having tangible influences on sporting outcomes (Zeller and Jurkovic, 1989). Simply by the presence of partisan spectators and their antics, the site of play suddenly favours one team over the other, becoming a place recognisable by identity.

The logical step to take to achieve placelessness would be to further increase the sameness of stadia by removing spectators from them entirely. A soccer match would then be played in an empty stadium and broadcast to spectators remotely, where their partisanship would be unable to influence the play; a recent reality for many professional sports across the world as fans socially isolate from home amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic (Weed, 2020). Bale draws on Baudrillard's (1993) writings on soccer and stadia *The Transparency of Evil*, who ponders that to “ensure the objective conduct of the match,” sports must be conducted in “a transparent form of public space from which all the actors have been withdrawn,” Baudrillard draws on a 1987 European Cup match between Real Madrid and Naples that was played in an empty stadium to punish Madrid for actions performed in a previous match. He describes how the “real” match was “stripped of its context,” with the televisual broadcast of the match becoming fully representational; the actual happenings of the match were directly lived by no one besides the players, yet it was experienced by many through broadcast mediation. He concludes by describing the match as “a pure event ... readily susceptible to replacement by synthetic images.”

Such writings of the placelessness and authenticity casts a precarious light on esports. Often perceived as placeless by virtue of its virtual and computerised nature, are the concerns raised by Bale (1998) and Baudrillard (1993) in relation to placeless conventional sports also implicit aspects of esports? Virilio (1992) expands on this

Baudrillardian version of sports in his dystopic futurism writings on the topic. He envisions a version of future sports where placelessness is taken to the extreme, with stadia being deemed completely unnecessary by replacing physical athletes with televisual images performing in a “video-stadium” directly televised to global audiences. It is based on these writings of Baudrillard (1993) and Virilio that Bale (1998) cements his stance that placeless sporting events in a landscape of sameness would strip sports of its authenticity. Bale places the authentic originality of sports in the genuineness of spectating in-person at the site of play. This reflects the notion within sports and tourism literature that sports spectating experiences are often framed as a pursuit to partake in an authentic experience (Lamont, 2014).

The boundaries which determine the playing space where a conventional sport is physically played, such as the field, pitch, court, or stadium, are often attributed as the most authentic places to watch a sport, being geographically as close as possible to the competitive spectacle (Bruner, 1994; Bale, 1998; Fairley and Tyler, 2012). While further research has also demonstrated that other venues of sports spectatorship are constructed as authentic through various means, either by the spectators themselves or event organisers, these constructs draw on what spectators believe to be authentic. This sense of authenticity is often achieved by evoking elements of an experience indicative of being at the site of play (Bale, 1998, Weed, 2007, Fairley and Tyler, 2012).

By spectating at the site of play, the spectator is free to spectate the match from their own perspective, watching the game as it happens without it being mediated²¹ by a coordinated broadcast production team. Furthermore, Bale (1998) asserts that at the stadium, each spectator obtains a unique perspective of the match; no two people can occupy the exact same physical space, adding a sense of exclusivity to each spectators’ viewing perspective. On this note, Bale asserts that televised sports and associated

²¹ Although those spectating sports at the site of play receive a perspective of the match through their own eyes rather than mediated through a camera directed by a production team, it is somewhat of a simplification to say that this mode of spectatorship is completely unmediated. Stadia are carefully designed architectural structures that are designed to showcase the spectacle of sports (Trumbour, 2006). The considered design of stadia inherently mediates the experience of spectatorship of those who occupy them. Nevertheless, the spectator is granted a greater sense of autonomy over their experience when spectating at the stadium than remotely via mediated broadcast, being able to direct their own gaze.

broadcasting techniques and technologies have established a semblance of a sports landscape of sameness, as they “re-place” spectators from the unique perspectives of the stadium to a single, unified perspective through mediated broadcast. Even at the stadium, Bale notes that the implementation of large format screens like jumbotrons and the use of time altering broadcast technologies like slow-motion replays also “replaces” spectators; a postmodern spectating condition is created where the fidelity of the mediated spectacle produces a spectator experience that appears more ‘real’ than ‘reality.’

While Bale’s (1998) and Virilio’s (1992) predictions of sameness and placeless in future sports were based on the broadcast practices and technologies dominant in the 1990’s, their predictions share an uncanny resemblance to contemporary esports. In many ways, esports can be argued to fit Bale’s sport landscape of sameness to a greater extent than televised conventional sports. While conventional sports embarked on a path towards achieving placelessness as a choice, some may argue that esports is inherently placeless. No matter where an esports event is physically situated, be it in a stadium, the public communal place of an esports bar, or across internet-networked homes, the digital synthetic environments in which players’ avatars compete remain the same for they are simply unchanging, objective constructs of code and art assets. In this sense, one could assert that no site affords changes to the pitch of esports play.

Much like how Bale (1998) envisions placeless sports as detracting from sporting authenticity, does the sameness of esports delegate its spectatorship as an activity of solely inauthentic experiences? Some may argue that the two Sydney events attended in Study 2 did not need to be held in stadia on a technical level for their matches to have occurred; they could have been produced remotely using the networked tools that have come to recently define many videogaming and livestreaming practices. With esports needing to be mediated to be watched²², every esports spectator shares a similar, often identical spectating perspective regardless of spectating location. This was the case at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney, with their

²² Although there exists research efforts and emergent technologies like virtual reality that offer spectators greater autonomy over their spectating perspectives, the existing landscape of esports spectator perspectives is one of sameness.

matches necessarily captured and therefore mediated by the production crews to be projected onto large screens around the stadia, as well as streamed to remote audiences. As asserted in Section 8.4.1, the stadium is not a native or required place to stage esports competition and spectacle²³, on an elementary level simply housing the equipment and professionals needed to produce esports spectacle. Furthermore, these individuals and resources do not necessarily even need to be present together in a single situated site. This condition reflects how Virilio (1992) envisions the function of sporting venues in a future of purely representational and placeless sports, becoming “no more than the scaffolding for an artificial environment.”

However, as was evident from Study 2, stadia do not simply house the resources required to produce esports spectacle. Fans from across Australia and overseas flocked to IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney to engage in the spectatorship of esports, even if they would be watching a mediated feed of the matches that was almost identical to that streamed to remote spectators by means of online livestreaming. If esports is a supposedly placeless practice as its sameness would imply, then why does esports spectatorship take place in esoteric sites outside of the home like stadia and esports bars?

Lacking a physically situated and directly observable pitch, one may conclude that the optimal spectating experience of esports would be had at home on the basis of fidelity, comfort, and convenience. However, this discussion has demonstrated across the three studied sites of esports spectatorship, the ability to spectate esports was often compromised. Although this was most explicit in instances of domestic spectatorship in Study 1, qualities of the stadium and the bar can also be considered as disruptive to the act of watching esports. At the bar, the noise of other patrons, social distractions, music, and seating positions often obstructed the esports shown in the bar, often acting more as an element of ambiance rather than the subject of direct spectatorship. The staging of the physical audience by the event organisers at the two Sydney events prevented many of the attending

²³ This is also perhaps even more pronounced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the vast majority of professional sports spectacles being cancelled, many professional esports matches have continued to be conducted via online networked play and broadcast. Some sports organisations and leagues have looked towards esports as a reprieve from the impact the pandemic is having on the production of their broadcast content. For example, NASCAR has started televising virtual rallies held in online racing simulation game iRacing, featuring a collection of notable professional NASCAR drivers as competitors.

spectators from securing seats that would provide an optimal viewing perspective of the screens showing the feed of the matches.

However, these obstructions at the stadium and bar were not necessarily considered by spectators as compromising factors. Rather, they were perceived as authenticating elements which spectators actively sought in the construction of their esports spectatorship experiences. The sensation of being in a rambunctious crowd with like-minded individuals, the spontaneous sense *communitas*, and the enactment of sporting rituals were only a few examples of authenticators that were present across the home, stadium, and esports bar. The Australian context of those spectating at home in Study 1 and at the bar in Study 3 also demonstrated placefulness in esports spectatorship; participants had to organise and schedule their spectatorship around the locally awkward hours of events hosted in the northern hemisphere, highlighting a factor of geographical place which shaped their spectatorship. Ultimately, the findings across Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3 demonstrate that esports is not inherently placeless, but is rather supported and reliant on a range of placeful, situated practices.

While Bale presents a bleak vision of a future sports landscape of sameness, he concludes on an optimistic note by detailing ways that soccer fans reclaim place from increasingly sanitised, placeless sporting environments. He reasserts the place-making quality of spectators, arguing that while the sameness of sports has become increasingly salient, the behaviours, actions, and passion of spectators are what make the experience of spectatorship memorable, valuable, and authentic. He notes that spectators are not complacent about their sites of spectatorship, even if variation in spectating perspective is minimal between them. Rather, conventional sports spectators seek out sites of spectatorship that will allow them to create and partake in authentic experiences of spectatorship. In this sense, the motivations and behaviours of esports spectators are similar to those of sports spectatorship. This is an observation recorded throughout various examples of esports research (see Lee and Schoenstedt, 2011; Pizzo et al., 2018). In particular, Trent and Shafer (2020) directly compare experiences of esports and sports spectatorship and conclude that both are enjoyed for similar reasons. The research presented in this thesis affirms these similarities, further illustrating that esports fans find entertainment in supporting their favourite teams and players in competitive spectacles of high-level

play. However, what this research considers that others do not are the reasons behind these similarities between esports and conventional sports spectatorship. While outwardly similar, these valued qualities shared across esports and conventional sports spectatorship are the results of dissimilar circumstances.

While spectators of conventional sports work to reclaim authenticity and place through the enactment of spectating rituals lost to the sameness of increasingly placeless sporting sites, the findings of this thesis have identified the *creation* of authenticity in esports; a practice that theoretically should have none by virtue of its supposed placelessness. Much like their conventional sports counterparts, the findings across the three studies presented in this thesis demonstrate that esports is not only placeful, but that spectators also work to create a sense of esportsing place out of the sites they spectate in. Rather than working to recreate lost authenticity, esports spectators work to authenticate spectatorship based on notions of authenticity from elsewhere, particularly conventional sports spectatorship. Although reliant on a range of computerised practices, the spectatorship of esports occurs in situated sites, with spectators transforming them into authentic places of esports spectatorship. In doing so, esports spectators affirm a convention of esports authenticity and come to value similar aspects of spectating experience to those of conventional sports.

One also cannot ignore the role that esports organisations have played in the creation of esports authenticity. The efforts of contemporary esports organisations appear to be progressing in the opposite direction that Bale suggests conventional sports is heading. Recent developments in the esports media landscape reveals efforts bring a greater sense of placefulness to esports. For example, Gibbs et al. (2018) note esports leagues like the Overwatch League and the Gfinity Pro Series have turned to city-based franchise models, where teams take the namesake they are intended to represent, with players living and training together in this geographical locale. Rather than playing online, teams travel to or host other teams on a home-and-away basis.

Although a cynic may view this strategy as purely driven by commercial interests, it demonstrates how those that hold the power to authenticate esports use their status to shape how esports *ought to be* by embracing the placeful, partisan sense of fandom

Chapter 8 – Discussion

that authenticates conventional sports. Ultimately, both organisers and spectators have worked to construct a sense of placefulness and thus authenticity in esports by drawing on pre-existing, broadly accepted constructs of authenticity predominantly from conventional sports spectatorship. While event organisers have guided this process, it was through the individual efforts of esports spectators that authenticity has been established in a seemingly placeless practice, employing their place-making qualities to create authentic places of esports spectatorship in a landscape of sameness.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The central objective of this thesis was to address how different sites influence the experiences of esports spectatorship. To do so, this thesis began by outlining the core concepts of spectatorship and authenticity in Chapter 2, then established a knowledge gap in Chapter 3 through a literature review of academic esports literature. This literature reviewed revealed that little consideration is given for the sites of esports spectatorship in existing academic research. The approach to addressing this knowledge gap was established in Chapter 4, where the theoretical perspective, research design, data collection methods, and data analysis methods were outlined and justified. Ultimately three ethnographic studies were completed, each intended to explore the experiences of esports spectatorship in three sites of play as inspired by Bale (1998): the home, the stadium, and the esports bar.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 each respectively presented the findings of Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3. Study 1 revealed that despite the implied autonomy granted to the spectator in constructing experiences of spectatorship in the home, experiences of domestic esports spectatorship were often constructed in response to various constraints. These constraints included household cohabitants, spectating platforms, and scheduling. Study 2 revealed how spectatorship at the stadium allowed esports fans to legitimise their spectatorship by engaging in rituals and behaviours that they deemed as sports-like. Study 3 found how patrons at an esports bar recreated elements of stadium-situated esports events to authenticate their experiences of spectatorship. Chapter 8 coalesced the findings across the three studies, culminating in four central findings. Firstly, the studies found that esports spectators endeavour to stage their spectatorship to construct specific spectatorship experiences. Secondly, there exists a dimension to esports spectatorship that is characterised by non-leisurely, laborious motivations. Thirdly, esports authenticity is constructed and affirmed through the spectating habits of esports fans. Finally, these findings offer insights into how places of esports spectatorship are constructed and authenticated in a practice that is often perceived as placeless.

This concluding chapter will return to the research questions and provide a final, detailed overview of the findings which were generated from the ethnographic

studies presented in this thesis. Specifically, these findings will be contrasted with the knowledge gaps presented in Chapter 3 to highlight how this thesis has contributed to the academic research area of esports. Limitations of the research presented in this thesis on both a methodological and practical level will also be noted, highlighting areas and topics that future research may seek to address.

Finally, I close the thesis with a remark regarding place in esports. Although often perceived as placeless, experiences of esports spectatorship are constructed by sensual and geographic elements that spectators encounter in situated sites they spectate in. Each site of spectatorship offers different resources, opportunities, and constraints for spectators to consider in constructing valued qualities into spectating experiences through situated action. As such, spectators choose spectatorship sites that best allow them to construct a specific experience of spectatorship, often selecting sites that allow them to engage in what they subjectively deem to be an authentic experience. In doing so, esports spectators work to construct and affirm a convention of esports authenticity.

9.2 Research questions and findings

The literature review presented in Chapter 3 revealed a limited understanding of how sites of spectatorship influence experiences of spectating esports. Much research assumes that esports is spectated in domestic environments on individual screens. While it is certain that the home is a typical site of esports spectatorship, the implications of the home and other places as sites of spectatorship are rarely considered. For example, efforts to recreate a generic “homely” environment (Rambusch, Taylor and Susi, 2017) by studying esports spectatorship in a lab are unable to capture the personal intricates unique to each individual’s domestic environments, as well as other elements of domestic life like scheduling and cohabitants. Beyond the home, research regarding esports has held a modest interest in spectatorship at the site of play in stadia. However, this research often does not consider how the sensual elements of such places influences the experiences of spectating esports, focusing mainly on motivations for spectatorship. Sites of spectatorship outside of the stadium and the home have received the least amount of research interest, being represented almost entirely by the small corpus of academic literature making mostly passing mentions of Barcrafts, as well as

historical accounts of esports which offer insight into the practice's origins in arcades (T.L. Taylor, 2012).

To address this gap, a research course was designed to explore experiences of esports spectatorship across a variety of spectatorship sites. Specifically, I sought to understand the lived experiences of spectatorship in such places, and how different sites influence experiences of esports spectatorship. In doing so, I also sought to explore how spectators worked in sites of spectatorship to construct their spectator experiences and what qualities they found desirable in their spectatorship. The following research questions were proposed:

Overarching RQ: What are the qualities of esports spectatorship experiences?

↳ RQ1: How do spectatorship sites influence experiences of esports spectatorship?

↳ RQ2: How do esports spectators construct experiences of esports spectatorship?

↳ RQ3: What do esports spectators value in experiences of esports spectatorship?

To answer these questions, three studies were designed and conducted, each exploring the research questions across three sites of spectatorship as outlined by Bale (1998). Study 1 was based on a series of semi-structured interviews with domestic esports spectators regarding their spectating habits and considerations. Participants were asked questions regarding spectating rituals they engage in, where they watch esports in their homes, the spectating technologies they use, who they spectate esports with, and other considerations they make when spectating esports. In doing so, Study 1 sought to develop an understanding of domestic esports spectatorship that looks beyond assumptions of the home found in existing esports research. In essence, the study generated an understanding of *how* esports is spectated in the homes of esports spectators.

The analysis of the transcribed interviews generated a number of salient findings. It revealed that esports spectators go to some lengths to stage their domestic spaces to construct an ideal experience of spectatorship. This was achieved through numerous methods ranging from the location within the domestic space, the screens used for spectating, the other activities engaged in on second screens while spectating, the

wearing of apparel, and the considerations for other people living in the household. Desired experiences of spectatorship across participants' homes varied; some staged for comfort while others staged for sociality, for example. Overall, three dimensions of spectatorship in the home were salient across the findings: mundanity, attendance, and compromise. Firstly, some instances of spectatorship were considered as mundane activities, engaged with spontaneously with little thought and often multitasked along with other mundane household activities like cooking and studying.

Secondly however, other instances of spectatorship were more carefully planned to disrupt the sense of mundanity within the home, with spectators making concerted efforts to stage the experience of spectating esports to enact a sense of authenticity by constructing a feeling of attendance. Spectators worked to stage their spectating experiences in a way that would mask the mundanity of the domestic environments spectatorship occurred in, creating a sense of having 'attended' an esportsing event while in a remote location. This consequently constructed a sense of esportsing place within the home. Other instances of spectatorship took on laborious qualities, with spectators working to legitimise esports for their non-fan cohabitants by portraying esports as legitimate, professional, and therefore authentic. Aware of their household cohabitants, some spectators staged their spectatorship in ways that would portray esports positively to non-fans in the household, particularly parents. The aspiration of this laborious spectatorship was to not convert non-fan cohabitants into fans, but rather to help improve the perception of esports among those outside of the fandom by portraying esports as a professional and legitimate practice. This was driven by a sense of indebtedness to esports for providing entertainment and a sense of belonging in a fandom, a theme which would appear in other forms of laborious spectatorship across Study 2 and Study 3.

Thirdly, a sense of underlying compromise united many of participants' efforts to stage their homes for esports spectatorship. Technological constraints, the media consumption habits of others in the household, and scheduling issues were just some of the elements which proved to be common hinderances around which compromises had to be made. Although domestic spectators often had access to the tools and means to construct a wide variety of spectating experiences in the home, the

mundane elements of domestic life and spectatorship often restricted them from doing so in an unrestricted manner.

Study 2 was predominantly centred around participant observations of esports spectators at two 2017 Sydney esports events and a series of semi-structured interviews with attendees. Participants were asked questions regarding their motivations for attending, their lived experience of the event, the activities and behaviours engaged with in the venue, and their thoughts of the event's spectacle. In doing so, Study 2 sought to understand what motivates spectators to leave the home to spectate esports at the site of play, especially when considering the sameness of esports watching perspectives. By exploring these motivations, an understanding of what spectators anticipated and desired in their experiences of spectatorship at the two Sydney esports events was generated.

The findings which were generated from a thematic analysis of these data revealed four main themes which framed attendance and esports spectatorship at IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney: entertainment, education, socialisation, and active support. Entertainment encompassed a desire for spectators to partake in an entertaining experience at the events. This not only manifested in excitement derived from the spectatorship of professional play, but also from the engagement in esports narratives which surrounded and contextualised the events. Some spectators at the stadium also treated the competitive spectacle as an educative resource, seeking to model their own play based on professional play and strategies.

Some spectators also sought to learn what it was like to attend and experience an esports event in person. This is a particularly key theme when considering the Australian context in which this study was conducted. With the two Sydney events being among the first major esports events to be held in Australia, many local spectators presented with their first opportunity to attend an esports event of similar calibre to those held overseas. This finding particularly affirms perceptions held by spectators in Study 1 and Study 3 of the stadium as an authentic site of esports spectatorship. By attending IEM Sydney and OWC Sydney, these spectators sought to affirm their own perceptions of esports authenticity. Ultimately, the findings of Study 2 present the experiences of spectating esports in stadia as largely fulfilling,

with participants' expectations and desires of the two events as projected in their attendance motivations largely met or exceeded.

Additionally, a finding from Study 1 was also supported by Study 2. Much like how sociality was a salient authenticator of esports spectatorship at the home, the same was true at the two Sydney stadia events. Besides attending with existing friends and being among a crowd of like-minded fans, some spectators used the events as an opportunity to travel and meet online gaming buddies they had not met in person. Spectators also felt that by attending the events they would demonstrate a stronger degree of fandom by actively attending to support, rather than spectating from home in a relatively passive manner.

In particular, this theme of active support embodied a second instance of laborious spectatorship. Driven by a desire for future major esports events to be held in Australia, spectators sought to portray themselves as an enthusiastic audience worthy of future consideration. Ultimately, this active support coloured the experience of spectatorship in the stadia as one reminiscent of conventional sports. Tying in with efforts to sportify esports, the sensual elements of the stadium reflected those of conventional sports. In particular, spectators were able to perform expressions of patriotic support and partisan fandom through their spectatorship, allowing these spectators to partake in a sports-like experience in a context they truly were passionate about. By allowing esports fans to experience these widely celebrated sporting rituals and behaviours, experiences of spectatorship at the two Sydney esports events were authenticated and legitimised.

Study 3 involved a five-month long 'classical' ethnography conducted at a local Melbourne esports bar. As a part of the study I immersed myself in the field of the bar, attending regularly to gain an understanding of the experiences of spectating esports in the venue by getting to know the regulars and staff, as well as engaging in spectatorship myself. In doing so, Study 3 offered insights into experiences of remote esports spectatorship in public communal places. The bar acted as a point of comparison to the home, offering insight into how experiences of remote esports spectatorship in public and private spaces differed.

Corroborating the findings of Study 1 which revealed a limited degree of autonomy over spectating experience in domestic environments, the bar offered spectators a

site in which to construct their desired spectating experiences. Although a public place, the bar offered a greater sense of autonomy over the staging of spectating experiences than the home. In some ways the bar was more ‘homely’ than the home. Acting as a third place (Oldenberg, 1989) for spectatorship, the bar offered spectators a different set of compromises which excluded many of those found in domestic environments. This allowed patrons at GGEZ to construct spectator experiences that would normally be unachievable in the home. This was largely in part due to the communal nature of the bar and the sense of *communitas* generated by the gathering of people united by their fandom of esports. The flattened social hierarchy extended beyond the patrons, also encompassing the bar’s staff who were also keen esports fans.

With the bar established as an accessible, flexible, and intentional site of remote esports spectatorship, the venue was often staged to replicate a sense of being at the site of play. Specifically, spectators looked towards the portrayal of esports in mediated broadcasts of stadium events in the staging of their own spectating experiences, perceiving qualities of spectatorship in the stadium authentic aspects of esports spectatorship. By replicating and engaging in rituals and behaviours observed in these esports broadcasts, spectators worked to authenticate their bar-situated remote spectatorship. The situated sociality enabled by the bar was particularly important in this regard, not only allowing spectators to share the experience of spectating esports among a crowd of like-minded fans, but also providing the number of people required to perform a range of spectating rituals indicative of stadium environments.

Although often used as an ideal foundation to build spectating experiences deemed authentic by enthusiast spectators, the laid-back and welcoming environment of the bar appealed to those interested in gaming and pop culture more broadly. This meant that the venue was also frequented by other types of patrons for reasons other than spectatorship. While esports maintained a permeating presence in the bar, this esports content was often atmospheric, rather than the subject of patrons’ undivided attention and gaze. Outside of screening events or the gathering of large numbers of enthusiast fans, esports spectatorship was an engaged with sporadically by patrons, their attention being captured by the content momentarily between lulls in conversation.

The relaxed atmosphere of GGEZ presented the venue as an attractive site to introduce people to esports. Specifically, it was observed that enthusiast fans often brought a group of their novice friends to the bar to introduce them to esports. While being constantly exposed to esports in the bar, there was no pressure placed on novices to actively spectate. Rather, enthusiasts worked to ease the novices into esports spectatorship, which can often be an overwhelming and confusing experience for those unfamiliar. In aiding their novices, the enthusiasts worked to stage a spectating experience that would be understandable, educative and engaging. Notably, the enthusiasts often narrated the match for their novices, providing a commentary track which focused on not only punctuating and contextualising the matches, but also explained much of the sport on a basic, mechanical level. In doing so, enthusiasts worked to bridge the gaming literacy which the novices lacked to fully understand and enjoy esports spectacle. Experiences of esports spectatorship were constructed for the novices based on what the enthusiasts believed spectating esports *ought to be* like, exerting their authority to affirming a convention of esports authenticity. In doing so, the enthusiasts' laborious spectatorship aspired to grow the esports community.

While each study produced novel findings of their own, the goal for this thesis was to come to a broad understanding of esports spectatorship experiences. The discussion presented in Chapter 8 coalesced the findings outlined in the three studies as a part of this endeavour. When taken together, the studies conducted in the home, stadium, and esports bar identified how desired senses of authenticity in esports spectatorship were construed by spectators. The discussion commenced by exploring how the stadium was positioned and interpreted by esports spectators across the studies as an authentic site of esports spectatorship, despite the stadium being a relatively recent site of esports spectatorship. Reflecting the sportification of esports, the stadium has been adopted as an authentic site of esports spectatorship, lending a sense of grandiosity and sporting prowess to esports. Following this finding, I explored how esports spectators worked to affirm and construct a desired convention of esports authenticity for themselves, fellow esports fans, and non-fans through their engagement in forms of laborious spectatorship. The discussion closed with an exploration of esports within Bale's (1998) sports landscape of sameness. Although largely characterised by its computerised and networked practices, esports

spectators construct a sense of placefulness through their spectatorship. In doing so, they demonstrate a place-making quality (Bale, 1998). Ultimately, place is a central factor to the experience of esports spectatorship. While esports can be spectated and played across a wide range of sites, these sites only become esportsing places through the practices and rituals that esports spectators enact in their efforts to authenticate their experiences of spectatorship.

9.3 Significance

Outside of simply addressing the research questions and filling the identified knowledge gap pertaining to place, construction, authenticity, and qualities of esports spectatorship experiences, the findings of this thesis hold broader significance. Firstly, this thesis can inform ways in which esports spectacles are composed by tournament and event organisers. As has been demonstrated across the three studies, spectators choose specific sites of play in the construction of esports spectating experiences. In particular, they seek certain degrees of autonomy and specific opportunities which allow them to best create subjectively desirable spectating experience, often aligning with their perceptions of esports authenticity. The place-making quality of spectators has been demonstrated as an important aspect to consider in the understanding of esports spectating experiences; an aspect which would prove valuable to factor for in the production of esports events.

Furthermore, this research has demonstrated that esports spectatorship is greatly varied and takes drastically different forms. Particularly in the home where the construction of esports spectatorship experiences were often compromised, spectatorship takes many forms which may be deemed unorthodox, in some cases involving little to no visual engagement. Existing spectator interfaces on livestreaming platforms like Twitch and YouTube Live cater to what is perceived to be a typical mode of esports spectatorship on private screens. As modes of spectatorship vary and spectators seek autonomy in their experiences of spectatorship, designers of spectator interfaces may see value in allowing a greater degree of customisation over how esports spectators can interact and engage with broadcast content.

Finally, this research also helps understand forms of engagement with digital media more broadly. Particularly it may help in generating insights into the ways in which

conventional sports are spectated and engaged with as they gradually become more digitised. As Collins and Evans (2016) assert, conventional spectator sports are increasingly reliant on computerised technologies in terms of play and broadcast. Particularly in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic which has seen conventional sports played in stadia void of spectators for the sake of public health, the findings of this thesis reveal ways in which authenticity can be constructed and affirmed in a landscape of sameness.

9.4 Limitations and future research

With the key findings reiterated and their significance established, this penultimate section will focus on the limitations of the research presented in this thesis. In Chapter 4 I discussed the criticisms and limitations of ethnographic methodologies; as such I will not repeat those points in this section. However, I will explore the limitations of my data collection and analysis methods. I will then shift focus to the limitations of the findings themselves and how these limitations offer opportunities for future research.

Some limitations concern the self-reported nature of a significant portion of data collected across the three studies, particularly from the semi-structured interviews employed in Study 1 and Study 2, as well as the informal conversations had with patrons at GGEZ in Study 3. There is potential for self-reported data to contain inaccuracies due to the reliance on participants' subjective recall, which could exaggerate or omit significant details (Rosenman, Tennekoon and Hill, 2011). This can be either purposeful or accidental. Social desirability bias is one factor which may contribute to such inaccuracies in self-reported data, which leads the participant to provide 'good' answers which positively reflect upon themselves. Such a bias is important to consider specifically in relation to the studies presented in this thesis.

The presentation of esports in a positive manner was a consistent theme across the three studies. It is possible that these aspirations to help improve the public image of esports may have permeated the responses given across the semi-structured interviews to portray esports and esportsing practices to me, a researcher with the ability to disseminate participant's responses through academic publication and discourse, in a positive manner. However, I am confident that I have mitigated the

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impact of this limitation thanks to my status as a competitive gaming fan and my broad demographic fit for gaming and esports communities. Throughout my interviews I ensured that I made use of lexicon indicative of competitive gaming and esports communities to present myself to my interview participants as knowledgeable of esports and its practices. While this was primarily done to ensure participants felt open enough to speak to me about some of the more nuanced aspects of their esports spectatorship, it also worked to establish me as a gamer with an educated understanding of gaming culture, harbouring none of the stigmas commonly associated with videogaming.

However, this sense of familiarity between myself and my research subjects raises concerns regarding analytic distance. As Adler and Adler (1987) assert, an ethnographer should remain situated on the periphery of the group they research as to retain a sense a ‘strangeness’ and to mitigate a sense that the data generated is not being taken for granted. It is therefore a possibility that through my understanding and personal enjoyment of competitive videogames that I may have moved away from the periphery of the groups of esports spectators I had been researching and formed a “unwitting communion” (Pollner and Emerson, 2001) with my subjects. Nevertheless, I do not believe this to have happened across the research presented in this thesis. It is important to note that while I maintained an interest and substantial degree of literacy in competitive videogaming across my doctoral candidature, I was not and still do not consider myself to be an esports fan. As mentioned in Chapter 3, competitive gaming does not entirely constitute esports, despite being a significant aspect of it. For me as merely a fan of playing competitive videogames, the cultures surrounding the groups of esports spectators I researched were alien, their symbolic rituals, behaviours, and fandom unfamiliar. As I continued throughout my research and learned more about my subjects and the groups they inhabited, I made efforts to retain a sense of strangeness. In particular, when conversing with subjects in both formal interviews and casual exchanges, I made sure to ask them to explain terms or slang as they would to someone with little videogaming or esports knowledge, even if I already had a preconceived notion of what such terms meant.

Another limitation pertaining to participants across the three studies was the predominant representation of enthusiast esports fans in each sample. This is a

limitation noted in other examples of esports research, such as Hamari and Sjöblom's (2017) "What is eSports and why do people watch it?" as discussed in Chapter 3.5.4. A broader sample of participants including those of more marginal interest in esports spectatorship could have provided impressions of esports spectatorship which extended beyond those who explicitly identified as esports fans. This limitation mostly pertains to Study 1, which featured a self-selected sample gathered from volunteers recruited from recruitment material publicly posted in physical and online places. While the recruitment material made an effort to reach out to those who watch esports in any capacity rather than solely self-identified fans, there is the possibility that those who engage in esports content through highlight reels and social media clips rather than viewing full matches would not consider these spectating habits as esports spectatorship and therefore not feel compelled to participate. This limitation was mitigated by a snow-balling approach to recruitment which sought to access these marginally-interested spectators through their enthusiast friends. However, there still remains the possibility that marginally-interested spectators with friends consisting of others marginally-interested or completely uninterested in esports could not be reached. This presents an opportunity for future research to focus on the esports spectating experiences and habits of those who do not identify themselves as esports fans or spectators.

This limitation was less impactful in Study 2 and Study 3. Study 2 sought to understand the experiences of esports spectatorship at stadia, and as such the participants recruited at the two Sydney esports events were indicative of the types of spectators who attend such events. The 'classical' approach to ethnography applied in Study 3 exposed me to a variety of esports spectators who attended the bar and allowed me to observe the ways spectators of differing levels of interest in esports engage in spectatorship. This predominantly manifested in the observations of enthusiast spectators' use of laborious spectatorship to create an enjoyable spectating experience for their novice friends.

Another limitation to consider is the continued evolution of esports in terms of organisation and governance. As noted in Chapter 2 by seminal authors in the field of esports research like T.L. Taylor, Nick Taylor and Emma Witkowski, esports has manifested in many different forms across its relatively brief existence. While this current contemporary wave of esports has been the longest lasting, the years over

which this doctoral research was conducted has observed noticeable changes in the esports landscape. 2017 marked the emergence of Australia as an esports destination, and subsequent years have seen major esports organisations turn to Australia to host prestigious esports events, signalling a further globalisation of esports. Locational franchised-based esports business models have also become prominent since 2017, with leagues like the Overwatch Pro League and the Gfinity Elite Series acting as prime examples with teams based in and geographically tied to major cities (Gibbs et al., 2018). However, as of 2020 the global COVID-19 pandemic threatens to again transform the esports landscape, with leagues shifting back to online formats reminiscent of the forms of esports seen in the late 2000's and early 2010's. It is therefore important to note that the representations of esports spectating experiences presented in this thesis are largely representative of a period between 2017 and 2019. Nevertheless, the findings presented in this thesis have the potential to remain useful for future researchers by acting as a snapshot of this period. This research offers context behind the history and evolution of future esports iterations, even if they barely resemble those present at the time of writing this thesis.

The fact that the research presented in this thesis was conducted by a single researcher raises another limitation. This has the possibility to impact the research's reliability, consistency, and presence of personal biases. Nevertheless, I am confident that I have mitigated the impacts of a lone researcher approach through the consistent engagement with my findings, analysis, and methods with other researchers. Specifically, my two supervisors, with whom I met on a fortnightly basis throughout my doctoral candidature, were key individuals who offered alternative perspectives on my research and helped expand my methods of knowledge generation. Furthermore, I often shared and discussed my work with fellow doctoral candidates within my lab and department, trading ideas and perspectives with each other. Finally, I received feedback from researchers outside of my university through the peer-reviewed publication of research produced during my doctoral candidature and the delivery of presentations at multiple local and international research conferences in the form of workshops, panels, doctoral colloquia, and paper presentations.

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In specific relation to Study 3, the use of GGEZ esports bar as the sole representation of public communal sites of esports spectatorship poses a potential limitation. It is likely that different types of public communal sites of esports spectatorship afford the construction of other types of esports spectator experiences that were not seen at the bar. This was alluded to in my interactions with the latecomer during the night of TI8 at the bar, who had come from a nearby cinema also screening the event. This latecomer decided to move to the bar to spectate the remainder of TI8, as he felt that he could not construct an authentic experience of esports spectatorship in the cinema. Based on my conversation with the latecomer, it was evident that the public communal place of the cinema affords spectators noticeably different experiences of esports spectatorship than those of GGEZ. Although the findings of Study 3 undoubtedly are closely tied to GGEZ and similar esports bars, the key point to take away from the study was not solely the specific affordances of the bar, but that public communal places act as foundations on which desired esports spectator experiences can be constructed. In essence, the resources and opportunities offered by each site factor into spectators' choices of where to spectate.

It is also impossible to ignore the Australian context in which this research was conducted. While this research is intended to be generalisable to experiences of esports spectatorship more broadly, it was evident that unique factors inherent to Australia played a central role to the construction of esports spectating experiences across the three studies. It is certain that many of these factors such as time zone differences, the development of the Australian national identity, and the relative youthfulness of the Australian esports landscape are absent from other geographical contexts of esports spectatorship. Nevertheless, much like the limitations associated with the use of GGEZ to represent public communal sites of esports spectatorship, this research demonstrates that national identity, culture, and other country-specific factors play an integral role in the construction of esports spectating experiences. As esports research often makes little consideration for the national and geographical contexts in which esports spectatorship takes place, the findings of the three studies presented in this thesis reveals a need to emphasis such factors in this field of research. This presents an opportunity for future studies to place focus on the national and geographic elements which factor into experiences of esports spectatorship.

This research has shed light on the construction of esports spectating experiences from the perspective of esports spectators. It has revealed the behaviours, rituals, and efforts that esports spectators partake in to construct a valued experience of spectatorship. In doing so, they pick out specific sites of spectatorship which allow them to best enact these subjectively desirable spectating experiences. With the perspective of esports fans established in this thesis, future research may see value in understanding the perspective of event organisers or those tasked with designing sites for esports spectatorship. This could offer insight into how their intended compositions play into the construction of esports spectating experiences and how they factor into notions of esports authenticity.

9.5 Closing summary

This thesis has revealed that experiences of esports spectatorship are largely constructed by esports spectators themselves, drawing on a variety of rituals and behaviours in staging a subjectively desirable spectating experience. Prior research concerning esports leaves room to further consider sites of esports spectatorship, predominantly focusing on what are perceived to be typical forms of spectating esports engaged with on private screens in domestic settings. This thesis has expanded this scope to focus on how experiences of esports spectatorship are influenced by different spectating sites. In doing so, the findings generated across the three conducted studies found that different sites of spectatorship enable the construction of distinct spectating experiences.

From these three studies, I provided rich accounts of the ways in which esports spectators stage their spectatorship experiences in the home, the stadium, and the esports bar. These findings have specifically revealed how sites of spectatorship are chosen to best allow spectators to construct specific, valued experiences often reflective of what they perceive authentic esports *ought to be*. Spectators commonly valued a sense of authenticity in their experiences of esports spectatorship. Placed in a position where spectators themselves hold authority to authenticate esports, conventions of esports authenticity were affirmed through their laborious spectatorship. To do so they predominantly drew on well-established conventions of professionalism, legitimacy, and fandom taken from existing practices, particularly conventional spectator sports. While supposedly placeless, esports spectators' efforts to construct a sense of place across sites of spectatorship affirms a convention of

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esporting authenticity that speculative ponderings of social theorists suggest it theoretically should lack.

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Appendix A

Spelling esports

The spelling of esports continues to remain inconsistent. Across academic and non-academic literature, variations include ‘esports,’ ‘eSports,’ ‘e-sports,’ and ‘e-Sports.’ These variations likely initially existed due to the lack of any explicitly defined spelling convention during the infancy of esports (Adams, Devia-Allen and Moore, 2019), further compounded by ambiguities surrounding the spelling of portmanteaus made from two individual words. With the rises of esports in academic and general discourse, some style guides have begun providing standardised spellings. Nevertheless, different guides propose different spellings, thus leaving the issue largely unsolved. This thesis is written in American Psychological Association style, which has made no official statement on the spelling of esports. This leaves me as the author with the task of determining which spelling of the term is most appropriate for use in this thesis. Although this process can be perceived as pedantic, these variations in spelling imply certain connotations of esports. It is thus important to settle on a spelling that will accurately reflect the interpretation of esports I present in this thesis.

As should be evident, the use of the fully lowercase, unhyphenated spelling of ‘esports’ has been adopted in this thesis. This spelling is prescribed by the Associated Press style guide, the most widely publicised style guide to have made an explicit ruling on a standardised spelling of the term. The AP style guide originally prescribed the hyphenated “e-sports” spelling in accordance with their stance on hyphenating “e” prefixes. However, due to “industry trends and general usage” (Darcy, 2017), the hyphen was dropped. This was based on results derived from Google Trends, which demonstrated that searches for “esports” dominated searches for “e-sports” with a ratio of 30:1 (Darcy, 2017). Similarly, the term “email” went through a similar transformation in the AP style guide, dropping its hyphen following its transition to a commonly used noun. Shortly following the AP’s shift to an unhyphenated spelling, Wikipedia endorsed “esports” as the preferential spelling across its articles (Bailey, 2018). Additionally, AP adopts the stance that ‘esports’ is appropriate as both a singular and plural denotation, another aspect of the term that has been inconsistent since its inception. The unhyphenated lowercase spelling also

Appendix A

appears to be the preferred spelling among news outlets dedicated to esports and esports fans. Esports news outlets lauded the decisions made by the AP, characterising alternative spellings from less reputable to “criminal” (Cooke, 2017). From a cursory look at discussions of the term’s spellings in online discussion forums dedicated to esports, a notion that ‘true’ esports fans use the fully lowercase and unhyphenated spelling of the term has emerged. Conversely, those who use alternative spellings are broadly perceived as outsiders to the esports community, a trait that is typically associated with journalist from mainstream news media reporting on the topic. Nevertheless, other mainstream journalistic outlets now endorse a fully lowercase unhyphenated spelling. For example, *The Guardian’s* (2015) style guide prescribes “esport,” although they do not offer an explanation as to why. Esporting organisations also tend to endorse ‘esports.’ Bertschy, Mühlbacher and Desbordes (2020) note that *France Esports* encourages the use of a fully lowercase unhyphenated spelling in English publications.

Several academic publications have cited the AP’s style guide as their rationale for adopting a fully lowercase unhyphenated spelling of esports Adams, Devia-Allen and Moore (2019) and Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2020) both do so, but do not explain their reasoning behind adopting AP’s spelling of the term. Holden, Edelman and Baker (2020) also cite the AP as their rationale behind their use of ‘esports,’ drawing on the AP’s methodology behind their endorsement of the term as justification. While Howard (2018) does not cite the AP in his use of the term ‘esports,’ his decision to do so aligns with that of the AP, reasoning that the unhyphenated style “falls more in line with current iterations of the spelling.” Alternatively, Scholz (2019) justifies the use of ‘eSports’ on a similar basis. Although he acknowledges the AP’s and other journalistic outlets’ stylistic choices in spelling the term, Scholz analysed a corpus of 40 academic publications written since 2016 and concluded that ‘eSports’ was the majority spelling, accounting for 23 of the publications. However, these claims are unable to be verified as Scholz does not describe his sampling method, the articles he sampled or the fields that the articles originate from. When considering the fragmented nature of esports research and the internally referential nature of certain disciplines’ writings on esports, it is likely that different disciplines have developed unspoken conventions of the term’s spelling.

Appendix A

The use of the fully lowercase unhyphenated spelling of 'esports' in this thesis was decided upon partially in relation to the AP's office style guide and the implications of this spelling variation in relation to the practice of esports. Firstly, the AP's justification based on the growing usage and recognition of the 'esports' spelling reflects the spread of esports into mainstream discourse. Much as how 'electronic mail' moved from the niche 'e-mail' to the widely used and ubiquitous 'email,' esports has also spread beyond its initial niche. This spelling of esports reflects the notions in academic literature that esports has grown into its own practice with a unique identity distinct from competitive gaming or conventional sports. As Seo (2016) demonstrates, many esports fans do not consider esports to simply be 'electronic sports' in the literal sense. Rather, they perceive esports as a distinct practice, rather than an electronic version of sport. For fans, esports transcends competitive gaming and sports. In relation to spelling, esports is apt because it quashes the portmanteau that existed of 'electronic' and 'sport' into an individual term. On the other hand, the capitalisation in 'eSports' and the hyphen in 'e-sports' stresses the term's original constituents, thus defining it by them rather than its own merits as a distinct practice.

Appendix B

Study 1 Participant Demographics

Table 9 Demographics of participants interviewed for Study 1

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Household cohabitants	Spectatorship devices	Spectatorship locations	Domestic dwelling
1	24	Male	Employed full-time	Girlfriend	Desktop Computer, Television, Smartphone	Study, Living Room, Kitchen	2 bedroom apartment
2	26	Male	Employed full-time	Mother, father	Desktop Computer, Television, Smartphone	Bedroom	4 bedroom house
3	26	Male	Self-employed	Mother, father, 3 younger adult brothers, 1 older sister	Desktop Computer	Bedroom	7 bedroom house
4	25	Female	Graduate student	Mother, father, older brother	Laptop Computer, Smartphone, Television	Bedroom, Brother's Bedroom, Living Room	3 bedroom apartment

Appendix B

5	28	Male	Graduate student	5 housemates	Desktop Computer, Smartphone	Bedroom	4 bedroom house
6	19	Female	Undergraduate student	Mother, father	Desktop Computer, Laptop, Smartphone	Bedroom, Living Room	3 bedroom house
7	21	Male	Graduate student	None	Desktop Computer, Smartphone	Studio apartment	Studio apartment
8	21	Male	Undergraduate student	Mother, father, younger sister	Videogame console, Television, Laptop	Bedroom, Living Room	3 bedroom house
9	23	Male	Graduate student	Housemate	Desktop Computer, Laptop, Smartphone	Bedroom	2 bedroom apartment
10	28	Male	Employed full-time	Wife, father in-law, mother in-law, brother in-law, sister in-law	Television, Laptop	Living Room, Bedroom	4 bedroom house
11	20	Female	Undergraduate student	None	Television, Laptop	Living Room, Bedroom	1 bedroom apartment
12	25	Male	Employed part-time	Mother, father, younger sister	Desktop Computer	Bedroom	3 bedroom apartment

Appendix C

Study 1 interview guide

1. Demographics
 - a. Age
 - b. Occupation
 - c. Identified gender
2. What esports do you watch?
 - a. Why do you watch [esport]?
 - b. How long have you been following [esport]
 - c. Did you play [esport] before you started watching/following?
 - d. For how long?
 - e. How often do you watch esports live?
 - f. Do you play [esport]?
3. What do you enjoy about esports?
4. How often do you watch esports?
 - a. How do you decide when to watch esports?
 - b. What factors into your decision to watch esports?
 - c. When (time of day, time of week, time of month) do you watch esports?
 - d. What esports do you follow?
 - e. What sports do you follow?
5. How do you normally watch esports?
6. Where do you watch esports (in your home)?
 - a. What platform(s) do you watch esports on?
 - b. What device do you watch esports on?
 - c. Why do you watch esports in [location]?
 - d. Where/how do you position (sit, lie, etc) yourself?
 - e. How do you set up the space?
 - f. What is in the space?

Appendix C

7. What kind of home do you live in (house, apartment, studio, student accommodation, etc).
 - a. Who else lives in your home?
 - b. Demographics of those in the home
8. How do others in your household impact your esports spectating habits?
 - a. What considerations/affordances do you make for them?
 - b. How do they feel about esports?
 - c. How do they feel about your esports spectating habits?
9. What (else) do you do while watching esports?
10. What preparations do you make before watching esports?
11. How does esports impact your daily/work/social life?
12. Do you watch esports anywhere outside of your home?
 - a. How often do you watch esports outside of your home?
 - b. For what occasion/reason?
13. What do you watch esports on?
 - a. Why do you watch esports on [device]?
 - b. Why do you watch esports on [service]?
14. How do others in your household factor into (or impact) your esports watching habits/experience?
15. Who do you watch esports with?
 - a. How do you engage with social aspects of esports spectatorship (live chatrooms on streaming platforms, social media, etc)
16. What do you like about your esports viewing habits/set-up/routine?
17. What don't you like about your esports viewing habits/set-up/routine?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D

Study 2 interview guide

1. Demographics
 - a. Age
 - b. Occupation
 - c. Local or from interstate/international?
 - d. Identified gender
 - e. Lone attender or with friends?
2. What motivated you to attend [esports event] today?
 - a. What were you expecting of the event?
 - b. How does your experience of the event compare to your expectations?
3. Have you been to any esports events before today?
 - a. Why/why not?
 - b. As a spectator? As a player?
 - i) Which previous events?
4. Do you normally watch esports?
 - a. How do you normally watch esports?
 - i) Where do you normally watch esports?
 - ii) On what devices?
 - iii) Which esports?
 - iv) Do you follow any teams/players/esports leagues?
5. Do you play videogames?
 - a. Which games?
 - i) Casually? Competitively?
 - ii) Do you spectate the games that you play?
6. Do you spectate any [conventional] sports?
 - a. Why/why not?
 - b. Which sports?
 - c. How do you normally engage with spectator sports?

Appendix D

- d. Do you play any sports?
- 7. How is the event going for you today?
 - a. What have you enjoyed?
 - b. What have you not enjoyed?
 - c. Was there anything you did not expect?
- 8. Have you done anything else at the event today besides spectating?
 - a. Why/why not?
- 9. Would you attend another esports event like this one?
 - a. Why/why not?
 - b. What would you like to see at other esports events?
 - c. What would you not like to see at other esports events?
- 10. What has been your favourite aspect of today's event?
 - a. Least favourite?
- 11. How do you think the Australian esports scene is currently going?
 - a. What is it currently lacking?
 - b. How could it improve? What would you like to see going into the future?
- 12. Is there anything else you would like to add?




Appendix E

Study 3 interview guide (conducted with GGEZ's owner)

1. Can you describe to me the concept behind GGEZ?
2. How did you develop the bar's concept?
3. Why did you decide to set up an esports bar?
4. What inspired the layout/aesthetics of the bar?
5. As the owner, what are your main responsibilities?
6. How would you describe the demographics of your patrons?
7. What kind of eSports spectator comes to GGEZ?
8. What have you noticed people usually do while at the bar?
9. Why do you think people come to the bar/why do people watch esports here?
10. How does watching esports at GGEZ compare to watching it elsewhere?
11. How does the timing of major eSports tournaments effect business/ what impacts business the most?
12. How do you decide which esports to show?
13. Which esports have you found to be the most popular among patrons?
14. How do you see the bar evolving/progressing into the future/ what direction do you see the bar going in the future?
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix F

Declarations for a thesis with publication

Declaration for a thesis with publication		 THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE	
<p>PhD and MPhil students may include a primary research publication in their thesis in lieu of a chapter if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student contributed greater than 50% of the content in the publication and is the “primary author”, ie. the student was responsible primarily for the planning, execution and preparation of the work for publication • The student has approval to include the publication in their thesis from their Advisory Committee • It is a primary publication that reports on original research conducted by the student during their enrolment • The initial draft of the work was written by the student and any subsequent editing in response to co-authors and editors reviews was performed by the student • The publication is not subject to any obligations or contractual agreements with a third party that would constrain its inclusion in the thesis <p>Students must submit this form, along with <i>Co-author authorisation forms</i> completed by each co-author (combined as a single file), when the thesis is submitted to the Thesis Examination System: https://tes.app.unimelb.edu.au/. If you are including multiple publications in your thesis you will need to list each publication on this form. Further information on this policy is available at: gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/preparing-my-thesis/thesis-with-publication</p>			
A. STUDENT'S DECLARATION			
<p>I declare that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the information below is accurate • the publication(s) below meets the requirements to be included in the thesis • The advisory committee has met and agreed to the inclusion of the publication(s) in the student's thesis • All co-authors of the publication(s) have reviewed the information below and have agreed to its veracity. <p><i>Co-Author Authorisation forms</i> for each co-author are attached.</p>			
Student's name	Student's signature	Date (dd/mm/yy)	
David Jian-Jia Cumming		15/10/2020	
PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION			
Supervisor's name	Supervisor's signature	Date (dd/mm/yy)	
Martin Gibbs		27/10/2020	
B. PUBLICATION DETAILS (to be completed by the student)			
Click on this box and on the “+” button in the bottom right corner to enter multiple publications.			
Full title	Understanding the experience of Australian eSports spectatorship		
Authors	David Cumming		
Student's contribution (%)	100%	Volume/page numbers	Vol. 15
Journal or book name	Proceedings of the 2018 DiGRA Conference		
Status	<input type="checkbox"/> Accepted and In-press <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Published <input type="checkbox"/> In progress		Date accepted/ published July 2018

Appendix F

<h3 style="margin: 0;">Declaration for a thesis with publication</h3>	 THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
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PhD and MPhil students may include a primary research publication in their thesis in lieu of a chapter if:

- The student contributed greater than 50% of the content in the publication and is the “primary author”, ie. the student was responsible primarily for the planning, execution and preparation of the work for publication
- The student has approval to include the publication in their thesis from their Advisory Committee
- It is a primary publication that reports on original research conducted by the student during their enrolment
- The initial draft of the work was written by the student and any subsequent editing in response to co-authors and editors reviews was performed by the student
- The publication is not subject to any obligations or contractual agreements with a third party that would constrain its inclusion in the thesis


Students must submit this form, along with *Co-author authorisation forms* completed by each co-author (combined as a single file), when the thesis is submitted to the Thesis Examination System: <https://tes.app.unimelb.edu.au/>. If you are including multiple publications in your thesis you will need to list each publication on this form. Further information on this policy is available at: gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/preparing-my-thesis/thesis-with-publication

A. STUDENT’S DECLARATION

I declare that:

- the information below is accurate
- the publication(s) below meets the requirements to be included in the thesis
- The advisory committee has met and agreed to the inclusion of the publication(s) in the student’s thesis
- All co-authors of the publication(s) have reviewed the information below and have agreed to its veracity.

Co-Author Authorisation forms for each co-author are attached.

Student’s name	Student’s signature	Date (dd/mm/yy)
David Jian-Jia Cumming		24/10/2020

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR’S DECLARATION


Supervisor’s name	Supervisor’s signature	Date (dd/mm/yy)
Martin Gibbs		27/10/2020

B. PUBLICATION DETAILS *(to be completed by the student)*

Click on this box and on the “+” button in the bottom right corner to enter multiple publications.

Full title	Between places: spectatorship at an Australian esports bar		
Authors	David Cumming		
Student’s contribution (%)	80%	Volume/page numbers	N/A
Journal or book name	Proceedings of DiGRAA 2019: What's Next?		
Status	<input type="checkbox"/> Accepted and In-press <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Published <input type="checkbox"/> In progress		Date accepted/ published January 2019


Appendix F

<h3 style="margin: 0;">Co-author authorisation form</h3> <p>All co-authors must complete this form. By signing below co-authors agree to the listed publication being included in the student's thesis and that the student contributed greater than 50% of the content of the publication and is the "primary author" ie. the student was responsible primarily for the planning, execution and preparation of the work for publication.</p> <p>In cases where all members of a large consortium are listed as authors of a publication, only those that actively collaborated with the student on material contained within the thesis should complete this form. This form is to be used in conjunction with the <i>Declaration for a thesis with publication form</i>.</p> <p>Students must submit this form, along with the <i>Declaration for thesis with publication form</i>, when the thesis is submitted to the Thesis Examination System: https://tes.app.unimelb.edu.au/</p> <p>Further information on this policy and the requirements is available at: gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/preparing-my-thesis/thesis-with-publication</p>	 THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
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A. PUBLICATION DETAILS <i>(to be completed by the student)</i>		
Full title	Between places: spectatorship at an Australian esports bar	
Authors	David Cumming, Martin Gibbs, Wally Smith	
Student's contribution (%)	80	
Journal or book name	Proceedings of DiGRAA 2019: What's Next?	
Volume/page numbers	N/A	
Status	<input type="checkbox"/> Accepted and In-press <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Published <input type="checkbox"/> In progress	Date accepted/published 01/2019

B. CO-AUTHOR'S DECLARATION <i>(to be completed by the collaborator)</i>		
I authorise the inclusion of this publication in the student's thesis and certify that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the declaration made by the student on the <i>Declaration for a thesis with publication form</i> correctly reflects the extent of the student's contribution to this work; the student contributed greater than 50% of the content of the publication and is the "primary author" ie. the student was responsible primarily for the planning, execution and preparation of the work for publication. 		
Co-author's name	Co-author's signature	Date (dd/mm/yy)
Martin Gibbs	<i>Martin Gibbs</i>	27/10/2020

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Co-author authorisation form


All co-authors must complete this form. By signing below co-authors agree to the listed publication being included in the student's thesis and that the student contributed greater than 50% of the content of the publication and is the "primary author" ie. the student was responsible primarily for the planning, execution and preparation of the work for publication.

In cases where all members of a large consortium are listed as authors of a publication, only those that actively collaborated with the student on material contained within the thesis should complete this form. This form is to be used in conjunction with the *Declaration for a thesis with publication form*.

Students must submit this form, along with the *Declaration for thesis with publication form*, when the thesis is submitted to the Thesis Examination System: <https://tes.app.unimelb.edu.au/>

Further information on this policy and the requirements is available at:
gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/preparing-my-thesis/thesis-with-publication

A. PUBLICATION DETAILS <i>(to be completed by the student)</i>		
Full title	Between places: spectatorship at an Australian esports bar	
Authors	David Cumming, Martin Gibbs, Wally Smith	
Student's contribution (%)	80	
Journal or book name	Proceedings of DiGRAA 2019: What's Next?	
Volume/page numbers	N/A	
Status	<input type="checkbox"/> Accepted and In-press <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Published <input type="checkbox"/> In progress	Date accepted/published 01/2019

B. CO-AUTHOR'S DECLARATION <i>(to be completed by the collaborator)</i>		
I authorise the inclusion of this publication in the student's thesis and certify that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the declaration made by the student on the <i>Declaration for a thesis with publication form</i> correctly reflects the extent of the student's contribution to this work; the student contributed greater than 50% of the content of the publication and is the "primary author" ie. the student was responsible primarily for the planning, execution and preparation of the work for publication. 		
Co-author's name	Co-author's signature	Date (dd/mm/yy)
Wally Smith		27/10/20