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Altruism Online: An Ethnographic Exploration into League of Legends

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Opening Vignette

In 2011, I was introduced to a video game called League of Legends, where myself, and 12 million¹ active daily players would log on and compete in a five versus five game that grew with the community, for the community. Three years later, 12 million unique active daily players would turn into 27 million unique active players per day. Not only did League of Legends grow as a game, but it became a fully flushed economy as a spectator sport, a fashion statement, and even a black market where even prestige and social capital in the form of ranking could be purchased. Globally, League of Legends was becoming the fastest growing sport², and in doing so, it began connecting players and fans together from all parts of the world. One of these players was Soren Bjerg from Denmark.

A nineteen year old from Denmark loads up his third game of League of Legends for the day as twenty-two thousand viewers eagerly wait to spectate his performance on the Rift. Soren Bjerg, known as TSM Bjergsen, moved to California from Denmark in 2013 after signing a two year contract with Team Solo Mid, a competitive League of Legends team, where he would be playing mid lane as one of the five team members. TSM Bjergsen is not the only player to come from overseas on Team Solo Mid, and with the money he makes through streaming with ad revenue, monthly subscriptions, and donations, combined with the money he makes from his contract at TSM, it is no wonder he came over. While existing as a globalized source of employment for those elite few good enough to compete at the professional level, pooling the best of the best from all across the world means communication and cooperation can be difficult, and Bjerg must keep this in mind as he is deployed onto the Summoner's Rift, the battleground of League of Legends, to compete for his own personal standings in the ladder.

Bjerg has achieved what so many gamers have dreamed of; becoming a professional gamer. But, the job is not as glamorous as it may appear. Despite having a paid contract, Bjerg's job security is much lower than others. He must always be winning games of ranked solo queue in order to keep his position on the ladder as high as possible and constantly reassert his

¹ <http://www.kotaku.com.au/2012/10/the-number-of-people-who-play-league-of-legends-just-blows-my-mind/>

² <https://medium.com/@Oddshot/the-fastest-growing-spectator-sport-you-re-not-watching-e3fdae27b6bd>

dominance over the community. In addition to having to maintain his solo que status as one of the best players, Bjerg must consistently perform against the best coordinated teams in LCS, League Championship Series, where the stakes are not only his job, but also his entire team's livelihood. LCS will not be for a while as Bjerg is still playing solo queue when I catch his team on Cho Gath, one of over a hundred playable characters known as champions.

The stakes are high as Bjerg enters mid lane to face his opponent, an Orianna, as whoever wins this game will be placed higher on the ladder, while the losers will be placed lower, and closer to demotion from Challenger, the highest tier of play, to Masters. When the weight of a win or loss is this high, communication, mechanics, and strategy become key. While during this game, Bjerg tries to entertain the twenty-two thousand people watching him, he must also concentrate on the victory. The viewer can tell that tensions are high when Bjerg swears as he misses cs (creep score), last hits on minions that give gold that is used to buy items to make one's champion more powerful in order to secure the win. He thanks viewers that sporadically subscribe to his stream, the medium he uses to display his games that viewers watch. With a paid subscription, viewers can skip advertisements while Bjerg plays gaining himself additional revenue. The game goes on with constant typing, and communication to his teammates, as Bjerg calls his opposing laner's activities and cooldowns (when key abilities will be available for use). Bjerg gets ganked (surprise attacked) by Lustboy, a fellow teammate on TSM playing on the other team in a solo que game. He laughs as he avoids Lustboy and yells at him from in the house they are both playing in. This is not an uncommon sight, as players at Bjerg's level constantly play against the same people in solo que, sometimes these people, like Lustboy, are their own teammates. Calling Lustboy's failed map movement in chat, Bjerg gives his bot lane the chance to play aggressive and acquire a kill, this kill then gives Bjerg's team the precious time window of a four versus five to make a move towards a neutral objective, the dragon. Acquiring the dragon will give Bjerg's entire team a small buff for the entire game making it easier for them to push down the map and end the game by destroying the enemy nexus. Obtaining dragon was a commitment of too many resources, and Bjerg's team is now out of position as the enemy team circles around them and instantly Aces them, an ace being when an entire team is killed. Bjerg's teammates are deeply impacted by the Ace stating that the game is not going well and they will probably lose due to that one fight. But, the game is not over yet and Bjerg states in chat that "We cannot let that put us on tilt" and that "We have to keep the comms

clear". These precious words will allow Bjerg's team to push on for another fifteen minutes, but another lost fight caused by faulty communication forces the team to admit defeat and surrender.

Introducing League of Legends

The complex degree of strategy and coordination that League of Legends requires puts players who typically know nothing of each other in a position where trust and teamwork is of the utmost necessity. With both money and their reputation creating stress, how players of all walks of life can coordinate rapidly and effectively is truly a wonder. How they do it, can be discerned through observations and interviews, my two research methods utilized, but how they do it typically changes from player to player. While it is a romantic ideal to study and focus on the .01 percent of players that perform at Bjerg's level, observations of coordination, teamwork, and altruistic behavior must in turn be used upon the other 99.99 percent.

League of Legends saw 1,779,636 years of logged gameplay time during the year of 2013³, more time spent than even fathomable. To put this in perspective, the anatomically modern human is only 200,000 years old, so League of Legends players in just one year, spent enough time playing League of Legends as nine times the amount of time our species is old. Since 2013, the play time and population have only grown, and with this growth, the demographics have also changed. As of 2014, ninety percent of players are male, and sixty percent of players are enrolled or have completed some college. This substantial population, and incredible time dedication brings League of Legends out of the realm of fantasy and into one with real life impacts and large scale cultural influence.

League of Legends provides a large and important environment for studying relations, communication, and cooperation in a globalized world. By being a complex team based strategy game, and also by being a globally accessible e-sport, League of Legends is a social model that may hold lessons in communication and cooperation that can build altruism amongst individuals from across the globe. According to the definition of altruism used by social behaviorist,

³ <http://www.ign.com/articles/2013/10/18/league-of-legends-infographic-highlights-eye-popping-numbers>

Hamilton (1964), altruism is social behavior that reduces the fitness of the organism performing the behavior, but boosts the fitness of others. Humans are much more likely to perform altruistically when they can see the individual being bolstered by their sacrifice. While altruism is primarily used to describe non-human animals, sociologist Boyd and Richerson (2006), Bowles and Gintis (2011), and Sterelny (2012) have gone into great detail debating over the extent that altruism impacts humans. While culture has a great effect upon altruism, these authors, and many social researchers have come to a consensus of altruism being a kin related behavior when examined amongst humans. As the vampire bat will often spit up its own meal of blood to help other starving vampire bats from its den survive, so will the modern human for their den, or kin. However, these authors find that altruism is less likely to occur between humans, and even other nonhuman animals that do not share a den, or kin. When people are as diverse and different as their environments and culture, how can altruism exist in a globalized world?

In examining this question the scope of a globalized world seems entirely impossible. It is near impossible to measure how altruism operates on a global level, and the scale of our global world is always expanding with the need for citizens of the globe to “be aware of the global nature of societal issues, to care about people in distant places, to understand the nature of global economic integration, to appreciate the interconnectedness and interdependence of peoples, to respect and protect cultural diversity, to fight for social justice for all, and to protect planet Earth-home for all human beings. This is a difficult task...”(Zhao, 2009) There is a need for people who have never met each other to be able to work together in order to accomplish the most troublesome of challenges such as the energy crisis, global climate change, and human conflict. In times of dire need, we need to collaborate in what gamers, such as myself, would call an epic win.

Throughout this paper, I will discuss what may lead to the “dreamwork”, that is the moment in gameplay when teams function with perfect teamwork, and I will also discuss threats to the “dreamwork” such as toxicity, and anonymity and how these create conflict with communication.

This complex game that has taken up a large part of the past four years of my life must be broken down into its basic elements in order to be examined as a source of anonymous

teamwork, cooperation, and at times, even altruism. League of Legends is a five versus five multiplayer battle arena that takes place on one main map, called Summoner's Rift. To



understand the game, one must understand the map the game is played on. Each of the ten players of the Rift pick one champion, or playable character, from a pool of over one hundred champions. They are then spawned at the start of the game at each respective end of the map (the North East corner, or the South West corner), where their nexus is. To end the game, players must destroy the enemy nexus (the one on the opposite side to where they have spawned). To get to the nexus players must push through three lanes and destroy the enemy towers preventing them from just going straight to the enemy nexus. Spawning at each nexus, are waves of minions that clash against each other in each lane. Players can obtain last hits on these minions, called C.S.ing (short for creep scoring), in order to obtain gold to then buy items. In between each lane is the neutral jungle, where one player, known as the jungler farms (the process of last hitting and obtaining gold) neutral camps of monsters that spawn throughout the jungle. In addition to lanes, towers, and jungle monsters, there are two neutral objectives that make the game easier to complete when capture/slain, these objectives are known as dragon, and baron.

The image above shows Summoner's Rift without any players, minions, or neutral monsters. The organization of the map determines the meta-role positions of the players. Certain

champions are made for specific roles, these roles being top laner, middle laner, attack damage carry (also known as marksman) and support (the bottom laners) and finally the jungler. Variation in champions and roles allows for different strategies and different ways to destroy the enemy nexus and achieve the victory. Champion abilities, of which each champion has four, create their “kit” which typically determines what they are used as and for. For example a champion with a kit that clears jungle camps fast through area of effect damaging abilities will be used as the jungler, while a ranged champion that uses primarily physical attacks will be used as an attack damage carry, or marksman. While meta-roles will be discussed more throughout different sections of this paper, the bulk of what one needs to know to understand the game is already stated.

Methods

Using a pilot ethnographic study I have sampled a small group of League of Legends players who also attend the University of Puget Sound prior to beginning my primary research which took place in San Jose California and throughout the internet. Student League of Legends players at the University of Puget Sound represent a large proportion of players with their age, enrollment in college, and sex. Of the six players I spent time with, only one of them was a female, and only one of them was in a higher level of play (Diamond tier) which I will discuss later. The players I spent time with were of all different ethnic backgrounds including, Native American, Mexican American, Peruvian, and more.

Participants at the University of Puget Sound assisted me in creating a base knowledge that I would later use to compare to the other observations I would acquire from competitive games, second hand interviews of professional gamers, first hand interviews at gaming venues such as AFK gaming lounge in San Jose, spectating streams, e-mail interviews, and game development conferences including one I attended first hand in Seattle called the Penny Arcade Expo. Additional field sites include Reddit, a social media website that many League of Legends players use, and Twitch, a streaming platform where professional players such as Bjensen will broadcast their games and answer questions from the viewers.

Creating interview questions began with examining theories of cooperation and altruism and then applying these theorists' work to my initial participant observations as a player of League of Legends for four years. Questions fluctuate based upon who I was interviewing and depending on the interviewee's knowledge of the game, some interviews were far more useful than others. Interviews were based upon opt-in convenience and snowball sampling, while some even existed over email. Observations ranged from my own experience in game, to spectating others play, to spectating formal competitive matches and subsequent interviews. One of the most helpful observations comes from the League Championship Series, the equivalent to NFL for American Football, which provides for second hand interviews, and audio content of professional players communicating in game during five versus five team fights. My final field site is a cloud based communication server where players of high skill coordinate in game and out of game in a League of Legends black market, where their full time job is to "boost", a term used for raising another players ranking by playing on that players account, and sell highly ranked accounts. The fieldsites both virtual and physical would provide for a fully flushed image of League of Legends through an ethnographic approach that would continually reveal more about the people, the culture, and the interactions of players on Summoner's Rift.

I. Becoming a Summoner; Crafting an Identity

Asking individuals how they became League of Legends players always provokes an introductory anecdote beginning with how the player learned about League of Legends and ending with where they have ended up in the community. League of Legends operates within a free to play model, where the parent company, Riot, makes money based upon in game cosmetic purchases of champion skins, which change the way one's character looks, or purchases of playable characters, champions. This free to play model paired with the easily accessible computer hardware requirements have made it the most popular video game in the world. Players typically are introduced to League of Legends in the same way I meet them, through snowball, and word of mouth connections. Every player brings with them their own identity, one constructed through their own experiences and nature from the bumps and bruises that are routinely administered by social living. This preconceived identity, which I will call the existent

world identity, must confront, or adapt to the virtual identity that exists in League of Legends as what the game calls the *Summoner*⁴. How players get from their existent world identity to their virtual identity and the fluidity at which they can jump from stage to stage in a dramaturgical fashion can often differentiate victors from losers. The idea of moving from performance to performance is one created by Erving Goffman who stated that human interaction is dependent upon the setting (time, place, values, norms, audience), and the better one is at “stage jumping”, or performing multiple roles, the more successful this person will be (Goffman, 1959). How players can take upon multiple roles both as their existent world identity, and their virtual world identity varies with each individual. A closer examination of the creation and fluidity of these identities and how they impact success in cooperation will be one of the primary focuses of not only this chapter, but also this paper.

League of Legends is a semiotic domain that allows for new identities to form alongside old ones. A semiotic domain is “an area or set of activities where people think, act, and value in certain ways” (Gee, 2007), the perfect way to describe Summoner’s Rift, the battlegrounds of League of Legends. Because League of Legends is a semiotic domain, players must learn to operate, communicate, and adapt within it. These three things require critical thinking and active learning for new and veteran players alike. First players must learn to operate, they must learn their selected champion’s four abilities, and the controls that come with that champion. Players must learn how to traverse the dangers of the Rift, what they can and cannot do, and this is aided by learning to communicate. Semiotic domains are shared spaces, and League of Legends is shared by nine other Summoners. Here players form social groups and have the potential to form closer bonds to others they may never actually meet face to face. This environment of communication can make the first and third requirement for a semiotic domain, operating and adapting (Gee, 2007). The semiotic domain of League of Legends has its own rules that I will explore further throughout this paper. These rules are largely community created and give

⁴ According to the lore of League of Legends, players take on the role of a Summoner who can summon a champion to represent themselves. Players can choose from over a hundred champions to diversify their role and their team composition. Each champion has their own reason and lore to joining the League of Legends and being called upon by a Summoner to destroy the enemy Nexus where the enemy Summoners are located, thus ending the game.

League of Legends players a stronger sense of *communitas* (Turner, 1969), a powerful network of social support through liminality (Turner, 1974), and a fully fleshed virtual identity.

To achieve status as a League of Legends player, new players must go through a series of stages that shape their transition into the community. The first stage to becoming a player, separation (Turner, 1969), where a player is placed into a tutorial period as a level one Summoner. The tutorial is completely isolated from other players where mechanics and gameplay elements are slowly introduced so as not to overwhelm the player. Allies and enemies alike are played by artificial intelligence, whose difficulty and complexity increase as the player becomes familiarized with the game. The removal of the beginner from the rest of the community serves to allow this player to take their time with understanding the game. The beginner has now leveled their profile (Summoner) beyond level one after completing the tutorial level. Versus AI, and Teambuilder game modes become available as the next step to understanding the game by introducing non-computer controlled allies and eventually a pregame lobby that allows for the construction of teams in player versus player (Teambuilder). During this liminal stage (Turner, 1969), the player transitions into Player versus Player competitions with players around their skill level and play time being matched together. The player must then climb a total of thirty levels in order to achieve the highest level and unlock all gamemodes including Ranked. Once achieving the highest Summoner level, the player undergoes reaggregation and incorporation (Turner, 1969) into the fully fledged game. More complicated strategies become available once achieving the maximum level (30), where the only thing left to do is ascend the Ranked Ladder and become Rank One (Challenger).

Rising through this multi-staged process has many secondary side effects that help to immerse the player into the community. While the extensive leveling process is initially made to introduce players to a complex game at a slower pace, it has secondary effects that help to increase a stronger group identity through a rewards based system. As one gains experience and unlocks in game items as rewards they feel more closely tied to those who have also gone through this process and gained rewards during it (Kamau, 2012). Players are also rewarded for positive behavior through an honor and report system which I will continually discuss throughout this paper. Players who are honored and positively reviewed by their peers are able to receive additional in game rewards that can be broadcasted publicly, such as a profile icon, or

can be used during game such as an unlockable champion. According to Kamau, 2012, these rewards during initiation especially will create a stronger group identity which can positively impact teamwork and communication in general.

This multi-staged advancement system that each new player must undergo in combination with the justice system, the Tribunal, create an online community that bonds gamers together with a strong sense of *communitas*. The Tribunal was introduced in 2011 as an application that came alongside League of Legends allowing players to judge the behavior of others that have been reported in game by their teammates. The Tribunal has since been taken down, yet not forgotten, as the data it has collected through its three years of activity have created a new rendition of the Tribunal. Throughout its lifespan, the original Tribunal, operated on a vote system, where players logging on would have to come to a consensus on what rules they wanted to uphold and what behaviors were right or wrong. Together the community looked to reshape itself and reform its own playerbase from within. To explain more on how the Tribunal operated Jeffrey Lin, also known as Riot Lyte, a neuroscientist at the head of Riot's player behavior department, has shared this anecdote, "When people were posting in the Tribunal and they saw offensive language, they'd post it all over social media. They were like, "Riot, should we punish offensive language? What should we do here?" And we were like, "No, no, no. We want you guys to figure that out. Tell us what you think you guys should do." Over about six months, what you actually saw, the first couple of cases, it was about fifty-fifty. Half of the people were voting "punish" for offensive language, and half were not." Later on however, the community came to a conclusion that "as soon as you say offensive language and it's directed at somebody, that's verbal abuse, and that's not okay. That's never okay." But if it's just offensive language, like, "Oh, fuck. I missed that skill shot," nobody cares." (Jeffrey Linn, video interview 3-15-15) With the original Tribunal the community created a sense of right and wrong which bound together players both metaphorically and literally as all players had to sign the Summoner's Code, an agreement to abide by the community created rules. The Summoner's Code, a rule set created by players, is enforced by all players who have the ability to report other players after each game. These reports create cases within the Tribunal that are then pardoned, or punished based upon the verdict of other players. This gives the community the power of legislation, execution, and judgement, dispersed equally to every player in the community. Even after the community has judged a player as committing an offense to the Summoner's Code,

typically resulting in a temporary ban from the game (three days to three weeks depending on the offense), that convicted player receives a message stating, *“Your peers judged your behavior to be far below the standards of the League of Legends community. Think through the conversation and reflect on your words. League is an intense, competitive game, but every player deserves respect”* (Tribunal, 2015). The message players who commit offenses receive reminds them that this game only operates because of their peers and because of the other players they have disrespected. Additionally, this message reminds the player whose behavior is in question that League of Legends functions with a justice system entirely run by the player base, and that by playing the game, each player is agreeing to operate under the community based laws, the Summoner’s Code. These equal powers create a political justice system like no other, which unifies League of Legends players with a strong sense of *communitas*.

To further enhance this sense of *communitas*, Riot Games, has recently deployed an experimental event called Pool Party. During the Pool Party event, players were rewarded points for playing in premade teams, and for giving gifts to other players. As a whole, the community had one week to raise as many points as they could in order to unlock bonuses for the entire player base. These bonuses ranged from extra in game currency to free champions and in game items. Together, the community collected over 45 million points during the weeklong event, with 5 points being awarded for every win as a premade team, and 10 points being awarded for every in game gift sent. Rallying together players throughout the community to take part in large scale events similar to a Ritual can be looked at through a Durkheim lens as a way to bond players together through a social glue. Events like this become one of the many ways League of Legends players form a collective consciousness and craft a shared identity (Durkheim, 1985). There are a list of holidays specific to League of Legends players such as the Pool Party, the Harrowing, or Snowdown Showdown, which are all events linked with existing world holidays, or seasons that bring with them opportunities for players to gift one another, participate in special game modes, and unlock limited in game items.

When I interviewed several League of Legends players of a wide range of skill as to how they identify as a League of Legends player off the rift I saw a general trend in responses showing a positive outlook on online gaming in the offline world. Eighteen year old Master tier player (the second highest tier making up the top .01 percent of players), senior in high school,

“Exile of the Blade”, believed that being a gamer throughout high school has changed just in the last four years. “Exile of the Blade” stated that, “Just in the past few years it has become more socially acceptable to be open about being a gamer. No longer do we speak of playing games in hushed voices in the halls, but now a lot of us, especially myself, speak openly about our lives in gaming and even are proud of it.” (Exile of the Blade, Interview, 7-8-2015) His classmate, “Prime Botz”, while being at a much more recreational level of play, is also much more vocal about his gaming identity in everyday life. Prime Botz expressed the fact that he is as open as possible about being a gamer in order to find others like himself, and while he may not be at the same social prestige in the League of Legends community as his classmate, Exile of the Blade, he still hopes to find other players at his school and his local community.

To create a more complete picture of identity in professional e-sports, I interviewed, Cognitive Gaming’s Heroes of the Storm team. A member of the Heroes of the Storm team for Cognitive Gaming, a company that sponsors teams in many e-sports such as League of Legends, Smite, and Super Smash Brothers, commented upon the way the outsiders view e-sports by saying, “While gaming in general has become more of an acceptable hobby it is still not a respected form of competition. When I speak with others who are not insiders about my career, I am typically met with humiliating questions and doubt, but when these same people see what we actually do every day to stay competitive, and when they actually take the time to understand the game, their views of my career choice drastically change.” (Professional Heroes of the Storm player, interview 7-16-2015) Here, the stigma towards competitive gaming is addressed as a spoiling agent towards the identity of a professional gamer. While stigma is still detrimental towards the identity of the pros, a mutually held belief amongst Cognitive’s Heroes of the Storm team, has them believing that eventually e-sports will be held with the same esteem as other sports. With the recent acknowledgement of League of Legends as an official sport⁵ by the United States government, and the growing popularity of e-sports in general, stigma towards gamers and professionals alike is likely to consistently fall allowing for many real world benefits for the gaming population.

⁵ <http://www.scpr.org/blogs/newmedia/2013/07/15/14255/us-government-recognizes-league-of-legends-video-g/>

The game leading the mainstream social acceptance of gaming is League of Legends. With large scale events such as the 2013 world championship at the Staples Center (15,000 seats) for, and the 2014 world championship at Sangam Stadium⁶ (40,000) in South Korea, League of Legends is demanding to be heard. League of Legends has created a cultural identity, that is especially seen in South Korea, where e-sports is as the New York Times columnist, Paul Mozur, puts it, “a point of national pride.” (Mozur, 2014) For South Korea, whose interest in e-sports arose out of harsh economic times in the early 1990’s leading to investment in cheaper infrastructure and online ventures, e-sports have become a symbol of a generational gap. For the youth, e-sports plays a pivotal role in social existence, while professional gamers offer a view of an alternative life to that of the twelve hour school day. For many adults, and parents alike, the idea that their youth can identify as gamers, is merely a stain, to the primary role of each child being a student. As e-sports have grown, the rate by which individuals enter the social networks they create grows with them. This is especially the case for League of Legends players, where the scale, and global impact of the game has led to a community of enormous size and substantial power.

Players feel important and relatively equal, with only skill as a dividing social factor, and because of this League of Legends brings with it a powerful sense of *communitas* that, through the depth and complexity of the game, can create an identity that every player can share via their common experiences within the game. Being a League of Legends player means sharing a past-time, a sport, a language, and even a new set of laws. The shared semiotic domain, and the demanding requirement to communicate create the ideal setting for individuals of a shared identity to create expansive social networks and truly become a part of the community.

By giving players a significant and egalitarian role within the community and creating a sense of accomplishment and pride in achieving status as a Summoner, League of Legends creates an environment that is intrinsically driven to improve itself. Many interviews have suggested that unlike other games, many players take pride in openly identifying as a League of Legends player allowing for social cohesion and support to extend from the online community to the offline world. Connections from the online community can create social capital in the offline world, as I have experience first-hand in the use of snowball sampling to conduct interviews that

⁶ <http://www.riotgames.com/articles/20141201/1628/worlds-2014-numbers>

have all stemmed from individuals I have met in game. The value of the individual in the community through governmental powers, the multi-staged system of becoming a player, and the benefits of becoming part of the community, make League of Legends an atypical social network that is both democratic and intrinsically driven. League of Legends runs on the passion of its player base who take pride in their hobby, their sport, and even their culture, allowing it to consistently improve and grow.

While it is unrealistic to look at the role of a League of Legends player in the community and say that governing bodies can learn from this radical form of online democracy, we can learn from the intrinsically driven community itself. Creating a global community to decide what acceptable behavior is, and then reinforcing it through its own intrinsically motivated members could be crucial in addressing micro problems that impact us on a global level. The micro problems I am discussing here could be some as simple as the destruction of shared resources, or as complex as creating accessible education for sustainable farming practices. The original Tribunal in League of Legends only worked because players committed to it on a micro level, by participating as a judge for as little as five minutes a day. A global community with a similar micro-justice approach could address the small claims that add up to compose the bigger picture problems. With individuals who identify strongly within the global community, participating on a micro-level could become something as simple as taking small amounts of time to clean a shared space of trash. Further adding a rewards system to these micro-engagements with a tracked rankings ladder could provide more incentive to players of the global community. While we already have rewards for doing things such as buying an eco-friendly car, or donating money to charities, both of which can lead to a tax rebate, furthering the intricacy and depth of a system such as this could greatly better our global society.

II. Language of Legends

Establishing a basic understanding of the vocabulary in League of Legends is key to successful cooperation, and the more one specializes in the dialect of League, the better one is able to communicate and strategize in a complex task. While individuals of all different language play League of Legends, take the example of Team Solo Mid, a North American team, with

players from all around the world speaking English, Korean, and Danish, every server has their own way of communicating through slang that allows for rapid deliveries of information. Here I turn to members of the League of Legends community at all different levels of play, a professional e-sports team by the name of Cognitive gaming, and e-sports manager and coach, Brad Fry.

To understand skill and respect within the community, I turn to Hailtothebeef, a bronze support and mid main (the meta-role positions he fulfills). League of Legend's ladder based skill rankings operate upon League points, "which the players gets when they win allowing them to move up in the ladder and eventually get promoted to the next division. Divisions go from five (V) to one (I) in each league. Leagues go from Bronze, where I am, to Silver, then Gold, the Platinum, then Diamond, then Masters/Challenger." Hailtothebeef's understanding of promotions into higher leagues and demotions were a bit lacking, but he did reveal a small insight into the mentality of many players in his position. Hailtothebeef provided an interesting juxtaposition to the communication in both my level of play (Diamond) and in professional levels of play (Masters and Challenger). When discussing the way his teammates communicated Hailtothebeef stated that there was almost no communication past the initial drafting phase, the phase of the game before the game actually starts where teammates are allotted a certain amount of time to pick their team composition and delegate Meta role positions. Hailtothebeef described this draft phase as the primary phase of communication and when I asked him if players called timers for important cooldowns, or objectives (the most basic and essential form of communication) he responded with rarely.

Hailtothebeef went on to say that "while there is a basic attempt to communicate and coordinate movements, these attempts usually fall to pieces as soon as one person becomes *salty*. The grey screen (referring to the way one's screen becomes grey while they are waiting to respawn after dying) is the time to rage." (Hailtothebeef, personal interview, 3-21). He explained that wins and losses are determined based upon one person becoming emotionally detached from the game, or angry with her, or his performance, or the performance of her, or his team. While Hailtothebeef knows much of the League of Legends dialect that helps to coordinate teams rapidly, he believes that very few players at his level understand these terms. He claims to have learned many of these terms from previous videogames that have carried over into League of

Legends and additionally he knows terms that have persisted from Reddit which will be discussed later.

Hailtothebeef's lack of communication in game only becomes an actual source of his skill level when compared to field notes from Bjerg's game described in the introduction.

From Fieldnotes: TSM Lustboy ganks his (Bjerg's) lane unsuccessfully. He (Bjerg) calls his mia (missing in action) as Orianna is roaming (his enemy laner). His communication saves his bot laners as ori looks for the ambush and they had the heads up. Udyr (his jungler) counters the ori in the roam and turns it into some kills largely due to Bjerg's call. Bjerg finds the enemy jungler and calls out her position warning his teammates. Bjerg's top lane plays more aggressive knowing this and lands a kill on his opposing laner, but goes down himself to the tower. Bjerg and jungler (udyr) make a roam bot and counter a gank with their support's wards (items that can be purchased and then placed to give map vision). The fight goes poorly. They are outnumbered and Bjerg goes down and says worth (a common sarcastic phrase effectively apologizing for dying) as he gets some farm(cs). Janna, his support, thought bjerg and udyr were coming down earlier and engaged before bjerg and the jungler got there causing the lost fight.

From these field notes the reader can see two things. First, even competitive games can have lapses in communication creating catastrophic defeats due to the snowbally nature of League of Legends. Rapidly communicating with a specialized dialect is incredibly important in coordinating team members and accomplishing complex tasks. Second, sacrifices must be made in order to cooperate that weaken the individual, such as spending gold, personal income, on map vision, yet strengthen the team to better make plays. Additionally sacrifices are seen in this episode when Bjerg and his jungler try to roam to help alleviate the pressure on their bottom laners (support, and attack damage carry). By doing this, Bjerg and Udyr, the jungler, are forgoing farming (acquiring their own gold) to allow their other teammates to get further ahead. Despite never meeting each other, Bjerg, and his jungler are able to make individual sacrifices in order to aid their teammates.

For now though, I will dissect the first thing we learn from Hailtothebeef and Bjerg's comparative communication, this being the impact of specialized language upon communication, coordination, and teamwork. When applying the concept of Linguistic determinism (Sapir, 1964), which claims that language shapes the way one conceptualizes the world, Hailtothebeef's

communication with his teammates becomes limited by the deficit of vocabulary that allows him and his team to coordinate in ways that Bjerg and his team might. Phrases such as peel, leashing, and focus shifting (fs for short) that are critical in team fights and are used frequently in upper level games, yet completely lost amongst players in HailtotheBeef's experiences. While not knowing the words for these maneuvers does not mean a player does not use these tactics, it is unlikely that teammates can coordinate with tactics that require the entire team to work together without knowing the correct terminology. Acquiring this language comes from adopting the League of Legends identity through the processes described in the previous section. The amount of time put into picking up the language of legends pays off in success within the game.

Linguistic Determinism can be further used to dissect the way players communicate in game by examining the medium used to communicate. For the most part, players communicate using text chat, which in a fast paced game, it is required that players are able to get large points across in a small window of time. Complex strategies and ways of communication are often boiled down into a system of numbers and letters. In Bjerg's game this is seen when each member of the team calls the time of when a neutral objective (dragon) will be available. For this, players say *d in 2* meaning the dragon will spawn in two minutes, or *d soon prep v*, meaning that players need to prepare vision and map control around the dragon before it is available for contestation. In Bjerg's games, a spectator can also see heavy emphasis on cooldown timers being called that allow the rest of the team to act upon windows where the enemy is at its weakest. This may look like, *ori f 1314*, meaning that the enemy laner (orianna) has no flash (primary means of escaping ambushes) until the game time 13:14. For players in HailtotheBeef's games, calling timers and asking for coordinated strikes are relatively foreign. This rapid communication and system of specialized dialect, may be the source of what keeps novice players from playing a team based game as a team.

When I spent time with professional gaming team, Cognitive gaming, I noticed something entirely endemic to their communications. Cognitive gaming put heavy emphasis on assigning short hand names for locations on the map. They call certain areas, such as the Bermuda Triangle, reference to the amount of care one must take when circumventing this part of the map. For Cognitive gaming, the Bermuda Triangle is a place where three bushes are very near each other limiting visibility of one's surroundings to a triangular shape. The lack of

visibility makes this area opportune for ambushes depending on which team has better map control, thus the name, the Bermuda Triangle, serves two fold, as both a warning and a physical description.

S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G., a linguistic model for understanding language by Dell Hymes, can provide valuable insight into the communication of a typical League of Legends game. Hymes' acronym stands for *Setting* and *Scene*, *Participants*, *Ends*, *Act Sequence*, *Key*, *Instrumentalities*, *Norms*, and *Genre*, providing for a comprehensive model to understand the multiple dimensions of speech in a given community.

When using this model in the context of League of Legends, the *setting* is the first and easiest aspect to analyze. While being completely dependent on where the player is playing from, the setting is typically in geographical isolation, yet for professional teams, importance is placed upon playing together in the same room. It is largely considered a fundamental part of being on a gaming team to live together and spend every hour of every waking moment together in order to build functional relationships that will then bolster in game performance. The importance placed upon physical location is dependent on the players, but manager for Cognitive, Brad Fry, claims that "Living together, the only advantage that I can see in terms of living together between housing teams and non-housing teams is that, focus. You get everyone onto the same page with their focus, their dedication, their schedule. But I think that you could do that and achieve that by creating a workplace, and then having them all live individually and separately because I think that like you said, some gamers can't distinguish the real world from the game, and having a separation like that helps them distinguish it, which I think helps them perform better." (Brad Fry, personal interview, 7-16-2015) Fry's players second this opinion believing that the personal interaction experience comes with practicing together. Member of Cognitive Gaming's Heroes of the Storm roster, Mike "Glaurung" Fisk, believed that "to do it optimally you would have a separate workspace (from living space)." (Mike Fisk, personal interview, 7-16-2015) It is important to note that this interview I am referencing was with both Fisk and Fry at the same time. This is likely to have influenced Fisk's stance on a shared living space. While separate living spaces may be ideal to keep the ever-looming context of social life away from the work place, this is a minority opinion amongst most gaming teams who see the blending of work spaces and social spaces as a necessity for building teamwork and trust.

The next piece of Hymes's S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. model, the *participants* can differ from game to game. *Participants* in League of Legends can be friends and they can be enemies. Players have three chat options when they are in game. Standard messaging where the player presses enter then types to their entire team, all chat (/all) where players press shift and enter, and private messaging between the player and one other person where slash followed by the summoner name is used (e.g. /Bjerg). The *participants* of the chat obviously change how communication is used. To share privately sensitive information /S.N.(summoner name) is used, while general strategy and banter is mostly saved for normal chat, and "sportsmanlike trash talk" is saved for all chat. The impact of these three different types of chat is great, in fact, not too long ago Riot games did an experiment on turning off all chat and making it so players had to select an option in the options menu to manually turn it on. The results were incredible, and in a video interview, Jeffrey Linn, lead analyst on player behavior at Riot Games, stated that, "just one week after this feature went live there was a 32.7 percent drop in negative chat, a 1.9 percent drop in neutral chat, and a 34.5 percent increase in positive chat."(Linn, 2015) What this means is that all chat was primarily used for toxicity and trolling before, but when it was turned into an opt-in process, the tables flipped making it more likely to be used positively. Making all chat an opt-in process, where players had to go out of their way to make it available, made players value it more as a tool for statements like *ggwp*, good game well played.

While the participants did not necessarily change, the way players engaged in conversation with the participants did change, and this flows perfectly into Dell Hymes' S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. model at E, *Ends*. With a change of the mechanics of chat, which are most similar to a change in setting for Hymes' model, the goal of chat also changed from "competitive aggression" to "sportsmanlike salutations". But these are not the only ends for League of Legends communication. Most ends are for cooperative teamwork, using regular chat, while some are for private slanders, using private messaging. When examining competitive play the ends of chat is typically to communicate things that other teammates do not see, such as an incoming gank, or the cooldown of an enemy ability. Equally effective is positive reinforcement in the form of congratulations such as, *gj*, good job, *wp*, well played. The typical conversation in Bjerg's games exclusively contains tactical information, or compliments, while losses contain more "what if" questions, and the occasional *let's just ff*, meaning let's just surrender as (/ff) is the command for calling a surrender vote ending the game early. The typical game according to

Coloradical can be much more toxic with people spending more time “spraying mud in the form of verbal abuse and seeing who comes out the dirtiest, but there is no winning (when spraying mud), there is no one to say who wins because no one does, everyone just gets covered in it... And when someone thinks their particular toxic insult is the best their self-indulged satisfaction goes off the [wayside] because no one really cares, you know, people are just too busy insulting each other to admire another’s artsy verbal abuse.” (Coloradical, personal interview, 4-26)

Coloradical sums up what toxicity amounts to with clear and concise words that I wholeheartedly agree with. There is no winning when the ending purpose is destruction.

To further the understanding of how Hymes’ model plays a role in Cognitive’s communication I spoke with Donald “Scylol” Dobbins, the head *shotcaller* for Cognitive gaming. When discussing the context of a communication within a professional e-sport, Dobbins stated that, “It’s pretty important. We actually had a discussion yesterday about how we say things in comms and how it can come off as derogatory or how it can come off as helpful, so there was a bit, so we cleared up a lot of things on that end, but, yeah I mean context is pretty big, especially when you are in the heat of the moment, and the adrenaline in rushing, you might say things like ‘be careful, be careful’ and that is us just straight up. There is a misconception of the people who are saying ‘be careful’, were just saying be careful as in nothing personal, but then some people were taking it as, ‘well I am being careful you don’t have to tell me’, so that was the biggest context of communication that has come up.” (Donald Dobbins, personal interview, 7-16) With this observation Dobbins has greatly aided his team. He understands that there is more to communication than meets the eye, and that the ear can pick up on sensitive aspects of speech such as tone and pitch in order to deduce more than just what the speaker is saying. This becomes important in Hymes’ ends portion of his model, especially for Dobbins and his team, as the high stakes pressure that accompany the volatile scene of e-sports can create tensions that blow up through presumably simple communications in game.

To most high level players interviewed, the *Act Sequence* (A) is dictated entirely by the game’s pacing. When a flash, a valuable summoner spell used for instant teleportation over a short distance that is the most critical ability in the game, is used players chat the cooldown timer (5 minutes), and when a dragon, or another neutral objective is able to be contested, players chat to strategize how their team will take the objective. Additionally, the act sequence can be used to

examine how chat shifts based upon whether a given team is winning or losing. Winning teams are more likely to engage in light-hearted jokes, while losing teams are more likely to play the *blame game*, attacking whomever caused the game to spiral out of control. There are expected times in the game and before the game when players routinely say specific things in order to initiate communication. As players drop into a pre-game drafting phase, where each player takes turns selecting champions to ban and then pick, players will call their positions whether it is top, jungle, mid, attack damage carry, or support. Complications occur when multiple people want the same role, but to deter from that there is an unwritten rule called “pick order”. If a player is higher on the picking list, which is randomly generated, then that player gets the role desired. Typically this drafting phase consists of additional communication for ban recommendations and team composition (*comp*) meta-strategies which can differ from *poke comps*, *hard engage comps*, *split comps*, *pick comps*, *disengage comps*, *kite comps*, and more. Discussion of what *comp*, commonly used in League of Legends for composition, to use, and what *comp* fits a team best is more frequently seen in Bjerg’s and Ebb Flow’s, a diamond League of Legends player in the League of Loggers, games than Coloradical’s, or Hailtothebeef’s.

The *Key* of League of Legends chat, is more appropriately worded as the tonality and mood of the dialogue. While I touched upon this earlier, the key is often dictated based upon the pacing of the game, or whether or not teammates are winning or losing. Ebb Flow, a competitive League of Legends player, has an exceptional amount of game knowledge given his experience and expertise. When asked about the *Key* of League of Legends dialogue he discussed how it will change from player to player and game to game. In his words, “Context means everything, and while there is the obvious game context, of whether or not you are winning, or losing, there is also the context of life. It’s like if you are having a bad day because your boss yelled at you and you then come home and have this [pent up anger] then transmitted into the game, and then that anger can build [amongst teammates] and then everyone has a bad day just because your boss yelled at you.”(Ebb Flow, personal interview, 4-11) Each of the ten players on the Rift come from their own unique walks of life that then mix together only through a shared interest in League of Legends. What should be a celebratory and fun experience of playing video games in one’s free time, can quickly turn sour through a breached contagion known to players as *salt*. I would also argue from my own experiences, that the *Key* perspective can be used to analyze games in which positive behavior proliferates over negative player behavior.

In games where players open up with *glhf*, good luck have fun, a common saying amongst the gamer community as a form of beginning a game politely, other players are more likely to respond with a reciprocation of the *glhf*, or another positive remark, permanently shifting the *Key* of the rest of the game into a more positive prosocial mood. To support this claim, I must bring up discussions of priming, a concept in social psychology that can be easily applied to linguistics. Positive psychologists have discussed the concept of Kindness priming, in that creating a positive prosocial stimuli will then cause additional positive and prosocial behavior (Teasdale and Fogarty, 1979). Riot games has also experimented with kindness priming, in their experimentation with changing the mood of each game by selecting a sentence of dialogue to appear at the beginning of each game. In this experiment, Riot games, found that placing a phrase such as “Players who cooperate with their team win 31% more games.” and “Players perform better if you give them constructive feedback after a mistake.” greatly reduced the number of reports filed after each game. While here, League of Legends hardcoded priming into the game to influence the dialogue that went on throughout the game, players themselves have the power to prime others in their games into behaving in a prosocial manner simply by writing four letters at the beginning of the game, *glhf*. These four letters would influence the *Key* of the entire game undoubtedly leading to a better player experience and more cooperative teamwork.

The *Key*, or mood of the game, is greatly influenced by initial priming, and then by the way the rest of the game unfolds. The pre-game lobby, also known as drafting phase, can create an environment where a positive experience is either created or destroyed. As Jeffrey Lin commented, “Even though a small minority is truly negative, they can control your community's perception by themselves. It just takes -- and this is really interesting -- 11 percent of negative posters on a forum discussion to just change the direction of the forum discussion.” (Jeffrey Lin, interview, 3-15-15) While Lin here is commenting on the forum posts for League of Legends, the same can be applied to in game communication. This perspective is similar to the broken windows theory which assumes that preventing smaller crimes such as vandalism, will in turn stop larger crimes. Unlike the broken windows theory which operates based upon fear of disorder and breaking social norms, Lin’s approach to toxic behavior is very real. Toxicity breeds toxicity, and in doing so, creates an environment where no one can communicate, or cooperate effectively which becomes a major problem in a team based game.

The *Key* is also influenced by the in game music. Recently, Jeffrey Lin has changed the pre-game lobby theme music, from a fast paced instrumentals, to a more gradually building drum beat, hoping that the new music would set a better more cooperative tone than the original. The original music “didn't promote cooperation. Because you have five strangers, you're in this lobby, the music is pounding -- and if there's a conflict, the music made it worse. It actually influenced the context around that situation.” (Jeffrey Lin, interview, 3-15-15) In changing the music, Lin found that he could alter the mood (*Key*) of pregame lobbies to promote communication and teamwork. The new “music is more toned-down, and it's only after you get over the tough decisions and the conflicting decisions that the music starts ramping back up again.” (Jeffrey Lin, interview, 3-15-15) By this, Lin, is saying that the music can return to fast paced “war music” after the key decisions have been made and after communication has been initiated. In the beginning of draft phase, where players select their roles and champions, is often where the most communication is needed to formulate a team composition and strategy and to delegate who gets what role. It is important for players to be as calm as possible when choosing roles as there may be conflicts in players wanting to play the same position. Positions, or roles, are the greatest sources of stress from the games I have personally experienced because often times players cannot compete at their current level at roles that are not their main. This can become more problematic as players become more specialized into a given role, while competing at higher levels.

The *Instrumentalities*, which according to Hymes are variation in forms and styles of speech, of League of Legends are most heavily influenced by the pacing of the game. There is no time for formality when in the heat of the moment, so players typically write as little as they can, as fast as possible to convey a message. While in the game, chat and communication are entirely utilitarian, with exception of when games become landslide victories or defeats allowing more time for cross team chat, harassment, and joking. Grammar fluctuations in League of Legends are luxuries that cannot be afforded by the players in game.

The *norms* or rules governing chat in League of Legends are almost nonexistent and this is partially due to the anonymous environment that the internet can provide. While there are reports for breaking the summoner's code, the rulebook that each player signs before becoming an actual player, that can add up to a hefty ban, the punishments for verbal abuse, harassment,

and general toxicity are purely limited to in game punishments. The summoner's code, which exists as a set of behavioral standards, essentially says do not be a toxic element of the community via harassment, racism, sexism, or other ways. Breaking this set of *norms* allows other players to file report which in turn can result in a permanent ban from League of Legends. The problem with this set of norms is in the delay of the punishment. Players are not instantly punished for their bad behavior as it can take up to three weeks for reports to become punishments allowing for an environment where the player whose behavior is in question to forget why they are being punished. By separating the punishment from the behavior that is supposed to be reformed it becomes more difficult to condition toxic behavior into the positive norms that Riot games is looking to foster.

Norms are created and maintained through the reward and punishment system of the community. While saying *glhf* at the beginning of the game and *ggwp* at the end of the game, is expected, these acronyms are not seen every game. The honor system, the opposite of the report system, positively reinforces good player behavior, but it does so in a benign and lackluster way. Being honored at the end of a game by other players does not carry any weight, it just adds a plus one to a number in the player's profile saying how often they have been honored. While this system has the potential to reinforce positive player behavior by creating a norm set for being a good person, it does not do so effectively due to its lack of in game, or real world weight.

The *genre* of chat in League of Legends is typically a goal orientated one that is also very dependent upon the *Key*. The mood can set the goals, and intentions of the chat, from one of trying to tactically plan out taking objectives, or to one of complete disarray where every player engages in heavy bickering typically resulting in a loss.

Using Hymes S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. model to understand chat in League of Legends shows effective speech as a game of mediating emotions. Chat in League of Legends is about avoiding devolving into a bickering match, because no player can perform a complex cooperative task while also arguing with their teammates. In an environment where stakes are one's internet honor, emotions can be volatile and players can *tilt*. Manager of Cognitive Gaming's professional Heroes of the Storm team (an e-sport very similar to that of League of Legends) describes *tilt* within his team as *quick sanding*, where, "one mistake leads to another mistake, and that mistake leads to another mistake. And it's all about emotional mistakes, it's not about

making mechanical mistakes and getting over it, because a player can make a mechanical mistake and get over and play after it, but instead he makes mechanical mistakes and then he invests emotion into it.” (Brad Fry, personal interview, 7-16) Here Fry discusses how mechanical mistakes can create emotional climates that fester and appear in *comms* that can then spread to other players and make them also *tilt*. *Tilting*, or *quick sanding* as Fry puts it, is negative priming in action and it can break a team if left undealt with. Success is often dependent upon positive priming, and when toxicity occurs, not letting it fester and grow to other players. While it is obvious to say that players cooperate better when they are not at each other’s throats, the S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. model shows that players are influenced heavily by priming, their peer’s mood, and the pacing of the game. As a social model, for cooperation in a globalized world, we can create a series of rules for global communication in order to promote cooperation and in turn limit negative behavior. While creating an environment of positive reinforcement for good behavior is difficult, it is much easier to prime individuals with positive images, or text, while also being able to quickly and quietly suppress negative behavior so that it cannot spread to others in what League of Legends players call the phenomenon of *tilt*.

To prevent *tilt*, in the regular playing environment, Jeffrey Lin at Riot Games has allowed for chat restrictions to be placed upon toxic players who are reported for “negative attitudes” and “verbal harassment”. While preventing the spread of toxicity in games, I saw a few problems with Lin’s chat restriction system that I confronted him with. Using the claim from Goffman’s The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life that the great greatest threat to a team is not being able to act in synchronized behavior (Goffman, 1959), I asked Lin if he thought that chat restrictions gave the team without any restricted players an unfair advantage. While Goffman was discussing the cooperation of actors presenting themselves in a certain manner, this is a situation similar to how League of Legends players must cooperate as a group of actors imitating professional players in order to achieve success through the complex strategies of the competitive scene. Lin’s response was a sound ‘for the greater good’ solution, as he pointed out that, “What Goffman didn’t investigate was whether inability to communicate is a greater threat to the team than an individual who is actively communicating in a toxic manner. But, in our research, we show that actually chat restrictions do not give the other team an unfair advantage, nor does it inhibit your ability to communicate. In fact, we ran several groups of neutral to positive players through chat restrictions and analyzed their ability to communicate. With the limited chat and

Smart Pings, most players had no problems communicating with their teammates and the only position that had some difficulty was the Jungler. These experiments and research groups were how we ended up at the current settings of chat restrictions.” (Jeffrey Lin, interview, 7-22) While Lin’s response to Goffman’s claims about the threat of acting out of sync are logical at casual levels of play, he neglects the importance of timers.

When playing at a near professional level of play one of the most important things to know is your enemies’ ability cooldowns. These are important to know because they provide pivotal opportunities to capitalize on your foes disadvantages if their abilities are on *cd* (cooldown) while friendly abilities are still available. Lin acknowledges that there are disadvantages for the jungler especially, and this is primarily because the jungler must interact with every ally and enemy at all points of the game. Because of this, the jungler relies the most of timers and must constantly be asking his teammates, who hopefully each keep track of an opponent’s timers, what abilities players have up. As the level of play becomes more competitive, the requirement for communication becomes more crucial and this may simply be something that players will have to deal with as they get matched with allies who may be chat restricted. Being in synch is of the utmost importance in a game as tactically complex as League of Legends.

Being in synch and acting as one body through rapid communication is not a unique strategy to League of Legends. In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman discusses groups of actors working together as teams where the greatest threat is an individual acting out of sync. He states that to thwart this, each team should have a leader that is a single fast acting voice (Goffman, 1959). I checked Goffman’s theories with a number of competitive teams’ shot calling methods and all operated within Goffman’s framework to an extent. Mike “Glaurung” Fisk, Cognitive gaming’s co-captain, agrees with Goffman’s claim saying that, “having one sole voice or two voices to guide both the strategic and just lead the team in general is the optimal way to do things.” (Mike Fisk, personal interview, 7-16-2015) Fisk went on to discuss his role on a previous team as a shot caller who where he did not get along with another player. Both Fisk and the other player “were very adamant about putting our perspective forward and because of that we would butt heads a little bit, and I definitely agree with the statement that optimally one person should kind of just guide everyone instead of having more.” (Mike Fisk, personal

interview, 7-16-2015) Fisk's teammate, Donald "Scylol" Dobbins seconded this view by explaining his role as the lead shot caller and the division of labor in making decisions. Both my observations of Cognitive's communications and Dobbins' views on decision making in game lined up relatively well with Goffman's theory.

Watching Cognitive gaming during a full week of scrimms, I recorded who was talking, when, how often, and how important it was to the game at hand. While almost everyone talked most games, the dominant voice, that of the head *shotcaller*, Donald Dobbins, was the force that kept Cognitive going even when on the losing side of a game. While Dobbins was the primary shot caller, Fisk, would occasionally call for more task-specific strategies such as *split-pushing* and *assassinations* which only required one or two members of the five player team. Player Austin "Shot" Lonsert, was the third most active in communicating with the team typically chiming in to prevent *tilt* after a mistake was made. Lonsert was the first one to speak after a critical mistake was made and was sometimes able to rally the team even after all seemed lost. Dobbins, the primary shot caller, commented on Cognitive's *comms* saying, "we do have the one voice but there is a very fine line to it. I am the person who says after we win a teamfight, 'take this, take that'. Not so much dooring the flow of the game, telling people to go do this, go do that." (Donald Dobbins, personal interview, 7-16) Here Dobbins explains his role as a director of action in game. He does not order his teammates to do things on a micro level, but instead directs the entire team on a macro level. "I do think having one voice is important because sometimes things can get a little bit cluttered. Like if someone says this and I have to assess what that person says and see if I agree with it and if I don't I have to instantly assert my, 'you know we are doing this instead'. So that can be a tough thing for me personally. Instead of thinking about what we need to do and then saying something, when someone says something instantly, I need to respond instantly. It can be difficult sometimes, but it usually isn't." (Donald Dobbins, personal interview, 7-16) Cognitive gaming makes good use of Dobbins' comprehensive knowledge of the game, and his teammates trust him to make the right calls. While Fisk helps with some more micro-level decisions, and Lonsert helps with team morale, most of the decision making is on Dobbins' shoulders allowing the team to respond faster to the actions of their opposition.

What can we learn from the language of legends? We learn that the most effective communicators in both the complexity of the communication and the time it takes to explain it,

can best coordinate their teams for the win. We also learn that there is an innate amount of holism in League of Legends, holism being a theory of parts of a whole needing to work together in order to exist otherwise they will die, and this exists even in the professional scene. Forgiven, attack damage carry (adc) for professional team SK gaming in Europe had this to say about his team's disappointing loss, "We are a bunch of plus one players, all great solo que players, potentially the best, but we are just that. We are just one plus one plus one plus one plus one, yet we can never play as five." This was in response to losing in a best of five series for the European League Championship Series quarterfinals. Teamwork and cooperation are the factors that make, or break both the best professional teams, and a group of five random solo que players. We also learn that context matters more than we might think, with Hymes' S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. model, and that *tilt* can disrupt any attempts to communicate effectively. Finally we learn that to respond quickly, there is a need for one voice and for the entire team to act in synch. By following these guideline, we learn that communicating effectively and rapidly can create environments where "plus one(s)" become wholes and can complete complex tasks and objectives.

III. Intersecting Identities and Altruism

The way a player voluntarily exposes their existent world identity within their virtual identity is greatly intertwined with my topic of exploring altruism online in League of Legends. For "plus ones" to become wholes, conflicts that can arise from identity clashes and personal differences must be dealt with. Despite our most romantic ideas of utopian altruism, altruism is dependent upon nature and nurture, and its dependence on nurture makes it vulnerable to social constructs that can often be polluted by stigma.

Altruism is both biological and sociocultural. Altruism has long been a topic of anthropology, mostly physical anthropology, when discussing the evolutionary benefit of altruistic behavior in related primate species. Misalignment between Darwin's writing on evolution and observable characteristics of altruism at first may appear contradictory, but a deeper understanding of these two topics sheds light upon their relationship. For example,

primatologists have recorded the altruistic behavior of the Vervet Monkey, a primate that lives in groups and emits loud calls at the sight of a predator calling upon the attention of that predator and ensuring the survival of the rest of the group, which are most likely composed of close knit kin. This form of altruism is a recessive form of Darwin's survival of the fittest. Howling, in this case, is a recessive trait that requires two recessive alleles to show up. The selfish Vervet monkeys may carry this trait, but like blue eyes in humans, each parent must have the recessive alleles in order to pass on this phenotype. This is an example of biologically ingrained altruism that only continues to exist based upon survival of the recessive gene in the martyr's surviving family members. In humans, altruism can also be observed amongst close knit family, and amongst individuals who share commonalities. According to the definition of altruism used by social behaviorist, Hamilton (1964), altruism is social behavior that reduces the fitness of the organism performing the behavior, but boosts the fitness of others. Humans are much more likely to perform altruistically when they can see the individual being bolstered by their sacrifice. While altruism is primarily used to describe non-human animals, sociologist Boyd and Richerson (2006), Bowles and Gintis (2011), and Sterelny (2012) have gone into great detail debating over the extent that altruism impacts humans. While culture has a great factor upon altruism, these authors, and many social researchers have come to a consensus on altruism being a kin related behavior when examined amongst humans. As the vampire bat will often spit up its own meal of blood to help other starving vampire bats from its den survive, so will the modern human for their den, or kin, but altruism is less likely to occur between humans, and even other nonhuman animals that do not share a den, or kin.

We know from research on altruism (Regnerus, Smith, Sikkink, 1998) that altruistic behavior, in this case, generosity towards the poor, is influenced by sociocultural differences ranging from religion, political viewpoint, race, and gender. We also know that as George Dent (2005), has pointed out, race is an important factor in altruism. Racial distrust and failure to cooperate has devastating impacts on equality, cohesion, and altruism. People of different racial backgrounds are far less likely to help out those in "out" groups in favor of helping those in "in" groups (Dent 2005). The racial identity of players in League of Legends is anonymous, meaning race as a variable for altruism and cooperation in League of Legends only comes into effect when language is used in chat due to cultural schemas that link specific languages with race. There are times when players expose their existent world identities. Why a player might do this

is dependent on that player's identity and experiences. As a minority player, for League of Legends this means someone who is not white, male, or heterosexual, there is little benefit to be found in exposing oneself to their teammates as being part of an "out" group can have negative impact for altruism (Dent, 2005) and thus cooperation.

League of Legends creates a novel space when discussing altruism because it brings together ten different players who have no kinship relationship. Players bring with them a plethora of different identities that intersect and converge at one point; that point being a League of Legends player, also known as, a Summoner. Teammates must cooperate and act selflessly in order to achieve victory with players who may identify completely differently from themselves. How players choose to identify themselves within Summoner's Rift can shape the outcome of their team's success. The Rift is a hostile environment where teams literally try to kill and destroy the enemy team, but the Rift can become even more hostile when intersecting identities create conflicts that take the form of homophobia, racism, and sexism. When these three identity related conflicts have the potential to make teamwork and cooperation more difficult, why might a player who identifies within a minority group reveal their existent world identity when they could just as easily remain anonymous?

To answer this question I have interviewed a number of different players from professionals such as Lautemortis to regular players and beyond. Tyler "Lautemortis" Nicholls, a retired professional jungler for Complexity gaming, had taken some time to answer some of my questions regarding his identity in the professional League of Legends scene. Lautemortis began his career in League of Legends by creating a team three years ago with a couple of friends from the solo-que, ranked, community. Lautemortis came out as gay after his parents both died when he was twenty-two. He chose to come out, "because it seemed like a lot of gay euphemism are used in online games and I personally felt slighted every time I heard them. I thought maybe knowing someone that people looked up to had to endure the same treatment would help other people get through, or it might make people who said the rude things realize there are occasionally gay people on the other end of the keyboard (so to speak)." (Lautemortis, interview, 7-4-2015) In being an openly gay professional League of Legends player, Lautemortis, gives representation and publicity to a minority group of players that are often marginalized and subjected to verbal harassment in League of Legends and in other online gaming communities.

Representation of sexuality and gender diversity is increasingly important in a game as widely played as League of Legends, with almost one percent of the world's population playing it (over 67 million). Lautemortis explains his role in the League of Legends community as a figure that proves to players that it is not only alright to be openly gay and also a competitive gamer, but that being gay is also an option. Having representation of minority identities allows for others, especially children who also play the game, to see a role model who does not identify with the majority. As T.L. Taylor puts it in "Multiple Pleasures: Woman and Online Gaming.", representation of gender and sexuality is important "because people may not know what they could enjoy" (Taylor, 2003).

When I asked Lautemortis how his identity has impacted him within the League of Legends community he shared a story with me of a bus ride to a LAN, local area, event with his and other teams. "I remember the first bus ride with other players after I came out semi-publicly about it. A random pro yelled out 'I heard Lautemortis is a fag'. It hurt a lot but in the long term it made me a stronger person." (Lautemortis, interview, 7-4-2015) In this anecdote, Lautemortis described the euphemisms of the community bleeding through into the *AFK*, away from keyboard, world, where the scrapes and bruises one receives from mainstream society often compose their identity. Here, Lautemortis, was verbally harassed for revealing his real world identity, yet, he still chooses to be as open as he can with his fans and the community. While Lautemortis has received support from the community, he has also become a victim to gay-bashing that has been so prominent in many competitive sports and E-sports alike, yet he still feels it is important to be visible and loud just so people see that minority identities can exist and thrive in the open world.

The first professional female player qualified for League Championship Series (LCS) just weeks ago, Remilia, making League of Legends the first mainstream e-sport to become co-ed in North America. Considering the scale of League of Legends this would be similar to if a female player joined the NFL. Remilia has commented upon the harassment she has dealt with since joining the competitive scene, "When I set out initially, I wanted to be the first girl in LCS. That was what motivated me. That dream I had I accomplished and yet it is being challenged in such a heartless way." (Remilia, 8-13-2015) While League of Legends has always had female champions, a female professional player on the big screen has yet to be seen since Remilia's

team, Renegades, qualified for the professional League Championship Series this upcoming season. It will be interesting to see her impact upon the community as the new competitive season starts at the end of Fall. An interview with Gracie “Sillypickle” provided me with the insight into what this means for a female gamer such as herself, “When I play League of Legends I typically do not let others know that I am a girl. On the off chance that I do, I receive one of two responses: Players will either complement my every trivial movement, which is more annoying than anything, or I am met with extreme disgust and rejected with the attitude that this game is only for boys. It is undoubtedly a better idea for me to remain anonymous and just be Volibear (Sillypickle’s favorite playable character).” (Sillypickle, interview, 8-18-15) Gracie’s desire to remain anonymous and play the role she has given herself by choosing to play Volibear, an armored bear, reminds me of the history of the word person. Person, originally meaning mask, is a “recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.”(Park, 1950) While Gracie occupies the role of a college aged young woman, in game, she takes on a different role, one of a *tanky* (meaning defensive) *initiator* (one who starts engages) with high damage and strong mobility.

By using the anonymity that League of Legends gives to its players, Gracie can avoid harassment, and take upon the identity of whatever character she chooses to play. While it is a sad truth that exposing her existent world identity jeopardizes the game due to the harassment that occupies the time and text chat required to communicate effectively, Gracie’s choice to remain anonymous and participate in the façade of pluralism increases her chances of winning. As Durkheim has said, “The human personality is a sacred thing; one does not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with other.” (Durkheim, 1953) Durkheim’s point about communion, coincides with Dent’s (2005) research on altruism amongst mixed races. With differences in identity and the stigma of a historically misogynist community, Gracie’s initiations as Volibear may be questioned by her teammates resulting in a lack of follow up by the team and a lost fight that could potentially cost the game. In a game where following a bad call, the demand for an organized action, in unison is better than having a team not follow any calls, anything that can potentially create disorder in communications is a jeopardizing agent. For Gracie, the addition of Remilia, may mean that

more gamers who previously held stigma against girl gamers, will be able to accept that this e-sport is one where gender matters only as much as we make it matter.

Another *gaymer*, in-group slang for gay gamer, is the controversial Greg “Sky” Williams, whose content largely consists of comical satire of the League of Legends community. Sky, is a youtube content producer, a comic, and a well-known streamer, a player who broadcasts his gameplay so others can watch, whose popularity in the community is unparalleled. Sky has similar reasons to Lautemortis as to why he is openly gay in a community that has the potential to be abrasively homophobic. Being both gay and black, Sky, has provided many players, regardless of identity, a positive role model for diversity. As Martin Luther King once told Nichelle Nichols, who played Uhura, a Black woman as a member of the original Star Trek bridge crew (1966-1969), “Don’t you see that you’re not just a role model for little Black children? You’re more important for people who don’t look like us... There will always be role models for Black children; you are a role model for everyone.”(King, 1967) Similar in concept to how Nichols created an accessible model for understanding diversity, Sky’s openness and acceptance has greatly benefited the community through representation. One anecdote Sky shared about this was the story of his first gaming event at PAX (Penny Arcade Expo), Seattle, where he said that he, “really felt at my first event that I was going to go into it and people would throw food at me and be like ‘go back where you came from you queer’. So going to my first event I went in with caution, but to my surprise, right when I walked in the door there was this boy, this young boy, and he’s just like ‘Oh my god are you Sky Williams’ ... and he wanted my autograph and his mom was there and she was super happy and he had this pen and paper and I’ve never signed something like that before, so I was like, ‘Aight’”(Sky, 6-29-2014) Sky’s surprise at being accepted into the community is expected due to the presence and content he has created for the League of Legends scene. Sky has established a very personal relationship within the League of Legends community by exposing everything from his dreams to his vulnerabilities. This has surpassed the “impersonal contacts between strangers are particularly subject to stereotypical responses, [when] persons come to be on closer terms with each other this categoric approach recedes and gradually sympathy, understanding, and a realistic assessment of personal qualities take its place” (Goffman, 1963) This excerpt from Goffman’s Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity is far ahead of its time and touches upon the exposure and representation that I will continue to bring up throughout this section of the paper. Sky’s ability

to be honest with his viewers has allowed for them to in turn see him for the person he is and not be “subjected to the stereotypical responses” that stigma towards a spoiled identity may create.

Sky’s content has greatly influenced the League of Legends community with comical satire and genuine gameplay advice. Sky has released content urging players to be respectful of one another in order to make the community less toxic as a whole. As a part of the League of Legends community, Sky has helped to shape it through his presence. However, like Lautemortis, Sky has had his fair share of good and bad experiences within the League of Legends community that have all led to building his own identity within the community. Sky describes his experiences within the community by saying, “Being gay you are automatically subject to bullying... I guess it really meant a lot to me because I thought that being gay in the gaming community would be a hindrance. I thought there would be a cap on how successful I could be, but honestly, I’ve never felt more at home in my community.” (Sky, 6-29-2014)

Recently, Sky has described his relationship to video games in general as “what I understood, these things at school just didn’t make any sense to me because either you are too heavy to be attractive, to whitewash for the black kids, you’re not the right skin color, you’re not smart enough... I was desperately trying to find anywhere to fit... but these games are indiscriminate. I think that’s the coolest thing about them” (Sky, 7-12-2015). Here Sky touches upon the power of any game, not just League of Legends, to create a community based upon common interests and not common appearances. While Sky believes that due to the anonymity the League of Legends community has, appearance, race, gender, ect. are of no major concern in the online domain of League of Legends. Sky is not alone in this opinion, as numerous professional and semi-professional players I have interviewed have made similar statements, they are incorrect in this assertion. Because of anonymity, and the difference between existent world identities, those one carries on a daily basis, and virtual world identities, the identity one takes when engaging in an online community such as League of Legends, or any other online game, identity actually becomes more important in a community where one has the option to remain anonymous.

In discussing this claim, it is easiest to bring up the famous New Yorker cartoon by Peter Steiner⁷, “Nobody Knows You’re a Dog”. As Shaw (2014) says, while nobody knows you are a dog, you might want to know if there are others like you out there. This is when one exposes their existent world identity in order to find people with similarities. Suddenly, identity does matter online, and it matters even more if your identity is part of a minority group of individuals. Those exposing their existent world identities online are using a semiotic domain built upon a common knowledge and interest base in order to search for stronger social support networks that go deeper than just having one interest in common. These smaller, more niche social circles



"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

create a sturdy social resource to fall back upon in times of need and to simply have fun with. These niche circles are found everywhere in League of Legends most notably in the group “gaymers”, which is a chat room and reddit, an open online blog commonly used by League of Legends players, where gay gamers can organize and play League of Legends together.

Identity is incredibly important in both the online world and away from keyboard life. As Dent (2005) and many gamers who identify as minorities online, have suggested through

research and anecdotal evidence respectively, differences and human diversity can create conflicts when dealing with individuals who subscribe to prejudice viewpoints. Prejudice and intolerance in the form of ableism, homophobia, and more, can create environments where no one wins, both in the game of League of Legends, and in real life. Gamers have the opportunity to remain completely anonymous in order to protect themselves from harassment, but they should not have to because this only allows for the furthering of intolerance. By having players of minority identity come into the spotlight of the community, such as Sky and Lautemortis, all players are exposed to the reality that at the end of the day, players are all the same with the same goals and intentions; to win and have fun. Representation and exposure to diversity will

⁷ Steiner, “Nobody Knows You’re a Dog”

eventually mend the problem of intolerance that breaks teamwork and cooperation within League of Legends.

On a competitive and global level, diversity plays a key role in the creation of the best teams. It is not uncommon to have a professional team speak three or even four different languages, as professional teams are often created with the best players from all around the world. What is important is that these players do overcome these potential threats to communication and teamwork. Professional teams, much like governing bodies of various nations, must overcome differences in language, customs, and behavior in order to achieve the victory. For League of Legends being able to overlook diversity as largely unsubstantial in the grand scheme of things is made easier through the representation and exposure of minority groups which allow all gamers to come together without difficulty in order to achieve a common goal. Exposure and representation of diversity becomes increasingly important as we head into the shared problems of a globalized world. Being able to understand basic human differences and acknowledge them without intolerance will be necessary to unite in the face of our planet's ephemeral life.

IV. In-Game Features and How They Can Positively Reinforce Cooperative Conventions

To better understand the values at play in Riot's League of Legends, the playable champions must be analyzed. As I discussed in an earlier section, representation of diversity and a wide range of demographics matter, while Lautemortis and Sky displays just one type of representation that is vital for the League of Legends community, the other type is representation within the playable characters of the rift. To paraphrase Plato in *The Republic*, artistic representations of the world offer an incomplete source of knowledge about everyday life. Art in all forms can offer a distorted view of reality whether it is a distortion of demographics, or one of beauty, these distortions can blur our existent outlooks on our own daily lives. While League of Legends has representations of different skin colors and an almost even split in female to male champions, representation stops there. While in the lore behind each playable character there are many references to heteronormative relationships, there are none to any non-normative gender

identity, yet League of Legends has created the perfect environment for something like this to thrive. In a community where the players overwhelmingly have decided that racist and homophobic slurs are against the Tribunal, there is still no representation of any deviance to heteronormative relationships. More so, League of Legends puts women and those typically of minority identities on screen simply in order to expand the range of representation their game has to offer. It does so paradoxically, because it often forgets why representation is important. Representation is important not just to supply the token one or two minorities, but to give as many people as possible someone to identify with. This expands past sheer physical features, but into characteristics and mannerisms. There are places where League of Legends excels here, for example in the champion Jinx, a young girl with a rebellious nature, or the champion Vi, a strong female bruiser who is always looking for the next brawl. While these archetypes are easy to identify with depending on the player there is still no non-hetero champion let alone one that does not succumb to tokenization.

Tokenization and the question of representation became a huge problem in many of my interviews. Despite how the interviewer identified sexually, when asked whether or not they would like to see a non-heterosexual champion every interviewee of the eight for this topic, with one exception, told me that there was already a gay champion. The playable champion, by the name of Taric, is a support champion who is easily linked with our societal projections of what a flamboyantly gay knight may look like. While this seems to be the running “joke” of the League of Legends community, a closer look into Taric’s lore reveals no mention of gender. To further probe interviewees, I then ask if having a non-heteronormative champion would benefit League of Legends as a tool of representation. For most interviewees who identified as heterosexual male, the answers were yes, but when I asked members of the League of Legends *gaymers* (a chat group of gay League of Legends players) the answer was overwhelmingly negative. Players who identified as gay were more often to express the lack of a need for a gay champion citing the fact that League of Legends is a fantasy game that has no grounds in reality.

On the surface, this may appear to be a logical argument, however, interviewees who answered with this forget what all fantasies are based on; reality. Identity is a deeply rooted narrative construct that does not necessitate non-fiction environments to be explained, or even created. Just because a medium is fiction does not mean it is not grounded in the truths of reality,

and it also does not strip any power away from the medium. Take Tim O'Brien's, author of If I Die in a Combat Zone, words, "That's what fiction is for. It's for getting at the truth when the truth isn't sufficient for the truth." (O'Brien, 1998) Sometimes fiction, and fantasy, can reveal aspects about reality too difficult to be exemplified in non-fiction. Fiction can also be more impactful than non-fiction as Stephen Adams has pointed out in a Manchester University study examining the impact of Khaled Hosseini's novel The Kite Runner, which has done more to educate Western readers about "the realities of daily life in Afghanistan under the Taliban and thereafter than any government media campaign, advocacy organization report, or social science research"(Adams, 2008) When we pair this facet of information with Plato's description of art as an incomplete image of reality, there becomes room for devastating consequences of misrepresentation and misinformation. In the context of identity, this can take the form of people integrating media's interpretation of identity as reality leading to stereotypes and stigma. For League of Legends, this explains why many interpret Taric as the League's token homosexual, despite his lore having an absence of any mention towards gender.

While this has answered why fantasy games such as League of Legends matter in the context of representation and identity, it does not explain why so many *gaymers* claimed to not need a non-heteronormative champion. Further research into this question that my interviews have created, has lead me to the works of Adrienne Shaw and the Third-person effect. While there are many answers to this question, two stuck with me the most. The first, I stumbled across within an interview with a Masters League of Legends player, who told me that "I do not see a need for representation of people like myself (referring to homosexuals) as for me, League of Legends fulfills two tasks: Employment, and Escapism. I do not need representation because this is my work space (referring to his employment through advertisement revenue in streaming) and I do not need representation in League of Legends because it is just an escape for me; it is simply entertainment that gets me through the day." (Andrew, 7-16-2015) This player and popular streamer expressed the desire to keep his sexual identity and the workspace separate environments, yet at the same time his claim of League of Legends as a form of escapism brings up a different line of thought altogether. Andrew later discussed League of Legends as a space where the problems of stigma and homophobia cannot follow you in the same way that they can haunt one outside the game. He does not have to openly discuss his identity on Summoner's Rift, and can instead be anyone he wants to. If he wants to be a woman who possesses the wind he can

play Janna, if he wants to be a man who duel-wields axes he can play Draven. For Andrew, League of Legends offers him the opportunity to be a voyeuristic identity tourist. Every day Andrew lives as a gay man in a largely homophobic community, but only in game can he be any one of the over one-hundred playable characters? While this is an awesome fact about playing League of Legends, I retorted Andrew's beliefs by asking him about the other players who also might want to join in on his identity tourism, but instead as a homosexual man, or someone of any non-normative gender identity. His response was one acknowledging the stigma ascribed to him by the people of his geographic community, "Why would anyone want to be like me. There are no perks to being a feared subject of disgust. There are no benefits to having your identity be used as an insult." (Andrew, 7-16-2015)

Despite general complaints of intolerance within the League of Legends community, Andrew, did not seem to agree that representation is incredibly important. While his statement about his own identity is a sad truth in many situations, by bringing up identity tourism Andrew has opened a paradigm fit for its own realm of research. The opinion, held by Andrew and many other *gaymers* I talked to, an opinion stating that there is no need for representation, on the surface seems paradoxical, but is often a common response known as the third person effect. The third person effect⁸ states that people believe that the themes present in mass media have a larger impact on others than they do on themselves (Davison, 1983). Originally discussed by W. Davison in 1983, the third person effect has since been adapted to fit the modern globalized world in the form of media studies such as the McLeod study of the influence of misogynic rap lyrics. In the case of identity and League of Legends it is likely that many non-heteronormative gamers see themselves as not being marginalized by the games that do not represent themselves. They do not see themselves as a population being underrepresented or harmed by the current status quo. There have been similar findings to that of my own by Clark and Clark, author of Skin Color as a Factor, who found that African American girls were more likely to prefer white dolls over African American dolls (Clark and Clark, 2015). While research has shown that in some cases this response is a form of self-defense (McLeod, 1997), or even denial of cultural

⁸ Antonopoulos, Nikos et al. (March 2015). "Web Third-person effect in structural aspects of the information on media websites". *Computers in human behavior* **44** (3): 48–58.

norms (Price, 1996) (Shaw, 2014), this response can also just be an underestimation of the effect of any form of media, let alone one as massive as League of Legends.

The champion pool in League of Legends, the available playable characters, has binary gender representation that defies stereotypes and tokenization, but lacks in any non-heteronormative representation. This becomes increasingly concerning when the impact of lay media (Seiter, 1998) that states media is an incredibly impactful socializing agent, and social learning theories (Bandura, 1971) (Vygotsky, 1978) that suggest the opposite of catharsis, what we see reinforces what we do. There is no doubt that all forms of media can shape our world views, and one as engaging as a video game may have even more impact. When that game is the deeply complex and popular, League of Legends, it can play a much larger role in the shaping of one's reality. Unlike many games, League of Legends does not bleed with misogyny and it does not lie safely in a pluralistic cast of characters, but it is not as representative as it could be. There is still room and time for League of Legends to grow with the release of a new champion almost every three months. With a more representative champion pool, League of Legends can positively reinforce acceptance and equality through the same way we learn to accept anything new, exposure and experience.

Mancala, an ancient board game played with a board with at least twelve small craters, and two large craters at either end, emerged in northern Africa as early as 6900 B.C. In Mancala, players move and distribute beads from each of the craters until they have acquired all the beads into their large crater at either end of the board. While there is variation in the supplies and construction of this game, there is a consistent theme, or value, at play, the value being distribution, gathering, and sowing. The game plays out in a similar manner as sowing a field, and because of this it brings home values that the entire community can engage in and share. Values such as trust, and distribution of shared resources, alongside the theme of working the land, or the board in this case shine through the gameplay and into the community and culture of the societies where this game was most prevalent⁹. Every game from one as simple as Mancala

⁹ Gobet, F. (2009). "Using a cognitive architecture for addressing the question of cognitive universals in cross-cultural psychology: The example of awalé". *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* **40** (4): 627–648. [doi:10.1177/0022022109335186](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022109335186).

to one as complex as League of Legends brings with it a set of values that are reinforced through playing the game.

By examining League of Legends in the same way that we examine Mancala, we can extract a core set of values, both good and bad, intentional, and unintentional. Like Mancala, these values come from the core mechanics of the game, and, also like Mancala, these values will change based upon who is playing the game, as each player can interpret different themes from the game. To analyze the values that Riot has instilled in their game, League of Legends, we must look at every detail placed into the game that had the option to take a different role. For example, when the game was first released in 2009, the champions (playable characters) and map (Summoner's Rift) had a much goofier tone, as each champion was made a radical satire or a gaming archetype, such as the oversized knight, or the eight year old girl fire mage. As League of Legends has become more competitive, it has taken a much more serious tone, with a map rework to make the neutral objectives and monster look more intimidating, and many champion reworks in order to create a more competitive atmosphere.

As I explained earlier, there are five positions in League of Legends similar to the positions in American football in the way each position has a unique role and job. When functioning at an optimal level a team composition will have a damage threat for the mid game, around twenty minutes into the game, and another for the late game, around forty minutes into the game. These two threats are consistent in almost every composition as the mid laner and the marksman. The third member of the team, the support, has a multi-purpose role, to protect the damage threats, create fights, and supply vision. These three traits are usually shared by at least one other member of the team whether it be the jungler, or the top laner, but these two roles are constantly in a state of flux more than any other role as they can often be substituted for more damage threats, or an assassin whose job is to eliminate the damage threats on the other team. Further research into how these roles can influence players out of game opens up an entirely new can of worms, but with a solid understanding of the *meta* of the game, we may be able to pick apart some of the values being reinforced.

The fact that League of Legends incorporates the position of support is one very contradictory to most games. Many games operate with the player as a hero who takes matters into their own hands, but the team based environment that League of Legends creates has made

room for a role other than the hero role. Support players have a very dynamic role depending on the team composition, they can initiate full team fights, they can use *crowd control* (term for suppressing an enemies ability to move, or play for a short duration typically 1 to 2 seconds) to lock up enemy carries, they can be responsible for *peeling* (the act of getting enemy players off and away from friendly players), or they can be empowering healers with the responsibility to *buff* (make stronger) and heal their allies. The support role is a crucial role with heavy impact upon the game. Support players often bring the utility to the fight, and while they are in the background of the “hero” (carry) players, their *kits* (term for a champions abilities and general skillsets) are often the most dynamic bringing with them the most potential to make, or break a game. The inclusion of the background hero role of support, shows a value in working together in a commune model where everyone has their own role. While every positions may be different and the value of each role may not be egalitarian, everyone does have a pivotal role no matter how glamorous. The best way to achieve success is a tactful division of labor amongst players.

The emphasis on everyone having a different role to play brings up aspects of communalism, individualism and stratification, all at the same time. While the carry roles focus on acquiring gold to purchase items that make them stronger throughout the game, the support role may focus on creating environments where the carries can acquire this gold through acting as a bodyguard, or moving around the map setting up vision to allow the carry to *farm*, the act of last hitting minions in order to get gold, safely. Many team compositions seem to change the tone of each game, as there are some compositions where four players may play a supportive role in trying to get gold income into their solo carry who they then buff and protect in order to end the game. Compositions such as these seems to be much more Leviathan focused than compositions with multiple threats, where everyone has a near equal distribution of gold except for typically one player. In each composition there is an uneven gold distribution, typically with the support or the jungler being most heavily starved of gold. With each player having a different income a literal class system within each game is created. Not only do players have different incomes, but they also have different gold bounties earned by landing the finishing blow on each playable character. These gold bounties depend on how many kills, or how much CS, minion last hits which award gold, a given player has making the carries typically worth more gold than the other players. This gold bounty system is a relatively new feature added to prevent one player from completely taking over the game while also allowing for the other team to earn higher gold

bounties for killing players with more gold making comebacks happen more easily. This patch, or change, made to the game allowed for more upsets, and more opportunities for losing teams to achieve the American Dream, the victory. More upsets, means more chances to go from rags to riches, but as professional statistics will show, games tend to be decided by whoever makes the first mistake, which will create a snowball effect to end the game. Even without taking the player's existent world identity into account, there is stratification in League of Legends that actually becomes the strategic focal point for winning games.

Team stratification does not start at the beginning of the game. Each player begins the game with the same amount of gold (with some complex exceptions) and from there, depending on their *meta* role (class), they slowly deviate from each other. This system creates a disparity in value between the low and high income roles which in turn creates the game's *meta*, a word used by players to describe the current macro strategies. The *meta* game of League of Legends is completely dependent upon syphoning available income into specific roles and players from farming minions, an act referred to as *csing* to taking out specific map objectives which gives gold to the entire team. With gold, players can more easily empower their characters with items that will help them accomplish the end goal of destroying the enemy nexus and ending the game. The focus on acquiring in game income, that will reset after every game, in order to purchase items to make winning the game easier puts a heavy emphasis on capital in game as a means to achieving success. The values that show up through the *meta* game are values very commonly found in American society. The emphasis on money as a tool for success and achievement, and the almost "necessary" need for stratification in game with the difference of incomes between support and carry players resemble the meritocratic values our own society holds so dear. The idea that everyone starts on the same income level and can acquire gold from there bleeds meritocracy, but like that of our own society, it is a faux-meritocracy in that income is already decided based upon the roles each player has locked into.

Everyone has a role in League of Legends, but not every role is equal. In game income creates *meta* roles which become the stratifying agent in each game, but outside each game, there is another stratifying agent, skill ranking. The most prestigious form of social capital in League of Legends is the solo-que ranking of an individual. From the least skilled, Bronze, to the higher leagues, Challenger, the solo-que ranking reflects a curve similar to the distribution of wealth in

America. Solo-que ladder rankings operate on a division system where one becomes placed and must work their way from the lowest League, Bronze, and then must go through Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond, and Masters, to finally be able to achieve Challenger rank. Working with the 67 million player count of 2013, Challenger tier consists of the top .00033 percent of players globally, while Masters tier is the top .00067 percent of players, and Diamond consists of the top .3 percent of players. The rest of the tiers, Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum, as well as the unranked players create the remaining 99.7 percent of players. Despite the insane elitism of being top .3 percent of players in the most popular videogame in the world, most players see all rankings below Diamond as “low elo (ranking)”. Even though to be of Gold ranking in League of Legends one must be in the top twenty percent of all ranked players (top 3 percent of all players including unranked), the common conception for high elo, and high skill for that matter is one of only the extreme right of the bell curve in skillset. The values that show through Riot’s and the community’s conception of skill and emphasis on ranking are very reflective of our societies emphasis on liquid value, and competitive markets. League of Legends is an incredibly competitive game that uses a skill curve that stratifies its players into elite groups that prevent mixing through a skill-based matchmaking system. The in game rewards for being highly ranked also operate as a class dividing agent. These include profile crests, in game borders, and publicly displayed icons by one’s player name. The social capital that accompanies ranking only occurs at the highest peak, of Diamond and above, and this social capital allows these players opportunities for employment such as streaming, account boosting (the act of playing on another’s account to raise its ranking for money), professional play, and even a job at Riot Headquarters itself.

The moment any choices are made about what to and what to not include in a game, and then how to present these chosen or not chosen materials, is the moment when a game studio takes a stance. No matter how benign or unassuming a programmer, or gaming studio may be, just by creating the game, they are creating a world with values that impact each and every player of their game. From in game mechanics, such as choosing a class of playable characters as healers, to the in game characters’ identities, these choices shape the values being portrayed by the world the gaming studio has created. As one of the most popular activities in the world, League of Legends does very well in providing its clientele a diverse champion roster, while also incorporating values found in everyday Global capitalism. The popularity of League of Legends

comes as no surprise after dissecting the values in the game, which reflect the values in any capitalist society. The *meta* strategies of League of Legends revolve around gold distribution and specialization through a division of labor; themes commonly found in our own market economy.

But there is more to be done here and more to be said about the values that Riot has created in League of Legends. In the next section I will discuss the automated ethics of Riot's tribunal system and how the tribunal has impacted the ethics, the values, and the behavior of each player who plays League of Legends.

V. Automated Ethics: Policing an Online Community

Values do not just come through the gameplay of Riot's League of Legends, but also through the way Riot deals with toxic player behavior. Developers at Riot have created several layers of protection for their players for dealing with toxic players. First off, players can mute each other at any given time in game. However, this is a temporary solution that will not actually solve the problem of the toxic player enacting cyber bullying and destroying any hope for teamwork. Second, yet no longer in existence, is the Tribunal. After every game players have an option to honor, report, or do nothing to each of their teammates and each member of the rival team. Of these three things, the reports go to the Tribunal, which was a community based justice system where players read chat logs from other games could decide if a report was justifiable. If a certain percentage of tribal readers decide that a reported player deserves the report, that player is then banned depending on severity and amount of reports. The Tribunal was a great experiment in that it allowed players to determine what is wrong and what is right in terms of community behavior. The honor system mirrored the Tribunal in that at the end of each game, players could honor each other for one of four different things: great teamwork, friendly, leadership, or if that player was an enemy, honorable opponent. These honors could then stack up and be turned into player profile borders that are broadcasted at the beginning of each game. Sadly, the Tribunal did not work as Riot intended it to, and the honor system had little impact due to its inconsequential rewards.

There were a couple flaws with the Tribunal, the first of which being the fact that responses to negative behavior were delayed to the point that the negative punishment was not associated with the negative behavior. The second problem is one Riot games refers to as using the stick first and primarily, without using the carrot. Tribunal can only punish players, it cannot be used to reward positive behavior and because of this it is negatively associated. The mood, or key, that tribunal sets is one of punishment making it an environment where players are more likely to punish others. For a system that exists in order to sift through reports to see who should or should not be punished, having the Tribunal be associated with negative punishment sets a scene where Tribunal users are more likely to punish players despite what the actual report may entail. In addition to this, the lack of the “carrot”, or positive rewards, in Tribunal does not fit the population that plays League of Legends, as “the truly negative players, the 1 percent, they respond only to punishment -- the stick. The neutral players, they're the ones who respond to positive reinforcement. They're the ones you can sway a little bit more towards the right, a little more positive.” (Jeffrey Linn, interview at GDC, 2013)

The most considerable problem for player behavior in League of Legends comes from a widely believed falsehood, that being that there is a disconnect between what happens in game and what happens in real life. To talk about this falsehood, I have asked Ebb Flow to comment on the disparity between “reality and gaming”. “Many gamers just see playing online as a total disconnect from reality. They can go through their everyday [lives], and then just as soon as they go online it is totally different. Good people can become assholes and assholes can be great people. Playing together over the internet can allow for an environment that can be a flourishing social experience, or a horrible exercise of pent up rage being released from an overly stressful [day].” (Ebb Flow, personal interview, 4-11) As Ebb Flow, and others have explained to me, the internet can create a wall of anonymity that allows anyone to be anyone. We have different rules of behavior when on and off the internet, and the disconnect between these two realms creates an unhealthy environment. What people, and League of Legends players, take for granted is that the internet is still real life, and still has real consequences. “We're spending more and more of our time online. Our kids are growing up, and more and more of their time is spent online. Our expectations of both should be the same.” (Jeffrey Linn, interview, 3-15-15) For Riot games, the disconnect between *irl* (in real life) and in game, becomes a leading source of toxicity. Individuals responsible for harassment, and unsportsmanlike conduct typically do not understand

that these behaviors are unacceptable. In response to this problem, Riot had placed judicial power in the hands of the gamer, with the Tribunal system, but with the loss of this system, judgment is left within the hands of employees at Riot games who go through reports by hand using a system of right versus wrong that the community had created within Tribunal. "So let's say you go on the forums and you complain: "Hey, I was banned by Riot. I don't agree. I don't deserve this." So now, other players are saying: "Hey, show us your evidence. Show us what they sent you." They'll post it, and all the other players will be like, "Hey, that's not cool. You should have known that." And that's how we're slowly changing that perception."(Jeffrey Lin, interview, 3-15-15) By making toxic behavior visible to the player base, and allowing for the player base to decide what is right, or wrong, Riot hopes to remove the disconnect between the online world and the offline one.

Anonymity and a general disconnect are intertwined problems that build off of each other. By being allowed to remain anonymous, players can choose to be anything they want with little real world repercussions. The sad truth is that some players use this as a shield to allow for verbal harassment and cyber bullying. The ironic part of this is while anonymity can be used as a shield to attack another's identity, anonymity is in place to protect the player's existent world identity. Anonymity has long been a controversial subject in regards to communicative interaction on the internet and in social media. Anonymity can have devastating effects upon player experience in League of Legends and experiences with the internet in general. New York Times points out how restricting anonymity may be the answer to ending "trolling", the action of using inflammatory behavior to incite anger, by saying "This kind of social pressure works because, at the end of the day, most trolls wouldn't have the gall to say to another person's face half the things they anonymously post on the Internet."(Zhuao, 2015) Inflammatory comments thrive under anonymity, and League of Legends can create this environment due to its use of the Summoner Name, the player's username. Comments with the intent to troll can often alienate players and make them feel "salty", or hurt. Anonymity in League of Legends can even result in cyber bullying.

Jeffrey Lin disagrees with Zhuao, and the belief that creating an environment where people have to display their real identities is the way to solve the toxicity problem. As a cognitive psychologist, Lyte's job is to shape the community's behavior through

implementations of different reward and punishments systems. According to Lyte, “With real ID, devs [developers] will say, ‘If they have to use their names to play, and everybody can see your real name, then all of the problems go away.’ But as you might have seen from news websites, a lot of them ask you to log in with Facebook, or log in with Google today, so they have your real name. But the behaviors haven't changed.” In fact, Lyte believes that the problem with player behavior and trolling on the internet stems not from anonymity, but from a lack of consequences both negative and positive. Lyte’s claims makes sense, even when individuals cannot hide behind anonymity, they can create toxic environments. Behavioral changes need to come as a result of behavioristic methods, conditioning through reward and punishment, and in addition to this, they need to come from within, as intrinsically motivated goals.

To create an environment where positive behavior is rewarded and negative behavior is punished, the Tribunal has been replaced by a new system. Using the Tribunal as a basis for Riot’s new justice system, Lin has helped to create a novel form of automated ethics. Riot has used over 100 million votes cast in Tribunal to build an artificial intelligence that polices the player base and responds to reports filed. With this system, the values that players previously decided upon as positive, or negative, will be rewarded or punished. The purpose of this system, like all systems of reward and punishment, is to condition behavior and to reach a point in time where positive behavior is reflex and negative behavior has been purged. This is a scary ambitious system; the new Tribunal is an automated machine that decides what is wrong and what is right and then conditions players of one of the most popular activities in the world. While this appears to be a form of cyber-bullying RoboCop, it is important to remember that the artificial intelligence delegating player behavior was created from those same players. While this is only a videogame, Riot, has done something almost unheard of. Riot has created the ultimate digital Leviathan, “For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which, the Sovereignty is an Artificial Soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body;” (Hobbes, 1651) In Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan he describes a ruler of the people who only exists due to the support he receives from the body he governs, the commonwealth. To do this, the Leviathan must act in the people’s best interest while also protecting them from

themselves. Riot has taken their digital Leviathan to the next level, by having it originate from what the player base wants, in order to protect the player base from themselves.

Not only does the new automated tribunal provide near instant feedback for reports in game, but it also brings with it a new type of feedback. The message players receive when they are reported is as follows, “Your peers judged your behavior to be far below the standards of the League of Legends community. Think through the conversation and reflect on your words. League is an intense, competitive game, but every player deserves respect.” (Tribunal report, 2015) After reading this message, players must sign an agreement to better themselves and refrain from being a toxic member of the community. According to Jeffrey Linn, this agreement is “inspired by verbal commitment research and by itself reduced leaving and AFK behavior by a pretty significant amount.”(Jeffrey Linn, interview, 8-17-2015) By creating a verbal commitment, players must make a declaration of action making them feel more obligated to follow through with their commitment and lowering the risk of cognitive dissonance, a personal clash of performance and belief. This can provide for intrinsic motivation for players to better themselves. By stating that “your peers” have judged the player in question, the player is forced to acknowledge that this behavior is not acceptable by her or his entire community and not just a lone judge.

Due to the new Tribunal’s creation, one based upon the communities’ culture, Riot does not dictate what is wrong and right. This responsibility is in the hands of the players who created the data used to make the new Tribunal. Jeffrey Linn brings up an excellent example of this feature when tackling the problem of *GGEZ*, “We rely on data like Reports, Honors, social media, the Instant Feedback System and Tribunal to help determine the standards of what the community believes is OK or not OK... all of our systems are intentionally designed to be community-driven, because we want players to have the ability to invest in and shape their own community. In saying this, looking at the data, *GGEZ* is considered a negative term, and is reportable. Players generally agree that the phrase is rarely used in a positive context, and is a pretty sour way to end a match.”(Jeffrey Linn, interview 7-11-2015) *GGEZ* is short for “good game, easy” which was ruled upon by the community as a toxic phrase and thus a reportable action. The counterpart to *GGEZ*, *GGWP*, “good game well played”, is an overwhelmingly positive phrase often resulting in *honors* instead of *reports*. The language created from the

culture of League of Legends has complicated the justice system, yet because both the language and the justice system are driven by the community, the new Tribunal has no problem adapting to new vocabulary in its every-changing community. “As players Honor and Report different behaviors, they contribute directly to the Tribunal's understanding of what's OK or not OK in League, and the system updates itself to determine the current standards of conduct. Because these things are constantly evolving, it's not easy for us to just "post" a list of rules because like real life, laws can change over time. However, in this online ecosystem, laws could change daily and is not as slow as real life which make take years for policy changes” (Jeffrey Linn, interview, 7-11-2015) Here Linn describes perfectly the adaptability of the new Tribunal, an artificial intelligence that can administer justice through the perspective of those providing it data.

The new Tribunal also holds the potential to award positive behavior. While the old Tribunal is one exclusively with the power to punish and hopefully reform, the new one is much more complex. Jeffrey Linn has commented on the toolbox for reforming player behavior and the history of how Riot has addressed solving player behavior online, “Although a lot of classic, traditional research suggests that positive reinforcement can be more effective at reform than punishment, if you had to ONLY choose one or if you had to choose which one to do FIRST, it becomes a much trickier choice especially when online societies have evolved for quite a long time without consequences. If online society was a clean slate with no preconceived notions of what's standard etiquette or what the behavioral norms are, you might choose positive reinforcement as your first approach.” (Jeffrey Linn, interview, 8-17-2015) Online societies however are not a clean slate. Never has there been a system of etiquette policing on such a large scale as League of Legends can provide. The history of online communities is a history stained by creating hostile environments of “otherness” with no control over behavior. While there have been pockets of resistance and rallying communities with equality at heart, an online police force for general behavior has yet to be initiated. Riot still has had systems for rewarding positive behavior, and much of what they have learned from these systems is now in the new Tribunal, “We researched the impact of positive reinforcement and its impact on cultural reform when we gave out Santa Baron to positive players in 2013, and Mystery Gifts to positive players in 2014, and rewards for just positive players in Team Up Weekend and Pool Party Events in 2015. With all of the data we've gathered from this research, we're now implementing a lot of these lessons

into new features in the new Tribunal voting system.” (Jeffrey Linn, interview, 8-17-2015) The new Tribunal will be able to review random samples of chat logs and allow for decisions to be made based upon whether or not players are positive, neutral, or negative. Based upon these responses players can then be rewarded or punished with a very short feedback time, providing for an efficient and effective system to shape player behavior.

Since turning on this new system, “The culture *is* shifting: ‘As a result of these governance systems changing online cultural norms, incidences of homophobia, sexism and racism in League of Legends have fallen to a combined 2 percent of all games. Verbal abuse has dropped by more than 40 percent, and 91.6 percent of negative players change their act and never commit another offense after just one reported penalty.’” (Linn, 2015) What is and what is not acceptable in the League of Legends is changing as a result of the new Tribunal, what I have called the digital Leviathan. Much like Hobbes’s description of the Leviathan ruler, the new Tribunal is composed of what the player base values and acts in their best interest. The new Tribunal operates to shape and reform behavior and its impact on the League of Legends community has undoubtedly leaked into the players’ lives. Having an entire community mandate its own behavior intrinsically with the help of the digital Leviathan has the potential to change the way these players see homophobia, sexism, and racism in their own lives. The digital Leviathan may hold the potential to shape an entire generation and culture of people, and while its results have yet to be sufficiently measured due to its relatively recent start, its impact will be lasting purely based upon the power of behavioral conditioning. The new Tribunal meets the needs of an online community through the way it can respond to changes. A quickly adaptable ruleset and judicator that acts for the people’s best interest may become necessary to face the array of problems that come with a globalized world escalating to the brink of resource depletion.

Conclusion

The value of knowledge and information has changed. With the invention of the internet, our already globalized world developed a travel time of seconds. Communication and

cooperation are the tools that will allow us to sink or swim, and now more than ever we need to stay afloat. What allows us to communicate and cooperate in altruistic ways becomes an important element for confronting global problems. A five versus five game of strategy, reflex, and communication can provide for an important social model in examining how individuals can cooperate in a globalized setting. In this paper I have revealed how becoming a Summoner (Chapter I), and developing the language and meta-knowledge through separation, liminality, and reaggregation (Turner, 1969) can lead to the adoption of a new dramaturgical role (Goffman, 1959) in a novel semiotic domain (Gee, 2007) that allows players to function together through a newly established shared cultural background (Durkheim, 1953) that includes group activities, a justice system and even shared holidays. The Tribunal, special events such as Pool Party, the honor system, the meritocratic ranking system and the emphasis upon egalitarian justice all operate to promote cooperation through creating a shared identity and culture.

Further diving into the shared cultural background and language, I examined the Language of Legends (Chapter II), with the S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. model (Hymes, 1997) to find that the most effective form of communication is one that is rapid and effective, while also controlling the tone and mood of the conversation in order to avoid *tilt*. In addition to this, I looked at how the actors as teams (Goffman, 1959) in League of Legends participate with one another when it comes to making group decisions. From observations of professional e-sports teams we can conclude that the best calls are the ones where everyone follows one voice for macro, entire team, related decisions, while individual actors operate independently on a micro, mechanical, level. Using a sole shotcaller allows a team to react faster, and when this is paired with a specialized common dialect, productivity and efficiency is at an all-time high.

In the third chapter, I examine how intolerance can destroy teams by creating a void in altruistic behavior and cooperation. I began by discussing Altruism as a kin based (Hamilton, 1964) construct prone to biological, and sociocultural (Regnerus, Smith, Sikkink, 1998) factors such as race, gender, and religion. Research has shown altruism to be influenced by “in” and “out” grouping (Dent, 2005), but in an environment where 67 million individuals identify across many different continuums, how does altruism and cooperation exist? To answer this question I relied on interviews with some of League of Legends most diverse players. Professional players and beginners alike who do not identify as white, or heterosexual men, offered their opinions on

why they choose to expose their existent world identity, or remain anonymous for better or worse. While many popular players in the League of Legends scene express their identities openly, some still choose to participate in the façade of pluralism to achieve the “greatest good in communion with others.”(Durkheim, 1953) Those who are open with their identity (notably *Sky*, *Remilia*, and *Lautemortis*) have many reasons for doing so most notably acting as representatives of a marginalized population in a historically heteronormative, misogynist, and white community. Many see exposure and representation as the first step to overcoming conflicts of intolerance.

In the fourth chapter, I focused upon the in game features and how they shape the players potential outlook. The moment any choices are made about what to and what to not include in a game, and then how to present these chosen or not chosen materials, is the moment where a game studio takes a stance. No matter how benign or unassuming a programmer or gaming studio may be, just by creating the game they are creating a world with values that impact each and every player of their game. Art has always offered a distorted view of reality (Plato, 380 BC), and League of Legends is no outlier to this. Through interviews, the impact of the diversity of playable characters and the values at the core of the gameplay have been dissected. Everything from appearance of the characters and map to the game’s mechanics (micro) influence the players’ conception of reality. The impact of modern media upon behavior is enormous (Seiter, 1998). The additional conditioning that comes along with a videogame based upon failure, success and social learning (Vygotsky, 1978) (Bandura, 1971) creates a hugely impactful medium upon players both in and outside of the game. The values of League of Legends shine through in its playable characters, and its meta game strategies which are based upon a division of labor, specialization, and stratification. There is an emphasis on every meta role (position) being necessary for victory in a holistic and commune-like system, but not every role is valued equally as different castes have different incomes and bounties. As for the character roster, League of Legends performs well above the average game in diversity, yet falters in gender diversity, which can lead to the marginalization of many populations. This type of analysis of League of Legends displays the impact that even the most tangential aspects of life have on those who cross through them. Like the Romans entertained the masses with gladiator arenas, we have the opportunity to entertain the masses with games that carry values such as tolerance, sustainability, and potentially altruism. While these three values do not necessarily appear in

League of Legends, a game with similar scale could have astounding positive impact upon a given population.

In my final chapter, I discuss The Tribunal, and the conditioning and policing of a global community on a massive scale. The leading problem within player behavior is a general disconnect between what happens online and what happens in real life. The answer to this problem is that there is no difference between what happens online and what happens in real life, because they are one in the same. To communicate this fact, League of Legends has established a justice system with laws made by the player base, executed by the player base, and judged by the player base. This system, The Tribunal is a novel form of micro-governing that allows each player to participate in the creation of laws, the execution of these laws, and the judgment of each case, putting the power into their hands and creating an egalitarian democratic global community. Since its creation, the Tribunal has been modified to the now automated Tribunal that uses Tribunal logs and old and new reports made by players to create a code for justice that is always changing to meet the dynamic needs of the community. This new Tribunal, the digital Leviathan (Hobbes, 1651), works with the data provided by the community to judge players who have been reported by the peers. This near instant feedback can both reward and punish players. The new Tribunal was created by the player base to protect the player base, leading to significant change that has already had a substantial effect upon the community.

If League of Legends can provide a social model for cooperation and altruistic behavior, the source of this behavior can be easily derived for future applications. What allows five strangers from all walks of life to come together, or fall apart may also be indicative of what allows global leaders to cooperate in a *gg*, or be confronted with defeat. League of Legends has provided for five possible ways by which a diverse population can come together to achieve a state of cooperative altruism. Through a shared identity, and an efficient communal dialect, players from around the world can relate to each other and communicate effectively. Through exposure and representation of minority identities, players can overcome preexisting stigmas that would otherwise interfere with cooperation. With values that mirror global capitalism, and a character roster that is relatively diverse, League of Legends provides for an environment that most players can relate to furthering their ability to cooperate. Finally, a shared justice system maintains and molds player behavior to allow for smoother cooperation and a more pleasant

experience overall. Through lessons such as these, we are able to better our own understanding of what can make, or break cooperation in the globalized context that our world exists in.

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