

Gaming Capital on Overwatch's Official Forums

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Abstract

This study uses the public discussion boards of Overwatch to see how context-based gaming capital is present, accumulated and expended through the messages. The data consists of a 1-month snapshot from which 50 most viewed threads were analyzed. The following aspects were recorded from each thread and first 10 replies: views, number of comments, users' role in forums, has the developer replied to thread, topic, date, whether there are types of capital (social, economic, cultural, symbolic) present, and in what linguistic form is the message posted. Findings: while discussions are within Overwatch's framework, there is scarcely any demonstrable amount of gaming capital in a single post or reply. Certain topics elicited more discussion, articulation methods varied but greatly leaned on the user's anecdotal experiences. Further, it was found that gaming capital is used to validate users' own views and argument for the credibility of the user and their messages.

Keywords

content analysis, gaming capital, forum, mixed methods, frequency count

Introduction

The rising popularity of video games has made the stigma of being a gamer smaller while the prevalence of video games is being normalized. As a side effect of these

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phenomena, people around the world are talking about video games through numerous media platforms, including social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), content websites (Twitch, YouTube), and forums hosted by various parties (Bourgonjon et al., 2016).

The information shared, absorbed, and learned through these asynchronous message exchanges dedicated to video games can revolve around virtually any topic ranging around the game in its forums to all the way to daily news in the said forums' off-topic section. Whenever a discussion on the dedicated forums concerns the game, genre, or platform, the messages can be thought to be a form of *gaming capital* (Consalvo, 2007). Gaming capital refers to “the role knowledge, experience and skill have both for an individual, but also for the larger cultural and economic system that surrounds digital games” (Mäyrä, 2010). Thus, gaming capital involves the player's collective understanding of a game or games, and gaming as hobby and work. The concept of gaming is not new, but for the uninitiated, it is at the conceptual level so novel that it will take time for these players to learn how to navigate and function in the game worlds. Bogost (2007) calls this the development of procedural literacies—the abilities to read a particular system (a game) and its requirements, and compare it to other existing systems, such as other games or the non-digital world.

This study examines the general section of Overwatch's official forums in order to explore and map out how gaming capital is displayed and demonstrated through the discussions on the message boards. To this end, this study analyzed the 50 most viewed topics in Overwatch's general forums over 1-month period and first 10 messages to each topic to see how Overwatch capital is manifest and utilized. More specifically this study attempts to find answers to these research questions: (1) how the types of Overwatch capital circulate in and through an online community related to the game, and what forms they take; (2) in what ways other types of capital exhibit features of gaming capital, and how does the overlap of these types of capital together can help to further define what gaming capital is.

Overwatch is a first-person shooter game released by Blizzard Entertainment in 2016 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016), and the first installment of the game series focuses purely on two teams of six players battling over various objectives in a player-versus-player setting. The game focuses on playable characters and their abilities to work together and overcome the enemy team. Overwatch has gained rather explosive popularity since its release, one that has been followed by a steady decline in player-base and interest in the game and its flagship e-sports scene “Overwatch League.” The game is aimed towards all types and levels of players where learning the basics is straightforward but true mastery takes months of dedication, but this alone is not enough to retain the players. Because of the story of Overwatch has had its highs and lows, the game has received sizeable scholarly attention from multitude of approaches. Recent topics have included gender (Friman & Ruotsalainen, 2022), ongoing development of the game (Välisalo & Ruotsalainen, 2022), players of Overwatch (Blom, 2022; Bohunicky & Youngblood, 2019; Cullen et al., 2018; Vahlo & Karhulahti, 2022; Välisalo & Ruotsalainen, 2019), and the

game's loot boxes (Macey & Bujić, 2022). This study attempts to build upon the previous studies (see above Harviainen & Savolainen, 2014; Mäyrä, 2010; Walsh & Apperley, 2008) to expand discussion that gaming capital is multimodal through an analysis of discussion forums of *Overwatch*.

Gaming Capital

Gaming capital is a highly feasible concept to utilize when studying how value is negotiated, accumulated, and expended in a public forum discussion. It gives both a holistic and a specific enough framework to read and analyze messages through with. When combined with other types of capital, it forms a solid foundation as to how gaming capital is born and how it can be seen in a strictly extra-game setting. The value of one's gaming capital will go down over time unless it is added to, or even changed to, newer and more relevant information (see Consalvo, 2019). This means thinking about gaming capital purely as an extension to Bourdieu's cultural capital (1986) is not covering everything.

To situate this study to the area of gaming capital, it is necessary to briefly define other types of capital present in the social world. Gaming capital can be understood as a derivative of cultural capital, defined by Bourdieu as "familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society" (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), comes in three forms: objectified (physical items), embodied (actions, mannerisms, and behaviors) and institutional (titles and recognition of knowledges). While much of the premise of gaming capital is tied into cultural capital, there are remnants of the other forms of capital that Bourdieu mentions embedded in what we come to understand as gaming capital. Bourdieu (1986) also presented social capital as the sum of the resources available to an entity as part of a network; economic capital as material or tradeable assets that are instantaneously convertible into money or property rights; and symbolic capital as the recognition of one's feats or actions through the eyes of others. It is impossible to accrue symbolic capital on one's own, it is only realized through other types of capital and through social interactions. Additionally, one's ability to accumulate gaming capital through asynchronous discussion boards is tied to a linguistic capital. Bourdieu refers to linguistic capital as one's discursive ability to convey meaning, status, purpose, and goals over written or spoken speech (Bourdieu, 1977).

In these dedicated forums, the type of gaming capital being manifested, accumulated, and spent varies greatly, but in the end the community and players have a net gain in their gaming capital. Through social interactions, one's game knowledge and understanding are made tangible as being able to answer questions their gaming capital is legitimized, and they gain symbolic capital within that topic of the discussion through social capital (Harviainen & Savolainen, 2014; Walsh & Apperley, 2008). Furthermore, studying *Overwatch*'s official forums demonstrates how gaming capital is not merely cultural capital, but rather ever-changing sum of other types of capital that varies depending on the game and framework the capital is present in.

The gaming capital of any other game is specific gaming capital to it as capital is specific to the field of practice.

Methodology

Qualitative content analysis offers an empirical way to manage the flexibility of discourses that could occur in the forums. For an overlook of the forum's studies similar to this one, it was deemed more feasible and meaningful to do a search on Overwatch's official forums' general section (henceforth "forums") without any specific term, phrase, or theme to focus on (see [Bell, 2021](#); [Braithwaite, 2014](#) for similar studies). Qualitative content analysis is used to find patterns from decentralized or seemingly unfocused data ([Elo et al., 2014](#); [Forman & Damschroder, 2007](#); [Kohlbacher, 2006](#)). From the three approaches to qualitative content analysis as presented by [Hsieh and Shannon \(2005\)](#), this study is in the style of "directed content analysis" where "...analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes." To support the qualitative content analysis methodology to discover possible new categories and emerging findings giving more context or meaning to categories thought before the analysis, this study incorporates frequency count to draw feasible and holistic conclusions from. The data set is large for purely qualitative study, and the way the study is set up utilizing mixed methods approach is the most feasible one. In this study, the data is the top 50 most viewed threads on the forums during a 1-month period in 2021 between May 16 and June 16.

Fifty most viewed threads over the 1-month period were chosen to allow for sizeable data set without hampering the data set or its analysis too much by having either too big or too little to work with. The time period from mid-May to mid-June was chosen because that is when the Western areas of the globe are moving to a period where academic requirements wane, allowing more time to play games and participate in forums.

The first 10 messages from each of the 50 threads were analyzed further. The analysis included the tone of the message, to what or who the message was aimed towards, users' role on the forums, what the message shortly is about, how many hearts (equivalent of likes or upvotes), and whether the message was turned into a subthread, the number of replies in the subthread and the tone of the replies in the subthread overall. [Table 1](#) depicts the titles, approximate views and comments of the threads analyzed for this study.

To find these trends on how various types of capital are displayed on the forums, each thread's first message and then the first 10 replies to the thread are closely examined. This includes the replies and subthreads containing messages that fall within the first 10 replies. In addition to reading the messages and capturing emerging trends and patterns, the number of hearts (the forums equivalent of likes), the number of messages in the whole thread, and the writer's role on the forums were documented.

Forum discussions related to one game have a certain degree or amount of innate game-specific capital. This means that every user posting to the forums carries some

Table 1. The Titles, Views, and Comments in Threads Analyzed.

Topic title	Views	Comments
Overwatch Bans: Long-term Mentality and Recent Action	12900	153
Cross-Play is Coming to Overwatch!	5300	219
Pride confirmed coming soon!	5200	644
Where is classic QP	4300	203
5v5 overwhelmingly negative	4000	270
May 24th Reddit AMA – All developer responses here!	3700	206
Flats on 5V5 (trust me he's speaking the truth)	3400	253
QPC and Mystery heroes no longer permanent?	3000	247
Overwatch confirmed dying	2600	125
First look at the player-versus-player changes coming to Overwatch 2	2600	83
PC players cannot opt out of cross-play, why?	2500	342
Why the "Rainbow" icon is problematic and disappointing	2400	440
Environment States in Overwatch 2: Behind the scenes with the engineering team	2400	54
Anyone else not buying OW2/quitting if it's 1/2/2?	2300	250
I'm VERY outraged	2300	213
I am now forced to ruin 20+ games	2100	220
I don't want to be a "brawler" I want to be a tank!	2000	213
Mercy's OW2 UI Is Really Bad	2000	151
To all the people saying "Just wait and try 5v5 out"	2000	133
A single rainbow flag added quietly is a cop out	2000	188
Can we treat female gamers better?	2000	181
I Tanks per team is a good thing, sue me	2000	190
My Excitement for OW2 is Dead Now	1900	202
So who seriously wanted 5v5?	1900	181
I'll be honest, one tank sucks	1900	144
Overwatch 2 Developer Live Stream – List of all changes!	1900	652
Antinade needs a real counter lol	1900	174
#RIPsombraOW2 : (1900	212
Overwatch Double XP Weekend June 4–8	1900	34
Crossplay is a net negative on PC	1900	248
Is this experimental a joke?	1800	160
Why do gold players expect their dps to have GM level aim?	1800	119
This is the issue with Pride rainbow	1800	457
This community is officially the worst	1700	206
Mass Rez Never Returned	1700	247
Protip: if you ask me NOT to play a hero, I'm playing them	1700	220
Oh my frickin god sombra skin	1700	74
What killed overwatch for u?	1700	308
Florida Mayhem is right in cancelling	1700	197
Happy pride month guys!	1600	268
Oneshots are healthy for OW, they just annoy you	1600	158
Pride is beautiful	1600	398

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Topic title	Views	Comments
Why was mass rez removed but Bap lamp is allowed to stay?	1600	177
Symmetra 4.0 is being teased	1600	166
Pink Mercy is coming back...? How is this fair	1600	102
Korean Official OW Survey of 6v6 vs 5v5	1600	117
Devs really treat Tank players like 2nd class citizens	1600	147
Funk and flavor: Behind the new Overwatch Anniversary skins	1500	10
Do a lot of girls still play overwatch?	1500	265
“shut up about 5v5 you don’t know what it’ll be like”	1500	214

gaming capital, laden with an innate knowledge called a gaming “doxa” and according to Bourdieu refers to “the natural and social world [that] appears as self-evident” (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977). In the case of Overwatch, this refers to the game game-specific information of the systems and functions of the game that is known for every player, such as the names of the playable characters or game format. Thus, the presence of capital in the messages focuses on those in addition to this Overwatch doxa.

To discover trends in how users communicate, display, and use capital on the forums each message was broken down to two distinct categories. Table 2 depicts the short definitions for the types of capital used in this study and examples of how they might be present in the discussions on the forums or in the game. In the second main category are the numerous other aspects of the messages in the data set which were analyzed loosely through the lens of linguistic capital. These are the tone of the message (positive, neutral, or negative) and for subthreads the overall tone of it was recorded, what the message is about, what is the total number of comments to the thread, and what is the linguistic style of the message. These linguistic aspects of the messages focus on how the subjectivity and assertiveness within the forums are brought to the front stage. Table 3 depicts the various tones and linguistic styles recorded with examples for each.

Out of the 500 analyzed messages, 302 were aimed at the Original Post without quotation or the reply function. One hundred and ninety-eight messages were replies in a subthread. One of the messages was overwhelmingly neutral with 408 cases, whereas 49 messages were negative, and 43 were positive. The vast majority of messages were written by regular forums users, 495 messages. Only five were written by a forum MVP, and each of their messages was in the same thread.

The messages aimed at the Original Post or OP (in the form of reply) were about the topic presented in the Original Post, whereas direct replies to other messages were sometimes off-topic with snarky comments, “trolling” or otherwise derailing the discussion from the Original Post. Some replies were answers to questions someone had or were giving additional insight on the topic at hand, via challenging or confirming manifestation types. Messages analyzed had 14.19 hearts on average (median 7).

Table 2. Definitions and Examples of Types of Capital.

Capital type	Definition for this study	Example in overwatch
Social	Refers to the ways the user conveys their social relationships, approached through five subcategories: (a) Lin's networking theory (2001), (b, c) Quantity and Quality of social ties (Granovetter, 1973; Williams, 2006), (d) Well-being and Support gained through social interaction (Yamaguchi, 2013), (e) Community	Possibility to join and form groups; Reciprocity
Economic	Refers to the monetary or financial assets or resources	Budget for purchasing game, items or hardware
Cultural	Refers to one's knowledge about the game's mechanics and functions, and game production	Knowledge on maps, game modes, characters, play styles
Symbolic	Refers to one's presentation in some form that might not be directly tied to other types of capital	Gender, age, in-game rank, account level, achievements
Gaming	The importance of the role knowledge in discussions on dedicated forums concerning the game, genre, or platform	Proper term usage, providing believable and backable arguments and articulation

Results

One of the prime examples of the volatility of the forums is how much engagement and attention thread regarding the Pride month and how it should, or could, be visible in the game. The threads about Pride had rather high view to comment ratio on average, with combined 2,207 replies and 12,600 views across the five threads, resulting in ratio of ~1:5.71. For comparison, the most common topic about game moving from 6v6 to 5v5 has a ratio of less than 1:10 in its 12 threads, even though in the top 10 most viewed topics the move from 6v6 to 5v5 has three spots, and Pride month's presentation one. From this, it can be inferred that larger changes to the game in the sequel garner higher amount of interest in terms of views and clicks of the thread, but less engagement through comments and discussion than the threads about Pride.

The discussion in the threads regarding Pride was found to be rather controversial with people being in highly polarized camps and some even given a role in either extreme group (either against or in favor) even if the comment itself was neutral. For example, thread titled "Why the "Rainbow" icon is problematic and disappointing" starts with "To preface: If you are an LGBT + person and you aren't satisfied with representation, you should absolutely be asking for more acknowledgement in game,"

Table 3. The Examples of the Tones and Linguistic Styles.

Message tone/ style	(Part of) Message
Positive	Really cool to hear about this. Had no clue about the 1,000 bans per week on average. Thanks for the update.
Neutral	I find it ironic that more things are removed compared to new things being added.
Negative	Seeing as how the comments of every media source is overly negative towards the idea of 5v5. It really goes to show how out of touch blizzard is with their community.
Questioning	Why should people play a role they don't enjoy? Doesn't that defeat the purpose of playing a game? I'm not here to work a second job, I'm here to have fun
Explanatory	Gonna take this chance to say that having numbers would really help across all the supports. There are important breakpoints that need to be tracked.
Confirmatory	I would much rather add players than subtract any.
Conflict	Can this community, for once in it's existence, put a sock in it and WAIT, before judging without holding all the cards in hand?
Challenging	why would you let PC players cross play with console players? thanks for letting console players experience hackers!
Affirmative	Omg this is so exciting! Even tho it might be something small i'm still very excited about it!

which is an exclusive wish for the original poster to receive further support to their own feedback from others. This sentence was immediately met with “They have two openly gay characters, a flag icon, and lore around it. I mean, how much is enough?” in the first reply, followed by “The Rainbow Flag is the original name. The fact y’all are oblivious to your own history speaks volumes.” as the second reply. These replies already are aimed at the start of the content of the thread, but not at the individual, by pointing out that the LGBT+ presentation is there, and that utilizing incorrect terms to advance the presentation are making the thread controversial to have discussion about the topic, which is that some feel there is not enough presentation for the sexual minorities, or it is not being put into the front stage enough.

Should the snapshot have been taken at a different random time period, there would have been a different externally motivated cause, such as an update to the game, announcement of a limited-timed event or larger news regarding the game itself. Therefore, there will be a cyclical loop of extra-game topics in the forums trending for a certain amount of time before a new one takes over or hype or new-ness value of the topic withers.

Regarding the types of capital present in the messages, in addition to the doxa level of communication, it was found that in general OPs (Original Posters—people who started a given thread) “asserted” position in various ways: be it with some message to other players or using personal status or knowledge to give an opinion or

somehow make the thread worth reading and replying to. It is possible that in some Original Posts, there are one or more types of capital present and multiple types of manifestations of the message. There are some overlaps with types present as it is possible to utilize more than type of resource in this type of communication at the same time, and to have the message be long enough or written in a style that has, for example, both a question and an explanatory style. In the following example the message is in a thread about how the tank role could play in the future titled “I don’t want to be a ‘brawler’ I want to be a tank!.” The message is as follows: “Yeah the idea of brawling tanks sounds really bad. What about your backline? What about the widow/hanzo and other dps just destroying your backline cause rein is no longer viable to be played with his shield always up cause the health will be reduced.” Here the message in its entirety has both question and explanatory style where there are more than one question with explanations as to why the questions are asked, and further, why the explanation is relevant to the topic and the questions. [Table 4](#) depicts the frequency count on the number of times the types of capital (social, economic, cultural, symbolic) were present in OPs and messages. Followed by [Table 5](#) that presents the frequency counts how the types of linguistic capital were present in OPs.

There was a substantial amount of subthreads as 312 messages were the start of a subthread, or a reply to one. One hundred and thirty-nine subthreads included replies within the first 10 messages. A majority of the subthreads had just one or two replies in them (average 2.55 replies per thread, median 2). Two-hundred and thirty-one subthreads were neutral in their tone overall, with singular replies leaning towards negative, challenging or critiquing a message within the subthread. The community subcategory was the most common type of capital with 36 cases, while the remaining three cases were in the network subcategory. Majority of the messages in the community category were about approaching in-game presentation or relaying information from elsewhere for others to read. There were no messages where the quantity or quality of a user’s social networks was present, nor (subjective) well-being. Manifestation types of the messages were broken into six categories: Question,

Table 4. Frequency Count of Types of Capital.

	Social	Economic	Cultural	Symbolic
OPs, out of 50	26	0	25	26
Messages, out of 500	39	3	56	21

Table 5. Linguistic Capital in OPs.

Type	Confirmatory	Explanatory	Confirmatory	Conflict	Challenge
Count	15	31	17	10	20

Explanatory, Confirmatory, Conflict, Challenging, and Affirmative. The frequency counts for the manifestations of linguistic capital of messages are presented in Table 6.

One example of *question* messages is a thread where the OP is wondering why a limited time outfit for one playable character is being brought back titled “Pink Mercy is coming back..? How is this fair.” This Pink Mercy refers to a unique customization option for one of the game’s characters that was available for a certain amount of time and only way to obtain it was to pay for it in real-world currencies. The proceeds of the purchases went to Breast Cancer Research Foundation. The OP asked and explained their stance in the following message: “The skin had actual meaning and you’re just going to bring it back because some brats in your Twitter mentions said to? Come on man, you’re so much better than that. If you’re going to do this, fine. At least make other limited skins available too and force people to pay for Pink so it benefits the charity it represents.” The thread’s first 10 responses are asking for confirmation and demanding source: “Wait, what? I demand a source!” and “Pics or it didn’t happen.” To which OP answers with referring to an Ask Me Anything session with developers during which it was said that they might bring back some competitive team’s skins: “Assuming that they’re going through with this, Pink Mercy would be a part of it right?” This is then again met with another question: “So... you jumped to the conclusion that not only would Pink Mercy be among those returning, but that also, for whatever reason, people wouldn’t be paying for it?” This example shows that the types of *question* messages can, and will, vary greatly even within the thread itself where people are asking questions to clarify something, gain more information, ensure they understand something properly, or provide a different perspective.

The messages *explaining* something were utilized to provide context or additional information to support the user’s claims. In a thread titled “Where is classic QP?” the OP and community members were expressing their dislike for unannounced removal of quick play (QP) play mode and were explaining to the community, and thus to the developers, that it is in essence the only play mode, or format, they want and enjoy playing. Some of the messages in the thread explaining the dislike are as follows: “That’s like the only mode I play and they take it away. Like wtf,” “for real, where is it? I DON’T PLAY ANYTHING ELSE hello blizzard ??,” “for real can we get an answer to this? QP Classic is the only mode worth playing in this game. Why was it taken out without any announcement?” and “I am the same way, I only played Quick Play Classic. This game mode was a shelter amidst the raging hurricanes of role queue.” In this example, the rotation of play modes and formats is negatively impacting players’ experience, rather than keeping the possibilities of playing fresh by altering the possibilities to play the game. Further, in this data set expressing one’s

Table 6. Frequency Count of Types of Manifestations.

Type	Question	Explanatory	Confirmatory	Conflict	Challenge	Affirmative
Count	54	241	10	21	126	112

personal take or feedback on game's changes or current happenings within the game or its sphere of influence were by far the most common way to type an *explaining* message.

Confirmatory messages were one of the fewest in the data set with most being answers in neutral tone to confirm someone's question or thinking. The examples of these types of messages are present in a thread titled "Can we treat female gamers better?" in which the OP asks for more just and better treatment for female co-players. One of the confirmatory messages in the analyzed responses is "probably not, people suck im not gonna lie" referring to the question in the title. Second confirmatory message comes as an answer to someone asking, "Who actually plays that [Open Queue]?" with somewhat crude tone "OP lmao." Further down the thread there are multiple people answering that they are indeed playing this format, however. Based on this example and the data set the *confirmatory* messages are also answers to various and sometimes off-topic questions or claims.

Conflicts. In a thread titled "I don't want to be a "brawler" I want to be a tank!," OP speculates that they will not like the format change from six to five members per team as that would shift how the game is played too much for OP's liking. The thread has messages and responses going against OP's and repliers' opinions. First message is "Shooting at shields is boring," to which OP started their reply with "That is an opinion you have, not a fact." Thread continues with "DPS community is much bigger. Time to appeal to dps players. Tanks are killing this game and every match is bottlenecked by 20 + minutes just waiting for someone to pick the role" which in turn is met with replies: "Have you ever thought that "tanks" are the people that do pick the role, and the people that bottleneck are DPS unwilling to actually learn the game." and "I am so sorry. I do not know how to respond.

You want the game to focus around the opinions of 1 group? This destroys anything because there will only be one opinion expressed. I have no idea if this is a troll account because changing and destroying an entire aspect and idea of a group just dor the slight convience of others would show a horrible game philosophy." The thread then continues forum users going against each other with conflicting tones and ideals on who is to play for the friction within the game's community for great disparity in queue times depending on which role someone plays, and how the game's play experience and flow might change. *Conflicting* messages were mostly on threads with personal touch or approach to some aspect of the game or experience of it.

Challenging the topic was often either expressively or strongly disagreeing with the topic or other user's message or providing a different perspective or alternative solution. These were concatenated into two types of threads. First type of threads were about the upcoming changes to the sequel, for example a thread titled "5v5 overwhelmingly negative." The thread consists of OP giving a set of bullet point arguments why the format change is "overly negative" and "It really goes to show how out of touch blizzard is with their community." and finishing the message with "Through all of this blizzard is guaranteed to continue ignoring all of our feedback like they have for years, and tank players will always be treated as second class citizens."

Here the *challenge* of the topic relates to the decision of the developers. Thread then continues on other users challenging the topic, or agreeing with OP, or going at odds with the OP with comments such as “Shocker,” “I don’t want to lose either of my tank players on my team.” and “SeCoND class cITizeNs’ Bah, you people will never stop being unreasonably whiney.” Further down the thread people are offering alternatives to the 5v5 format, or just bashing the developers for going that route, and some pointing out that there are communities, or player groups, that are not against the change, thus challenging the OPs argument.

Second type of threads *challenging* the topic or developers’ decision regarded mostly the Pride month and its in-game presentation. In a thread titled “Why the ‘Rainbow’ icon is problematic and disappointing” OP is far from content with the amount of attention LGBTQ+ community has received for the game and is calling for all other members of the community to ask for more. Further, the OP is unhappy with Blizzard for not naming the rainbow avatar icon they added “Pride” but “Rainbow.” This precise argument received this comment “The Rainbow Flag is the original name. The fact y’all are oblivious to your own history speaks volumes.” which in itself is challenging and accusative even if the comment about the rainbow flag is correct. Second example thread about the Pride month and its in-game presentation is titled “A single rainbow flag added quietly is a cop out” where the OP shares a Twitter post to compare what other games of similar genre have done or will do for the presentation of LGBTQ+ community. Among the analyzed messages of the thread that are in the *challenge* category: “I don’t think it’s a cop out. We’ve got an icon to express our support for equality which I thought was the important part. The rest is more icing on the cake.” and “Well, the rainbow flag represents everything itself, the diversity.” For some there is no need to push LGBTQ+ in-game through avatar icons or give more highlights to such in-game characters whereas for some the developers should absolutely do more to give attention to the Pride month but they were not focusing on how the developers should do it.

Affirmative messages can be categorized into two different types: agreeing with the thread’s message(s) and providing positive feedback to the user they are replying or referring to. First type of affirmative messages was themselves found to be clustered around two sets of threads: Pride month’s in-game presentation and the upcoming change in team size for the sequel. Prime example in the data set is the replies in the thread titled “Pride confirmed coming soon!” in which the OP shared a Tweet about an interview “regarding pride content.” This was met with replies such as “Yo, this makes me excited,” “Omg this is so exciting! Even tho it might be something small i’m still very excited about it!,” “I have a feeling this thread will become controversial. Either way, I’m welcome to more events and content,” “Yesss!! I hope we get some asexual rep!” and “Congrats to the gays and their acronym friends.” Regarding the format change, the *affirmative* replies were more on the topic of the thread itself, rather than the more arching happening like the Pride month. In a thread titled “Overwatch confirmed dying” the OP and replies to it are in certain level of agreement in speculating that playing the tank role will be more stressful and queue times might

get even more skewed. Some of the replies are as follows: “Playing tank will be so stressful now. And you will get screeched at all game every game for not playing Rein,” “looking forward to the devs taking 3 years to rebalance tanks once ow2 drops” and “LOL I kept telling everyone they were willing to sacrifice half the tank players to ‘fix’ queue times for obstinate DPS players....” It must be noted that at the time of the messages written, there was not much actual gameplay or information available, other than one showcase to highlight stylistic changes and release planned for 2022. Both types of messages relating to the thread’s topic were commonly rather critical and negative towards the developers, mainly for the lack of communication.

Cases of the second type of approach were gathered to threads about the developer’s blog post of recent actions taken against illicit accounts and how they are going to push for a better game environment in the future, and to one well-written feedback on one heroine’s user interface (UI) changes in the sequel and suggestion on how to make the UI function better with less visual clutter. For example, in the thread titled “Overwatch Bans: Long-term Mentality and Recent Action” which is one of the five started by a representative of the developers, the users of the forums were glad to see such communication from the developers: “Thank you Josh for the update, honestly hacking his been on the rise as the game as gone older (or at least hackers are the only ones staying on the game) so updates are pretty good,” “Really cool to hear about this. Had no clue about the 1,000 bans per week on average. Thanks for the update,” “Didnt know there was so many bans per week! wow! Thanks” and “Wow, good job!!”

Lastly, the thread about the UI of one character is titled “Mercy’s OW2 UI Is Really Bad” the OP lists in detail some of the more glaring issues in the UI design compared to first game. Out of the 10 analyzed replies seven can be categorized as *affirmative*. Some of the replies are “productive post pointing out a real concern... yeah I don’t see this thread getting much attention on these forums KEKW,” “Gonna take this chance to say that having numbers would really help across all the supports. There are important breakpoints that need to be tracked,” “I agree, I dispise the new UI, I hate how bright the ultimate logos are, I hate how my teammates healthbars look as mercy, I hate how all the your abilities and healthbar are slanted, it makes me feel sick, I hate how the new ult charge looks... it just looks bad, sickening, and overwhelming.” and “I personally like the new UI but I barely play the hero nowadays so it would be hypocritical of me to want it to stay. I probably just like it because it looks new. I hope it gets changed! :]” These messages were directly aimed at the writer of the post or message, rather than fully endorsing, or agreeing with the message conveyed.

Discussion, Implications

Overall, anecdotes were quite common as there was some information stated as fact and were often concerned with the whole player-base without any source or data to back their claims, such as “For people who are not tank mains, it is hard to put

yourselves in our shoes but I think i speak for a majority of tank players that this change sucks.” This is effectively gatekeeping others from gaining capital by requiring certain degree of agreeableness, yet the actual demands are very rarely told as what is required for a satisfactory showing of one’s Overwatch capital. This is in line with earlier research, which has suggested that information sharing relating to a game is not just assistance to other players, but also an application of power done for the purpose of gathering capital (e.g., [Harviainen & Hamari, 2015](#)). Using anecdotes or personal understanding can work in making others to trust the message, and anecdotes are used to assert one’s position within the message chain. Naturally, there is more than just confident style of writing at play. Some users might think they truly know or understand a topic they are talking about which then comes off as confidence, as in their mind there is nothing uncertain. Additionally, it is assumed that users do not willfully lie to other members of the community. Whether the anecdotes were used “successfully” or not, is not in the scope of this study, but could be an interesting future study topic.

Finding a satisfactory answer to the first research question has proven difficult, and the short answer is that circulation of capital does happen, but not in the expected way for it to happen. The gaming capital takes the form of doxa and linguistic capital, and through those are the other types of capital within the gaming capital become present. The value and amount of any user’s capital is only legitimized and realized through others. Depending on the topic, or even the members partaking in any given thread, certain aspects of one’s Overwatch capital are highlighted more than others. In some cases, user’s gender weighs more than their account rank or how well they articulate the response(s), and vice versa. For example, in a thread titled “I’m VERY outraged,” OP made a lengthy message about the lack of females at the top of the e-sports scene and it gathered these replies from two self-reported females: “This topic AGAIN. As a woman myself, the last place I care to see representation is in OWL and everything surrounding pro-play in any competitive game. Know a few fellow ladies that don’t want to be professional players.” and “Ugh another one of this posts? Representation \neq skill. guys are just better and more interested in E-sports. If women want they can achieve the same. It’s their choice.” It is highly volatile, dialectic, and dynamic way for capital to be presented because of nature of the forums being open and virtually no topic is disallowed as long as it is pertaining somehow to the game itself.

The presence of types of capital had great differences between messages and original posts. In 20 original posts where type of capital was present there were two or more expended simultaneously, such as threads titled “Pride confirmed coming soon!” and “Overwatch confirmed dying.” This is interesting as the OPs seemed to push their assertiveness for a thread to be worth a read through various types of capital. Yet, not once was economic capital present in the original posts, so the combinations of types of capital were between social, cultural, and symbolic capital. While symbolic capital is defined as somewhat indirect capital, it is still possible to accrue it by stating something that others in the community will understand. These statements

were in this study mostly the user's gender, in-game rank in competitive playlist, or account level. Messages focused on or attempted at some dialogue, but surprisingly rarely there was capital present. From this, it can be inferred that users are drawn to certain topics on the forums and echo or challenge the topic.

The lack of economic capital is somewhat unexpected. It is possible to buy loot boxes in-game with in-game currency and with real money, and for a game that has no subscription fees to play, it is the only monetization system. Compared to other games that focus more on monetization than actual game content, *Overwatch's* income generation relies solely on selling new copies and loot boxes. To alleviate this, there are numerous limited time events around the year that always have new skins available that can be bought with in-game currency or received from a loot box during the event. There are naturally differences in monetization and revenue strategies between games (see e.g., *World of Tanks* ([Wargaming.net, 2010](#)) and *FIFA* series ([Electronic Arts, 1993-present](#))), but in *Overwatch*, there has not been egregious amount of in-game monetization pushed for the players, the sequel might paint a different based on information available at the time of data gathering.

It seems that while there is a certain degree of economy present in the game, such as in-game credits, the game's monetization systems are not presented or utilized in the forum discussions. From this, it can be inferred that there seems to be a desire to keep and accumulate social and cultural capital more than there is for economic and symbolic capital. Especially in its current form, before the launch of the sequel or any information of its monetization systems, the value of the player is seen through their knowledge of the game and position within the community's hierarchy. This sets the mindset of players of *Overwatch* in very different position compared to for example, *Fortnite* ([Epic Games, 2017](#)) and *Apex Legends* ([Respawn Entertainment & Electronic Arts, 2019](#)). At the time of data gathering, it is impossible to buy specific skins or other vanity items directly with real-life currencies. Presentation of self and characters has become increasingly popular within online gaming in the last few years, and it is rather curious that *Overwatch* decided to go against this trend.

Overwatch has received numerous free updates since its launch which means that the expected level of game doxa has increased as new maps, playable characters and their reworks, new modes, vanity items, and adjustments change the amount of basic knowledge needed to function believably in communities around *Overwatch*. These additions and changes are discussed, and feedback given through the forums and in other various communities which in turn alters or increases the amount social or cultural capital any given player has regarding *Overwatch*. At least within the *Overwatch's* sphere of influence, gaming capital is both social and cultural capital as the game is multiplayer only and how one acts in the game directly affects others' gameplay experience. While personal gaming capital as [Consalvo \(2007\)](#) presented it is helpful to the player themselves, and in the online multiplayer games indirectly to the others, in this case, the personal knowledge of the game is not enough to explain how players operate the community and co-operate within the game.

To answer the second research question, merely focusing on gaming capital through cultural capital lens is not enough to explain how the status of one's status or identity as gamer or the accumulation of gaming capital happens. It is more akin to the social interactions with other members of one's social networks that give value to the game and gaming knowledge. In this approach, gaming capital is very close to being symbolic capital as the knowledge is legitimized through social capital. Thus, it is more feasible to start approaching gaming capital in the context of online multi-player games as a synthesis of social and cultural capital when approached through the Bourdieusian lens.

Regarding the manifestation types of messages, it is no surprise that almost half of the messages were explaining something. Many threads were stating or asking something which will spark a discussion. Rather unexpected and interesting was the fact that there were more messages challenging the topic or other user's message than being in some way positive towards the topic or messages. Rest of the types of manifestations were scarce and used for a very specific purpose, either to almost insult another user or request an exact source for a claim a user made.

It was found that original posters were actively responding to the messages in threads (within the first 10 replies) about the upcoming changes to the game's systems in the sequel. Any new information on the sequel is surely going to generate attention and discussion on the forums as during the data gathering period there was not much information available regarding the sequel.

Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. The results cannot be directly generalized to other games, as every game has its own subculture and gaming capital. While the results can be reflective of other forums, this study can merely validate or challenge other studies' findings and provide more data from which to draw conclusions and inspiration for future projects and research.

Further, the amount of capital that Overwatch has, and its players have, is not strictly comparable to other types of games because the affordances, possibilities, functionalities, and game design choices vary too much. As Overwatch development is on-going new content published, the cap for gaming capital is always rising. Certain information or knowledge can lose its "value" as it becomes outdated or irrelevant because of an update or balance changes (Consalvo, 2019). Comparing the amount of capital Overwatch to other games is not straightforward as the cap on knowledge is different, and how the types of capital are distributed and accumulate varies greatly and needs to be alleviated in future studies

No automation was used to find any specific keywords or phrases, and as such the manual work to complete the study was immense. Additionally, due no filter to focus on certain topics, it was necessary to limit the analyzed messages to first 10 as going through threads with hundreds of messages would have been infeasible. It is known that first 10 messages are more akin to reactionary ones rather than deeper and well-

argued. The first 10 messages to any given thread often presented a well-fitting tone for rest of the thread with some being more polarized than others.

Perhaps one of the biggest limitations regarding the representability of the results is the volatility of the general forums of Overwatch. Should the snapshot be taken at a different 30-day period, the top 50 most viewed topics listing would look drastically different with very different discussion tone.

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Henry Korkeila, PhD, MSc, is postdoctoral researcher whose recent work has focused on the avatarization of our analog cultures as they inevitably turn into digital cultures. Special focus has been on avatars themselves, usage of avatars in their different contexts including online video game genres. He has approached avatars through the types of capital, or resources, they have. His recent work in progress looks at game accessibility and inclusivity at large.

Steven Dashiell is an interdisciplinary sociologist who studies language, specifically the nature of discourses in male-dominated subcultures. His work looks at how understood assumptions in language and behavior work to set rules in these spaces that reflect on our interpretations of masculinity. His recent work in progress looks at groups as wide ranging as the military, barbershop patrons, gamers, and Bronies.

J. Tuomas Harviainen, PhD, MBA, is Professor of Information Studies and Interactive Media at Tampere University, Finland. He is a former editor of the journals *Simulation & Gaming* and *International Journal of Role-Playing*. His work has been published in venues such as *Organization Studies*, *New Media & Society*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Journal of Documentation*. Harviainen currently researches mostly either information sharing between co-operative game companies or drug trading on the Dark Web.