

FIFA Football

A video game that functions as an ideal male bonding activity

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Declaration

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Summary

With the proliferation of home consoles in recent decades, video gaming has become an increasingly popular pastime, especially among boys and young men. The video game phenomenon has, therefore, ushered in a new vehicle through which males socialise. This research study discusses the playing of video games as a platform for social interaction among young male adults, with particular reference to the *FIFA Football* franchise. A massively popular game worldwide, it has initiated the emergence of a unique video game culture that includes drinking games and forfeits.

This paper places *FIFA Football* in the wider context of traditional male pastimes in order to illustrate that the game embodies prevalent themes of traditional male bonding activities. Typically, male friendships are characterised by three predominant elements: shared activities, the glorification of traditional perceptions of masculinity and competition. (Thernell-Read, 2012) Shared activities provide men with a medium for indirect, filtered interaction around common interests. This study argues that *FIFA* serves as one such activity, creating an environment for structured interaction where prescribed roles and patterns of behaviour induce group cohesion. *FIFA* is shown to glorify masculine norms through perpetuating the association between masculinity and sport. Indeed, it functions as an expression of football fandom in general; it acts as a group norm that serves as a shared interest in groups and aids in group identity formation. The inextricability of *FIFA* and wider football fandom is attested to in its associated subcultures of *FIFA Drinking Games* and *FIFA Apologies* (a drinking game and a game of forfeits respectively), which directly reference real-life football culture and add even more to the social merits of the game. *FIFA Drinking Games* are shown to be a modern expression of the age old theme of male binge drinking and presents another social element to the medium. Finally, this paper illustrates that *FIFA Football* provides an outlet for men to exercise their competitive energies, the third predominant characteristic of male friendships. *FIFA Apologies* encapsulates the highly competitive nature of the game, contributing to its humour and amusement in mock dominance displays.

Secondary research was utilised widely in this study, where conventional sociological and psychological theories on male friendships and group interaction were applied to the *FIFA Football* group scenario. Primary research, in the form of an online survey, was utilised to collect data on the popularity of the game, as well as to determine in what contexts the game was predominantly played i.e. individually or in a group. Results were found to support the paper's proposal that *FIFA* functions as a popular group activity for male bonding, especially among those who play and follow sport.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. Video Games - A Social Activity	3
2. Literature Review: Male & Female Friendships - The Fundamental Differences	6
3. Methodology	9
Secondary Research	9
Secondary Data Analysis	9
Primary Research	10
Primary Data Analysis	10
Methodological and Ethical Considerations	11
<i>FIFA</i> Survey – Summary of Responses	12
4. <i>FIFA Football</i> and Structured Interaction	13
5. Group Norms, Group Identity and Group Cohesion	18
6. The Element of Competition in <i>FIFA Football</i>	24
Conclusion	29
Bibliography	31

Introduction

Sport, drinking and cars are all traditionally male pastimes that have become inextricably linked with masculine culture. Indeed, while cars (and mechanics and technology in general) may be a relatively new addition to the above list, sport and drinking have dominated male pastimes since time immemorial. We need only glance at classical, Nordic and Celtic legend to see evidence of the latter, be it in the athletic exploits of Achilles or the rowdy feasting halls of the Northmen. Fishing, horse racing, carpentry, boxing, and poker are further examples of archetypal male pastimes, all of which serve as social platforms for male interaction. With the proliferation of home consoles in recent decades, however, video games have become an increasingly popular pastime, especially among boys and young men. Whilst often played independently for personal entertainment, multi-player video games-catering for two or more users, offer a social element to the medium. The video game phenomenon has, therefore, ushered in a new means by which to socialise, joining the match or the round of beers as a platform for homosocial male interaction.

Video games have become the fastest growing form of human recreation. Attesting to this, annual revenues from video games have surpassed those of Hollywood, making them the largest entertainment medium in the world (Ryan et al., 2006, p. 1) and unquestionably deserving of sociological discussion. But, while the negative effects of video games have received extensive academic attention (in particular a proposed association between video games and escalated violent behaviour), the beneficial social significance of the medium has been relatively untouched. This social significance is seen clearly in the *FIFA Football* franchise, which has become an immensely popular pastime among boys and young men alike. As the name suggests, *FIFA* is a video game about football, the most widely played and watched sport in the world. It is no surprise, then, to learn that this annually released video game has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide in its 20-year history (McHugh, 2010) making it one of the most popular video games ever. What is most compelling about this franchise, however, is its social significance, as the game is a hugely popular video game among male groups the world over. In fact, the game is such a popular group activity that it has cultivated its own subculture of unique drinking games and forfeits, attesting even more to its social merit.

This paper proposes that *FIFA Football* serves as a modern platform for male bonding among young adults, fitting the mould of archetypal male pastimes. As we shall see, male same-sex friendships are characterised by shared activities which provide a focal point and support structure for male interaction. Similarly, *FIFA Football* provides a structured activity for groups of men. It promotes group cohesion by creating a familiar setting with its own customs and patterns of behaviour. It acts as a social crutch, providing thematic cues for conversation regarding the video game and real-life

football in general. The strong relationship between virtual football and its real-life counterpart will be analysed at length in this paper, as the game acts as a group norm that bolsters traditional perceptions of masculinity- another characteristic of male group activities- whilst also perpetuating the dominance of football fandom throughout the world. Male shared activities are also characterised by competition which features prominently in *FIFA Football*, where group members are pitted against each other head to head. Competitive energies are channelled in a socially acceptable manner that, rather than generate antagonism, nurtures camaraderie. This competition induces joking and banter and manifests itself in a game of forfeits unique to *FIFA*, as mentioned above. Likewise, the age old male bonding theme of drinking is expressed in its own unique fashion in related drinking games, again consolidating masculinity and contributing to a convivial group atmosphere.

Adopting a sociological approach, this paper will critique *FIFA Football* as a male bonding activity in the context of conventional theories and research on male friendships. Chapter 1 will briefly discuss the social merits of video games and the current state of research into the medium. In Chapter 2, the established theories regarding the fundamental differences between male and female same sex friendships will be considered. Male friendships will be shown to be characterised by shared activities, the glorification of traditional perceptions of masculinity and frequently, an element of competition. The methodological approach of this study will be outlined in Chapter 3. Primary research in the form of an online survey will be used to investigate the assertions made in this paper, whilst also drawing on a wide range of secondary research into the social significance of video games in order to contextualise proposals made. Chapter 4 will apply Goffman's theory of "focused gatherings" (1972) as a framework for discussing *FIFA* as a structured activity, one that prescribes thematic patterns of behaviour and promotes group cohesion. In Chapter 5, *FIFA Football* will be discussed as a group norm, one that bolsters masculinity through its association with real-life football and football fan culture in general, and finally, Chapter 6 will focus on *FIFA* as a highly competitive form of entertainment, a feature that makes it perfect as a platform for homosocial male interaction.

1. Video Games - A Social Activity

Since their inception, video games have traditionally offered a social experience, where multiplayer games provide fun and competition between friends. *Tennis for Two*, arguably the first ever video game, was a two player game, as was its landmark successor, *Pong*. Almost all home game consoles since the seventies have invariably been released with two or more controller inputs, standing testament to the fact that these entertainment systems were envisioned as group activities. In contrast to the common opinion that video games cultivate isolation, studies have shown that, for most people, video game playing is essentially a social activity. Gamers tend not to be social isolates; instead they meet friends outside of work or school more often than occasional players or non-players do and they often play video games with friends and family instead of playing alone. (Vorderer et al., 2006) Williams quite poetically describes video games as “the new electronic hearth” (2007, p. 200) around which friends can congregate and interact. Indeed, a study by Sherry found that the social element of video gaming was its biggest draw.

Social interaction is the main reason many individuals got involved in playing video games as a child. Respondents mentioned that the arrival of Nintendo brought sleepovers where video games were played, and the need to keep up on the games to be “cool”. Many now use video games to interact with friends and learn about the personalities of others. (Sherry et al., 2006, p. 217)

Colwell et al (1995) accentuate this view of games as being important social vehicles, stating that computer gameplay has become normative for males and has become integrated with peer relations, facilitating the establishment of social identity and group membership.

However, the majority of research is outdated and predominantly focuses on young children when, in fact, video games today are just as popular a form of entertainment for adults as they are for children. In 2005 the average playing age in the US was 30 (Williams, 2006, p. 205) and as the first real gaming generations of the 70s, 80s and 90s have grown older, this average has certainly grown with them. Elsewhere, researchers have focused on the social significance of online or LAN gaming where users are removed from one another. This study, however, will discuss the playing of video games among young adult men in an intimate “living room scenario” with particular reference to the *FIFA Football* franchise. *FIFA* has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide in its 20-year history (McHugh, 2010), making it one of the most popular video games ever. It is no wonder, then, that playing this game has become a customary pastime amongst male groups, as many young men across the world have grown up playing it.

Attesting to this widespread popularity and longevity, associated subcultures of *FIFA Drinking Games* and *FIFA Apologies* have crystallised around the video game. Since before antiquity, drinking games

and binge drinking have been prominent features in male social interaction, and this manifests itself in a unique manner in *FIFA Football*, where the game itself provides the rules and cues for drinking. For example, on conceding a goal, a player may be compelled to drink a finger (measurement) of alcohol, while missing a penalty results in drinking two. In recent years, the phenomenon of “Pre-Drinking” or “Pre-Gaming” has exploded in popularity, where groups congregate to socialise and consume alcohol before going to a bar or club. *FIFA Drinking Games* have emerged as a popular expression of this trend. Likewise, the popularity of the game as a social activity among groups has cultivated the *FIFA Apologies* (also known as *FIFA Forfeits*) game. As we shall see, competition is a defining aspect of many male activities, and *FIFA Apologies* is undoubtedly a manifestation of this trend. The highly competitive nature of *FIFA* induces an atmosphere of jesting and jeering among group members and this custom is an offshoot of that atmosphere. Put simply, *FIFA Apologies* is a game of forfeits whereby players beaten by a substantial margin must make mock public apologies, announcing their supposed inferiority to their opponent. These apologies are often broadcast via social media in the form of Facebook statuses, providing an even wider scope for continued banter among third parties. It is a game of mock dominance displays that on a surface level adds to the entertainment, but also serves as a humorous, competitive mechanism for group cohesion, a subject that will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

Lazarro has commented on this phenomenon of subcultures crystallising around games, emphasising their social importance:

What surprised us most was the dramatic contrast in emotional displays between one versus several people playing together. Players in groups emote more frequently and with more intensity than those who play on their own. Group play adds new behaviours, rituals and emotions. (2004, cited in Chatfield, 2011, p. 51)

Indeed, he observed that the social settings that games create are even more important than the games themselves, which serve as the focal point for group interaction at large:

Our results revealed that people play games not so much for the game itself as for the experience the game creates: adrenaline rush, a vicarious adventure, a mental challenge; or the structure games provide, such as a moment of solitude or the company of friends... Many player comments centre on the enjoyment from playing with others inside or outside the game. In addition to buying multiplayer games, players structure game experiences to enhance player to player interaction. Participants play games they don't like so they can spend time with their friends. Wisecracks and rivalries run hot as players compete. Teamwork and camaraderie flourish when they pursue shared goals. Dominant emotions include Amusement, Schadenfreude, and Naches. Players using this Key see games as mechanisms for social interaction. In our study players whose enjoyment came from interaction with other people say that:

- It's the people that are addictive not the game.
- I want an excuse to invite my friends over.
- I don't like playing games, but it's a fun way to spend time with my friends.
- I don't play, but it's fun to watch.

It is in this context of structured play that this research paper proposes that *FIFA Football* acts as a platform for social interaction between males. The game creates an environment with its own cues and behaviours that provide thematic conversation patterns - or, put quite simply, small-talk - that centres on the game and football culture in general. As we shall see, it fits the mould of archetypal male pastimes through the glorification of masculine norms in football and drinking, while its element of friendly competition provides banter that contributes to a socially cohesive atmosphere. In short, it provides males with a familiar and comfortable atmosphere in which to interact in a socially acceptable way that bolsters their masculinity.

2. Literature Review- Male & Female Friendships: The Fundamental Differences

Certainly, video games can be played simply for fun in their own right, without any particular desire for social benefits. However, there is certainly a very important social aspect to the playing of video games, especially for male groups. It has been stated that, “women’s friendships are *face-to-face* whereas men’s are *side-by-side*.” It’s an oversimplification, but this pithy phrase coined by Wright (1982 cited Brehm et al, 2007) gives a brief description of the fundamental differences between male and female same-sex friendships. A great deal of research shows that women’s friendships are characterised by emotional sharing and self-disclosure, whereas men’s friendships revolve around shared activities, companionship, and fun (Brehm et al, pp. 235-236). In contrast to women, who are more likely to simply meet and talk, men tend to maintain emotional distance by organising their time together around an activity that is external to themselves (Messner, 1992, p. 222), for example, a video game. This view is supported by a study carried out by Caldwell and Peplau, which found that almost twice as many men in their survey (84%) preferred “doing some activity” to “just talking” as women (43%). In addition, more men than women (57% vs. 39%) preferred a same-sex friend who “likes to do the same things” rather than a same-sex friend who “feels the same way about things”. (Caldwell et al, 1982, p. 727)

Where the sexes differed was in the nature of their interactions with friends. Women showed a greater interest in emotional sharing. Women preferred talking to activities, and, on several measures, women indicated spending more time talking to a best friend and revealing more about their feelings, problems, and personal relationships. In contrast, men appeared more interested in shared activities. Men preferred activities to talking; they more often got together with a best friend to engage in a particular activity such as a sport; and their conversations with a best friend more often centred on shared activities and interests. Contrary to Komarovsky’s (1976) suggestion that men’s and women’s intimate disclosure is similar in their closest relationships, we found that emotional sharing played a lesser role in men’s than women’s best same-sex friendships. (Caldwell et al., 1982, p. 731)

Women tend to be more “expressive”, and men more “instrumental”, resulting in these differences in communication patterns, as Miller, Perlman and Brehm relate:

Women engage in intimate verbal communication with trusted partners because they tend to be high in expressivity and are comfortable talking about their feelings....it’s true that about half of all men are sex-typed, which means that they are high in instrumentality and low in expressivity, and such macho men are less expressive than most women are. Thus they are likely to display a style of emotional communication that is rather different from that of most women. Whereas women tend to be open about their feelings, such men are likely to be comparatively close mouthed. (2007, p. 86)

This inability or unwillingness among men to be intimate with one another is as much a result of social pressures as inherent make-up. Fehr argues that most men can be as expressive and close as women are but they simply choose not to be (1996). In particular, men seem to be fully capable of forming

intimate friendships with other men when the circumstances support such closeness- but they generally choose not to do so because such intimacy is less socially acceptable among men than among women (Miller et al., 2007, pp. 236-237). Miller et al argue that social norms in western society constrain male intimacy:

First, gender roles play a part. A traditional upbringing encourages men to be instrumental, but not expressive and a person's expressivity predicts how self-disclosing he or she will be. Androgynous men tend to have closer friendships than traditional, sex-typed men do, but more men are sex-typed than androgynous. Second, in keeping with typical gender roles, men are expected to display more emotional constraint than women do. Social norms lead men to be more reluctant than women to express their worries and emotions to others. Finally, men's same-sex friendships are more influenced by homophobia, a fear of homosexuality and a dread of being perceived to be a homosexual. In general, it appears that if men felt as free as women to admit that they cared for their friends, they would do so. (2007, p. 200)

Thus, the lower intimacy of men's friendships probably isn't due to an inability to share meaningful close attachments to other men. Instead it's a choice that is supported by cultural pressures that play an important role in shaping men's reluctance to engage in intimate interactions with one another (Reis, 1998, p. 225). Indeed, a study conducted by Reis shows that men often find their emotional needs met by female friends rather than male (Reis, p. 1985). Many men would probably have closer same-sex friendships if western cultures did not discourage psychological intimacy with other men. Thernell-Read states that:

Men's friendships are thus commonly characterised by emotional detachment, competitiveness, and the objectification of women (Bird 1996). In particular, the expression of anything suggestive of weakness, such as tears, pain, and self-pity, are seen to contradict masculine ideals and are, as such, heavily policed. (2012, p. 252)

As a result, as we have already seen, men tend to rely on structured activities when they interact that generally bolster their masculinity. Thernell-Read states that, "Homosocial groups help sustain hegemonic masculinity and play a significant role in establishing accepted forms of masculinity. Male friendships have been characterised as lacking in intimacy and typically channelled through alternative social relations such as competition." (Thernell-Read, 2012, p. 249) These activities are typically traditionally masculine, such as taking part in, or watching sport, working on cars and drinking in order to display the characteristics of independence, dominance, toughness and success associated with heterosexual masculinity (Nardi, 1992, pp. 1-2).

Undoubtedly, video games quite clearly fall into this sphere of male shared activities, especially sports games such as *FIFA Football*, with its traditionally masculine theme of sport and high element of intragroup competition. Its associated subculture of drinking games and *FIFA Apologies* add even more to the overtly macho and bravado-fuelled atmosphere that surrounds the game, making it the perfect setting for male bonding to flourish.

The following Chapters will discuss how *FIFA* functions as a platform for social engagement, highlighting the social norms and expected behaviours that are synonymous with *FIFA*, thus providing group cohesion.

3. Methodology

As this research paper aims to highlight the social merits of video games (especially the *FIFA Football* franchise) in group scenarios, the discussion will be contextualised by drawing extensively from secondary research in sociological and psychological fields, applying conventional theories that deal with same-sex friendships and group behaviour. The aim is to directly compare and contrast these established theories with the modern medium of video games, thereby critiquing the value of *FIFA Football* as a group activity in the context of traditional male pastimes. As technology is becoming ever more central to society and the way we interact, the application of these well-established schools of thought to the relatively new concept of social gaming will provide a vernacular for discussion as well as place video games in the wider context of traditional social interaction.

Secondary Research

Wide secondary research into the theories of male friendships, group interaction and group norms was carried out in order to situate *FIFA Football* in the wider context of male bonding. The application of Thomas's theory of *the definition of the situation* (2002) and Goffman's *focused gatherings* (1972) were applied to provide a framework for this paper's proposal that video games like *FIFA Football* serve as platforms for structured interaction, complete with ritualistic behaviours that are conducive to cohesive group interaction. The characteristics of traditional male shared activities- the glorification of masculine norms and competition- were analysed and compared to *FIFA Football*, in order to demonstrate that *FIFA* fits the mould of traditional male social activities.

Secondary Data Analysis

This paper also draws on a wide range of video game research and statistics dealing with the social benefits of video games. Although much of this research is outdated and predominantly focused on children and adolescents, a synthesis of data and observations was drawn upon to provide a reference point for the proposal that *FIFA Football* provides a focused social activity for young men in a similar fashion to children and teenagers. Research carried out by Conway (2010) - which deals with themes of social interaction in groups of adults playing a similar football video game- served as an invaluable secondary source in this discussion. As he directly observed the behaviours, norms and speech patterns of focused groups playing *Pro Evolution Soccer* over a prolonged period, his paper provides a wealth of information unavailable to me without a similar group study.

Secondary analysis of qualitative data in the form of questionnaires and surveys pertaining to the competitive draw of video games was re-analysed through the lens of competitive male bonding

activities in order to illustrate the game's perpetuation of the traditional male bonding theme of competition in video games.

Primary Research

This paper's hypothesis was tested by analysing data collected in primary research in the form of an online survey using Google Docs. The aim of this survey- hereafter referred to as the "*FIFA* survey"- was to establish the popularity of *FIFA Football* among young men and determine in what scenarios the game is generally played in i.e. independently as a more personal entertainment experience or socially, as part of a group. It also aimed to establish the popularity of the associated *FIFA Drinking Games* and *FIFA Apologies* as manifestations of the highly social and competitive nature of the video game, as well as to analyse the relationship between real-life sports enthusiasm and its virtual counterpart.

The online survey was distributed throughout the University's School of Computer Science via email and men between the ages of 18 and 30 were invited to take part. A total of 141 respondents completed the survey. Females were pointedly excluded, as the aim of this paper is to critique video gaming as a male bonding activity. It encompassed eight closed questions with yes/no options and two multiple choice questions.

Primary Data Analysis

The basic answers collected from the survey were first analysed in isolation, e.g. how many people play the game, but then cross referenced with other data in order to contextualise it further. This was done using Google Docs, whose software allows data to be filtered according to conditions set by the user. For example, data can be filtered to display those respondents that play the game *and* play sport in real life, in order to analyse the relationship between an interest in virtual football and real-life sport. This cross referencing of data was applied to various answers to test the hypotheses proposed by this paper, including how many people play in groups and drink alcohol, how many follow a soccer team and play the game and how many play in groups and describe it as a competitive experience. This cross analysis of data provided more perspective, unveiling recurring themes among the users, most strikingly the strong relationship between real-life sport and an interest in *FIFA Football*.

Methodological and Ethical Considerations

The foremost consideration is whether secondary analysis of quantitative research is tenable; data taken out of their original contexts and reapplied to an unrelated study is potentially questionable. A possible conflict of interests should also be noted in the *FIFA* survey; as the survey was distributed among the School of Computer Science and Statistics, not only were fellow classmates included in the survey, but the high concentration of computer science students, potentially with a more concentrated interest in video games, should be kept in mind as a possible skewing of results.

FIFA Survey- Summary of Responses

Question	Yes	No
Do you play sport?	96 (68%)	45 (32%)
Do you follow a football (soccer) club?	80 (57%)	60 (43%)
Do you own a games console?	118 (84%)	23 (16%)
Do you own an edition of FIFA Football?	73 (52%)	67 (48%)
Do you often play FIFA Football?	54 (38%)	87 (62%)
Do you play it more often independently or as part of a group?	Independently	Group
	31 (26%)	89 (74%)
	Yes	No
If you play is as part of a group, do you sometimes drink alcohol while playing?	66 (55%)	55 (45%)
Do you ever take part in “ <i>FIFA Drinking Games</i> ”?	30 (23%)	101 (77%)
Have you ever taken part in a game that involved <i>FIFA Forfeits</i> ’/ <i>FIFA Apologies</i> ?	53 (40%)	78 (60%)
How best would you describe your playing experience of <i>FIFA Football</i> ?	Fun	39 (30%)
	Competitive	45 (35%)
	Relaxed	11 (9%)
	Frustrating	6 (5%)
	Boring	23 (18%)
	Friendly	4 (3%)

4. *FIFA Football* and Structured Interaction

We have seen, then, the tendency among male friends to structure their time together around activities, thus providing a medium through which to indirectly communicate by discussing shared interests, a phenomenon Thernell-Read describes as “men’s talk”:

One area where the relationship between men has been relatively well explored is what one might call “men’s talk”, that is, the form and character of talk between men. Such has been identified as an area where the specifics of what constitute acceptable masculine behaviour and ideals are maintained. As a rule, emotive expression is seen as feminine while the absence of self-disclosure and a lack of emotive expression are typified as masculine. Both the ability and desire for interpersonal connection and intimacy are assumed to be lacking in peer groups “indirectness”, where expressions of homosocial connection are invariably filtered indirectly through, for example, mutual talk of shared interests or alternative social arrangements such as competition and playacted confrontation (Thernell-Read, 2012).

These activities act as social supports for men, providing for this “filtered” form of interaction Thernell-Read describes. They create familiar settings, allowing men to interpret how to behave and interact within the context of the scenario, often providing prompts and supports for conversation. This almost scripted interaction takes its cue from what William Thomas describes as *the definition of the situation*, where agreed upon, habitualised behaviour reinforces order for interacting persons (1923, cited Rousseau, 2002, p. 104). They embody implicit rules of conduct, regulating behaviour in a fashion deemed appropriate in the particular setting at hand.

Goffman proposes a theory based very much upon Thomas’ hypothesis of the definition of the situation. In his *Presentation of Self in Every Day Life* (1975), he uses the metaphor of actors, stage and setting to describe how people present themselves differently depending on the context of the scenario, i.e. the definition of the situation. Similarly to actors on a stage, people “perform” different roles in different settings, following scripted or pre-established patterns of behaviour.

A ‘performance’ may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolding during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a ‘part’ or ‘routine’... When an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions, a social relationship is likely to arise. (1975, p. 26)

Goffman argues that people “intentionally or unwittingly” employ these “fronts” when they interact to behave in a way acceptable to each scenario and thus create a subliminal order. (1975, p. 32) Put in this light, we can argue that *FIFA Football* creates a “setting” where in men can perform roles of behaviour that they are familiar and comfortable with. As Goffman utilises an exhaustive list of

dramatic terms, we can go so far as to describe *FIFA Football* as a “stage prop” that is inherent in the creation of these performances.

First, there is the ' setting ', involving furniture, decor, physical lay-out, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it. (1975, p. 32)

In a non-metaphoric discussion, Goffman labels these organised interactions as “focused gatherings”, “encounters” or “situated activity systems”. He states that, unlike unfocused interactions, which are spontaneous and disorganised, encounters occur “when people effectively agree to sustain for a time a single focus of cognitive and visual attention, as in a conversation, a board game, or a joint task sustained by close face-to-face circle of contributors.”(1972, p. 7) These units of social organisation provide “schema of expression and interpretation” creating structured interaction in customary or ritualistic behaviours (1972, p. 25).

Encounters are everywhere, but it is difficult to describe sociologically the stuff that they are made of. I fall back on the assumption that, like any other element of social life, an encounter exhibits sanctioned orderliness from obligations fulfilled and expectations realised, and that therein lies its structure.(1972, p. 25)

Goffman states that this is particularly evident in the playing of games, where explicit structure and clearly defined roles are evident. Games create “meaningful events...planes of being, engines of meaning, a world within itself” (1972, p. 25). Reizler goes so far as to say that “games create a little cosmos of their own”, where special behaviours and habits are endemic, separate and often unique from the outside world. (Reizler, 194, pp. 505-17) Huizinga encapsulates this special nature of games in *Homo Ludens*, or *Man the Player*, stating that play creates an atmosphere where consensus abounds:

Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, is order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme...Play casts a spell over us; it is "enchanting", "captivating". It is invested with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving in things: rhythm and harmony.
(1998, p. 10)

Men engaging in shared activities can expect to employ certain patterns of behaviour, conversation and interaction, taking their cue from the central activity at hand. In a *FIFA Football* context, it creates a testosterone fuelled environment of fun and competition, and the *FIFA* survey strongly supports the hypothesis that it serves as a shared male activity. Indeed, 89 respondents (74%) of the survey professed that they play the game more often in a group scenario than independently, while 35 of the 54 people that play it regularly stated that they play it more often in a group, attesting strongly to the social significance of the medium.

There has been little academic discussion on the significance of video games teaching this type of social problem-solving alluded to by Huizinga, that is the many cognitive processes involved in

interpreting a social situation and behaving in ways that are congruent with one's own goals. Buckley and Anderson observe that video games teach a range of these skills:

It is important to understand that video games frequently teach social problem-solving skills positive or negative, whether intended or not...There are four processes used in social problem solving: (a) encoding and interpreting environmental cues, (b) generating and selecting goals, behaviours and scripts to guide behaviour; (c) evaluating how appropriate the selected script is, and (d) behaving by an interpretation of the restrictions to the behaviour. (2006, p. 368)

But while Buckley and Anderson argue that video games teach the above skills *in* the games themselves, this paper propose that video games construct their own environmental cues and scripts of behaviour *outside* the video game. Because of the nature of *FIFA Football*, it serves as an excellent prop for small talk. As the game franchise has been on the market for the last two decades, players of the game are invariably comfortable with its controls and mechanics-which barely change year on year- not to mention familiarity with the rules and tactics of football itself. As a result, players need not devote complete concentration to the game, allowing for both game-specific and wider conversation. Men partake in playful bravado, teasing and mocking of opponents and releasing outbursts of frustration and glee, and game-specific conversation or small talk relating to the development of the match or match statistics is very common. In a sociological study that focused on the social significance of a similar football video game title, *Pro Evolution Soccer*, Conway acknowledges this characteristic type of game specific chat. He argues that the half-time break, for example, which shows an interface displaying major match statistics such as shots on goal, possession etc., invokes a tradition of comparison, analysis and debate among the users.

S: It's been a battle in midfield! [Referring to the similar possession statistics]

C: Yeah it has. What's your formation?

S: 4-4-2 I think.

C: With no wingers you've just kept them all in central midfield!

S: [laughing] Yeah! [looking at match details] Yeah come on two on target!

C: None on target- that is depressing.

S: Yeah that is depressing. More possession. Look at that for your possession I would not be happy with your team I'd give 'em a bit of the hair-dryer treatment!

C: Done that! Without you hearing, we don't need to share what goes on in the locker room...

S: Not doing a Dallas, not revealing what's going on in the locker room?

C: I've gone to a French paper. (2010, pp. 348-9)

It is worth noting their use of the football trope, "hair dryer treatment", whereby an angry manager would furiously shout at his players at half time in an effort to inspire some resolve. Terminology such as this is endemic in the game, attesting to the strong relationship between virtual football and real-life fan culture, a topic that will be addressed later. Indeed, behaviour typical of real life football matches often occurs, for example shouting at the referee or the willing of players to make a run, give a pass or take a shot. Conway (2010) emphasises this behaviour in his description of goal scoring.

The scoring of a goal is particularly notable for two reasons. Firstly the extreme and often referential nature of the celebration is revealing, by loud shouting and cheering, banging of nearby furniture, or even invoking a number of famous football celebrations of the past

(pulling the shirt over the head, various parodies of the ‘Klinsmann dive’ and so on). As mentioned earlier, whilst it was often normal for the gamers to celebrate as typical sports spectators if playing on the same team (high fives, handshakes and so on), playing as individuals (1vs1) allowed the player to assume the role of sports participant in their celebration, as the need to negotiate a celebration with their fellow team-mate was gone. (2010, p. 346)

As the game of football generally has lulls in play, *FIFA Football* invites periods for broader conversation, for instance when the ball goes out of bounds, resulting in a short stoppage of action, or a player is deep in his own half, with minimal danger to both defences. Conversation regarding real-life football frequently occurs, the habitual question “Did you see the game yesterday?” being a typical conversation device one expects to hear. Characteristic topics such as this, act as launch pads for familiar patterns of conversation. Berne labels these formulaic conversations *complimentary transactions* (2010, p. 28). These are conversations where reciprocal, appropriate responses follow a regular order, providing familiarity and social cohesion.

FIFA does not simply serve as a support for those engaged in actively playing the game. Often, large groups gather around taking turns in tournaments, or “winner stays on” scenarios. The game serves as a vocal point for all, extracting the same game-related small talk that it does from the players themselves. However, because the non-players are removed from the game, it allows them greater freedom to pursue their own topics of conversation as they wish. Goffman (1972) describes these sub channels of conversation as “communicative byplays”, which occur within the overarching activity. Indeed, he argues that this byplay can sometimes become the main focus of the entire group for a time:

During any encounter it is possible for a sub-set of participants to form a communicative byplay and, without ratifying their new mutual activity except among themselves, withdraw spontaneous involvement from the more inclusive encounter. It is even possible for all the participants in a given encounter to join together to sustain a single, all-inclusive byplay... Sometimes these byplays are carried on quite furtively; always the gestures through which they are sustained will be modulated so as to show a continued respect for the official or dominant encounter. (1972, p. 55)

Should these byplays break down, however, the game constantly serves as a social lifeline the group can revert to, providing the game-centric conversation patterns discussed above.

In a study that very much parallels this view of *FIFA* as a social platform, Zurcher (2006) analyses a fortnightly poker game among friends in a sociological context. He argues that the poker game created a setting where its players had clear roles, norms and patterns of behaviour that provided group cohesion. He emphasises that these roles are “ephemeral” and afford satisfactions that are particular to the friendly game alone. However fleeting, these ephemeral roles provide a range of social benefits in the game setting, including friendly competition, complimentary transactions, and group identity formation:

Within the group boundaries, each member enacted the “ephemeral role” of core member, providing him the opportunity for scripted competition, self- and other-control, event brokerage, normative deception and aggression, micro-institutionalising; and retrospective conquest. More specifically, it provided him with the following opportunities for satisfaction: to share in the establishing and/or maintaining of a personally relevant group structure and interaction pattern; to compete vigorously but safely with equals; to demonstrate and be admired for skill in betting and playing; to become deeply involved in intense but controlled personal interaction; to read, analyse, and utilise cues emitted from other players.....
(2006, p. 108)

FIFA functions in the very same manner. As a structured activity, it provides a focal point for interacting male groups, as well as encompassing prescribed roles and behaviours that provide cues for scripted interaction. Thematic complimentary transactions often occur, as group members take their cue from the video game, serving as an aid in constructing conversations. These aspects combine to create a cohesive group atmosphere around *FIFA Football*.

5. Group Norms, Group Identity and Group Cohesion

Nardi (1992) has historically located the practice of male only social activities and has found a common trend in many cultures in what he labels the “ceremonial men’s hut”. He concludes that these places, forbidden to women, provide an essential social function for group bonding and identity formation among men:

A primary form of gender segregation in many nonindustrial societies is the ceremonial men’s hut... Whether called a ceremonial house, a bachelor’s hut, or a clubhouse, all serve a similar function: They are places where men congregate with other men to the exclusion of women... The ceremonial hut is thus a separate place in which men develop personal ties apart from women and also display solidarity toward women as a group (1992, p. 60-1).

This tendency among men has manifested itself in a variety of ways in modern society, be it in the Australian born “Men’s Sheds”, “Man Caves” or simply rounds of beer at the local bar.¹ Undoubtedly, *FIFA Football* has emerged as another expression of this need for male interaction. But whatever the setting, these “ceremonial huts” all bear one major element in common- the celebration of masculine norms.

All groups evolve systems of norms that define the limits of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Norms help the individual to structure and predict his or her environment and they provide a means by which behaviour in the group can be regulated. (Brown, 2000, p. 64) As Mann (1969, p. 35) puts it, they are “shared ways of looking at the world”, attitudes and values that provide individuals with a frame of reference for understanding their world which they might lack alone. Group norms help create a “definition of the situation” discussed in Chapter 5, thereby allowing cohesive interaction in familiar environments:

In order to be compatible with one another, in order that the group functions shall be performed smoothly, members must to some extent share perceptions of and attitudes towards others and themselves. They need to be able to predict with some accuracy the behaviour of the other members, in order that all behaviour may synchronise smoothly. In essence, a group consists of people who know, or believe they know, what to expect from one another... The smooth running of the group, based on accurate predictions of each other’s behaviour, is only possible where members conform to the norms.
(Edwards, 1974, p. 106)

Group norms, then, create settings for the scripted interaction discussed earlier, providing social cohesion in familiar environments. We have also looked at how archetypal male interaction is focused

¹ *Men’s Sheds* are non-profit organisations that originated in Australia and have since grown in popularity worldwide. These *Sheds* involve groups of men congregating to work on practical projects in their free time. The aim is to promote social interaction among men in order to reduce increasingly high rates of depression and loneliness. *Man Caves* is a popular term used to refer to rooms in a house devoted to male gatherings, pastimes and interests, for example watching sport, drinking beer or playing video games. Both of these phenomena exemplify modern expressions of male only group bonding.

around shared activities with a traditionally masculine theme. These activities help consolidate celebrated ideals of masculinity, such as strength, independence and competition. Group norms, which are intrinsic in these activities, massively contribute to this aspect of a group's identity. *FIFA Football* is, therefore, an intriguing example of a male group activity as, not only does it serve as a social prop, it reinforces the masculine football culture that permeates Europe and most of the world.

Historically, sport has been so closely identified with men that it has become one of the key signifiers of masculinity in many Western societies. Traditional institutionalised sports cultures in these societies have been a central site for the creation and reaffirmation of masculine identities and for the exclusion of women. (Wheaton, 2000, p. 2) Connell (1995, p. 54) claims that sport has become "the leading definer" of masculinity in Western culture, particularly through the association between manliness, skill, and strength. "What it means to be masculine is, quite literally, to embody force, to embody competence" (Connell, 1995, p. 27). Despite the fact that women watch more television than men on a global scale, the sole exception to this rule is televised sports- "Sports is the only television programme type that attracts more men than women." (Kennedy, 2000, p. 266) *FIFA Football*, then, a virtual representation of the most widely watched and played sport in the world, is a pastime that reinforces masculinity. In fact, the video game is inextricably linked with real-life football fandom in general. In interviews discussing the phenomenal popularity of another football video game franchise, *Championship Manager*, among young adults, Crawford highlights this aspect of sports video games:

Like, *Championship Manager* is probably the most talked about game . . . and we'll talk about real football as well, 'cause they're pretty much the same things aren't they?
(2004, p. 264)

A survey carried out by Crawford (2004) found that most people who played sports video games had an interest in the real-life equivalent as well. Of the 257 respondents who indicated that they had recently played a digital game, 42.9% indicated that their participation in a sport had encouraged them to play a digital version of it. Likewise, 47.2% said that their interest in sport as a fan had encouraged them to play a related digital game. 57.3% of male respondents indicated that their interest in sport as fans increased their interest in sport related games.

Yeah, I play *FIFA* and *Pro Evo Soccer* [*Pro Evolution Soccer*] and sometimes *Champ Man* [*Championship Manager*] on me mate's PC [all soccer related games], but that's about it really. I'd say, first and foremost I'm into me footy. Like, I play footy and that's the main sport I follow, so the few [digital] games I play, like when I play 'em, are just like a reflection of that...you know, 'cause that's what I'm interested in. (Crawford, 2004, 263)

Undoubtedly, sports video games such as *FIFA* act as group norms that perpetuate the masculine sporting tradition, and *FIFA* in no way denies this. In fact, a popular ad campaign for its 2012 instalment explicitly professes the inextricability of the video game and wider football fandom, where the narrator proclaims his sporting mantra over a montage of football enthusiasts, portraying the supposed all-encompassing quality of the sport for fans:

If I can't play a match, I'll tell someone how to play a match. If I can't tell someone how to play a match, I'll be at a match. If I can't be at a match, I'll watch a match. If I can't watch a match, I'll read about a match. If I can't read about a match, I'll listen to a match. If I can't listen to a match, I'll argue about a match. If I can't argue about a match, I'll worry about a match. If I can't worry about a match, I'll dream about a match. And if I can't even dream about playing a match, you might as well bury me. 'Cause that means I'm dead. So...Guess I'll be playing a match then! (YouTube, 2011)

Conway argues that such games are not simply activities unto themselves but should be contextualized as 'an authentic extension of football culture' (2010, 14). As such, players were just as likely to talk about footballers' lives, current team news, the analysis of statistics, and other topical sporting issues. Similarly, Crawford and Gosling argue that video games provide another medium through which sports fandom can be expressed and serves as an important tool for identity construction:

Sandvoss suggests that sports fandom is a textual construction. Sport, and in particular a fan's sense of what it is that they follow, is constructed from a series of multiple and changing texts. For instance, what makes up the identity of a sports club are the multiple players and managers who have played and worked at the club over its history, as well as significant locations, other fans, stories, histories, media coverage, and a long list of other factors (or texts). Each of these texts then becomes a resource on which fans can draw in constructing their own particular version of the club's, and their own associated, narratives. Therefore, sports-themed video games provide an additional, and for many of those who play them, not insignificant, text and resource that contribute to their understanding of sports, and possibly their own identities, narratives and social performances as sports fans. (2009, 61)

They note that sports-themed video games provide gamers with a high amount of information on real-life athletes, clubs, managers, stadiums, histories and much more, providing football enthusiasts with contextual information with which to engross themselves, increase their knowledge of sport, and can prove for many a popular source of conversation on sport. Again, Crawford's interviews provide an interesting insight into how this distinction between virtual and real football is indefinite.

Yes, I used to love to impress my work mates with my knowledge of relatively unknown foreigners [soccer players], never letting on that it was all gained from buying them in CM [*Championship manager*]. (2006, cited in Crawford et al, 2009, 61)

There is clearly a strong relationship between the virtual football found in *FIFA Football*, and the real-life sport itself, and, frequently, fan identification with real-life footballers and clubs occurs in the game. When selecting respective teams with which to compete, users often select the club they follow, or have acquired knowledge of what teams are good based on their knowledge of the teams in real life. Crawford (2010) comments on the dress code worn by his sample group, noting that football jerseys were worn frequently, emphasising that fans in the game were loyal supporters of football teams in real-life. The *FIFA* survey also strongly supports this connection between sport enthusiasm and attraction to the game. Of the people that play *FIFA Football* regularly (54), 42 of these play sport, while 46 people stated that they follow a football team and play the game regularly. A cross reference of these statistics- i.e. those that play sport, follow a football team *and* play FIFA regularly- shows 35

people answered yes to all questions, a total of 25% of the entire survey, and a strong indication of the relationship between virtual and real life sport.

The prevalence of alcohol consumption as a recurring theme in male social interaction has briefly been discussed in previous chapters. Bales (1962), argues that the custom of drinking creates a “convivial sphere,” one that “allows the participants to alter their footing with each other during the encounter. It is, in sum, a levelling, specifying, focusing activity.” Drinking cultivates an atmosphere of camaraderie and goodwill among a group, and, besides its physical effects, is symbolic of good times. As Szwed puts it, “Drink is the symbol of friendship and the occasion for its expression.” (1966, 437) Drinking, as a male bonding ritual and social norm, has manifested itself in a unique way in *FIFA Football*. Often in group situations, drinking games focused on the video game will take place, where particular events such as goal scoring or red cards will prompt group members to take a drink. There is no one *FIFA Drinking Game*; rather it is widespread cultural phenomenon, often with rules particular to different friend groups. That said, there are many online sources that provide recommended rules, attesting to the popularity of the game. For example, one simple version of a *FIFA Drinking Game* is available at Urbandrinking.com, a site that professes to provide “seriously fun drinking-related entertainment”.

Rules

- Opposition scores (4 Swigs[of beer])
- Red Card (4 Swigs)
- Yellow Card (2 Swigs)
- Foul (1 Swig)
- Offside (1 Swig)
- Ball into touch (1 Swig)
- Crossbar/Post (2 Swigs for other players)
- Score a lob (3 Swigs for other players)
- Give away a penalty (3 Swigs)
- Miss a penalty (4 Swigs)
- Own goal (A SHOT) Shame on You!
- Injure an opponent (2 Swigs for other player) (Urban Drinking, 2010)

Significantly, this set of rules makes allowances for both users and spectators, alluding to the fact that these drinking games often take place in large group scenarios:

If you are not playing the game and are only spectating, you will need to pick a player [user] to back throughout the game. Whatever forfeits your backed player has to do, you also have to do to! (Urban Drinking, 2010)

This exemplifies a very basic structure of a *FIFA Drinking Game*, taking its drinking prompts directly from the fundamental game mechanics. However, users frequently develop imaginative and comic rules of their own that often satirise real-life aspects of football culture e.g. goals scored by Emile Heskey, a notoriously inaccurate striker, result in a more severe forfeit for the users’ opponent, as highlighted in this extract below:

11) THE BRUCEY BONUS COMEDY VALUE PLAYERS POINTS PENALTY: for comedy value, we now have a selection of players that for every goal they score, an extra 3 fingers have to be drunk! So if for example the legend Emile Heskey scores 3 goals in extra time you would have to see off 18 fingers for the goals, an extra 18 fingers for the Brucey Bonus Factor, and an additional 10 for the completion of the hat trick... So if Emile Heskey were to score a hat trick in “double the punishment extra time” you would have to see off 46 FINGERS.. Pretty much 4 1/2 PINTS... Believe it or not this has been achieved... And it will be nothing but messy... (The Tech Game, 2011)

Often the rules allude to wider football history, and the legacies of successful teams:

If you're playing as Germany and lose in a penalty shootout, you must finish your drink and your opponents.

(for those who don't know, the German national side haven't lost a penalty shoot-out since 1976. And excluding Podolski's penalty miss against Serbia in the 2010 world cup, the last penalty missed by the German national team was in 1982.) (Facebook, 2012)

These examples quite clearly attest to the strong association between real-life football culture and *FIFA*, while also highlighting the element of binge drinking in *FIFA Drinking Games*.

Not only do these *FIFA Drinking Games* provide fun and entertainment for group members, they also serve an important function for promoting group solidarity. The practice of “pre-drinking” or “pre-gaming” - where young people consume alcohol in a domestic setting before relocating to a bar or nightclub- has become an increasingly popular custom in the past decade. One aim of these pre-drinking sessions is to get drunk quickly and economically in order to avoid costly prices at the bar (Vander Ven, 2011, p. 42), but Grazian (2005, pp. 110-11) argues that they serve a more therapeutic social function. He proposes that, for many young people, going out “on the town” may prove anxiety-producing, particularly the stress generated by meeting new people and potential sexual or romantic partners. Not only does alcohol serve to lower these inhibitions, but the custom of drinking together as a group promotes solidarity which lowers anxiety:

Shown in this light, the goals of pre-gaming make a lot more sense. If interacting in public ordinarily fosters anxiety among young people, then some students may imagine that alcohol provides the liquid courage to relieve them of their nervousness. But more importantly, the pre-game provides young people with a ritual of solidarity designed to engineer cohesion within their peer group, in order to mentally prepare them to negotiate the human traffic of city nightclubs and bars, just as players on an athletic team might warm up together before a sporting contest. In the company of their friends, they are able to build up their confidence; the alcohol may start the party early, but ultimately it is the *sociability* of the gathering itself that lowers the anxiety associated with the challenges surrounding the experience of urban nightlife.

FIFA Drinking Games that take place before “nights out”, then, offer the same social support mechanism Grazian proposes and are indeed a very common occurrence.

Of the people who answered the *FIFA Football* survey, 66 people (55%) stated that they sometimes drink alcohol while playing the game, while 30 (23%) stated that they have taken part specifically in

FIFA Drinking Games. Although almost 25% of respondents have taken part in *FIFA Drinking Games*- a strong indicator of the popularity of the phenomenon- the fact that over half of all respondents have consumed alcohol while playing is indisputable evidence that *FIFA* provides a focal point in a social scenario, particularly when we take into account that of the 66 people who drink while playing, 53 stated that they play more often in a group context. Of the 30 who have taken part in *FIFA Drinking Games*, 22 stated that they play sport and 24 stated they follow a football team, while 18 answered yes to all three, a significant fraction that again reinforces the correlation between an interest in real-life sport and *FIFA* as a popular pastime.

The masculine norms of football-fandom combined with these macho binge drinking games make *FIFA Football* a pastime that clearly bolsters masculinity, a characteristic typical of male shared activities. But the nature of playing a video game as a shared activity is in itself a very masculine undertaking. The use of technology has traditionally been associated with men and boys, and games consoles in particular have always been more popular with males. Mellström gives a good insight into this phenomenon:

...women use technologies to the same extent as men do, and women are just as skilled in using machines as men are. Technologies, however, often play a different role for men, when an identification with technology is self-evident and taken for granted. It is often part of what it means to be a man; it's part of a masculine script in many different contexts...technology has often been an essential part of many men's upbringings as boys and connects closely to definitions of what is masculine and what is not. Crucial for such identification is the early socialisation with the embodiment of different machines and technological knowledge and the pleasures derived from them. Such tinkering pleasures are generally codified as masculine. (2004, 369-370)

The target age-group of the *FIFA* survey- the 18-30 year old bracket- is a generation that grew up with video games, which have undoubtedly become a staple pastime among males. Indeed, 118 respondents to the *FIFA* survey stated that they own a games console (84%), while 73 (52%) own an edition of *FIFA Football*, a strong indicator that video games are a highly popular pastime among males and attesting to the popularity of the *FIFA* franchise.

Clearly, *FIFA Football* fits the mould of traditional male shared activities, which celebrate masculine norms and aid in masculine identity formation. Its association with real-life football ties it closely with football fan culture in general, while related drinking games perpetuate a masculine theme of male binge drinking.

6. The Element of Competition in *FIFA Football*

Evolutionary biologists propose that competition is innate in human instinct, acting as the driving force for survival, adaptation and, ultimately, evolution. Whilst arguably athletic competitions first developed to practice the arts of war, sport and games have since developed to express and channel this competitive energy in passive societies. This element of competition is typical of male shared activities, and is seen to no small extent in *FIFA Football*.

Fasteau suggests that competitive games provide for a display of masculinity and shape the way in which men relate to one another:

Competition is the principal mode by which men relate to each other- at one level because they don't know how else to make contact, but more basically because it is a way to demonstrate to themselves and to others, the key masculine qualities of unwavering toughness and the ability to dominate and control (1974, cited in Farr, 1988).

Competitive games give people a way to exercise their combative, aggressive tendencies in a safe, socially acceptable way. Indeed, the element of competition, experts have found, is the leading factor why people play video games in the first place. Greenfield found that a major attraction for adolescents was the presence of a challenging goal, (1984) while respondents to the ASC Games Group survey stated that "competition" was the most important factor (31%), followed by "challenge" (21.4%) for their enjoyment of game play. (Vorderer et al., 2006, p. 2) This competitive motivation in gamers has not been lost on the industry developers, who commonly divide their consumers into nine main group types, the "competitor" being the most prominent. (Klug et al., 2006, 91)

This competitive element in video games seems to be of far greater import to males than females. Raney Smith and Baker (2006) found that, while female users tended to be willing to play video games with little regard to their score, males were far more competitive and reported being upset by poor scores. In a similar study, Sherry et al found that video games provided social gratification in friendly dominance displays that parallel real sport.

One of the most frequently cited reasons for playing video games was to prove to other people who had the best skills and can react or think fastest. Typically, competition response came from male respondents who spoke of competing for pride or money. Hence, video game completion served the function of a dominance display among males most often seen in sports. This gratification derives its power from the reactions of others to the dominance shown by the player, establishing a relative position in the peer group's hierarchy. (2006, 217)

They found that the most common answers as to why males play video games were; "I like to play to prove to my friends that I am the best", "When I lose to someone, I immediately want to play again in an attempt to beat him or her" and "It is important to me to be the fastest and most skilled person

playing the game”. (Schell, 91) Their interviews with a focus group attest to this competitive nature in men, and the vying for ascendancy and prestige.

“We always play in all house (fraternity) tournaments. We used to put money down.”

“When you play with someone you’ve never played with, and they think they’re an expert, and you beat them finally, you get invited to play with them more. Because it’s like, “I’m going to beat you this time.” (2006, 218)

In fact, one interviewee went so far as to describe a match in such a way as to parallel a defence of personal honour:

“[Competition] is pretty much the only reason why I play. We, like, have an intercom in our house and they’ll call you out and you’ll have to defend.” (2006, 218)

Video games allow users to derive standings, ladders and rankings, all of which are important for bragging rights and the establishment of pecking order. (Klug et al., 2006, 95) This element of one-upmanship is clearly evident in *FIFA Football*, where score keeping of victories and losses over a period of time are remembered and frequently referred to in mock dominance displays. Although the length of matches can be reconfigured in the game’s menu, standard match length is about five minutes a half, meaning many matches can be played in one “session” of play. This produces a very competitive atmosphere, as beaten players will invariably have a chance to redeem themselves and exact competitive revenge. Winning players are often rewarded for their victories through the customary practice of “Winner Stays On”; on winning three games in a row, however, the controller is generally passed to another group member to allow all a chance. This competitive aspect is strongly attested to in the *FIFA* survey, where 45 (35%) of respondents described their playing experience as “competitive”, the most common answer, followed closely by “fun” (30%). (Only 9% described it as “relaxed” and 3% “friendly” while 18% described it as “boring” and 5% as “frustrating”, highlighting that it is competition and fun that are the most common experiences by far.) Conway (2010) documented one football video game player stating, “It feels serious, like the results matter, and you get the usual stuff being shouted, and it feels like a real football match.” These rankings and bragging rights act as important resources for the male banter discussed earlier, providing material for playful antagonism, while the game itself provides cues and support for conversation, particularly in a competitive context. This competitive banter is seen prominently at the half time interface in *FIFA Football*, one that provides statistical information on the game at hand, including possession percentages, shots on target etc. These invariably invoke debate and discussion amongst the users, as Conway observes in *Pro Evolution Soccer*:

At the end of a half, the *Pro Evo* series displays a panel of information noting score, shots on target, disciplinary cards received, and ball possession. Such data would normally be used as material for banter amongst the group, as the relative merits of each statistic would be used to prove one player’s superiority over the other, discussed in common football slang (usually aggressive metaphors for physically dominating your opponent), for example: ‘sixty per cent possession, I’m all over you!’ and ‘ten shots on target, I should be battering you!’ Again, the emphasis of the televisual genre’s status as ‘football’ more than ‘videogame’ to the players

explains this form of evaluation and subsequent banter, as similar discussions can be observed watching pundits provide their professional views at half-time or listening to regular pub repartee. (2010, p. 338)

He also studied the body language of his participants and found they expressed their competitiveness, both subconsciously and consciously, in their demeanour:

Opposing players would, if sitting on the same couch or sofa, often unknowingly move away from one another (upon questioning no user ever seemed conscious of this movement), creating a space that symbolically communicated their oppositional status. Conversely, a conscious effort was made to sit alongside the partner if in a team situation (2v2), so much so that people would verbally agitate and negotiate until each pair were seated together. This served no functional purpose, as the players were all seated so closely that the slightest whisper was still perfectly audible to the entire group, yet it served as important social and symbolic role. (2010, p. 345)

The nature of football, in real life and in its digital portrayal, makes for tense and excited gameplay. Matches can vary between goal fests to low scoring matches of attrition, leading to suspense and tension between players. Indeed, even the worst of users can scrape a win against a more advanced opponent with a well organised defence. Goals, then, are valuable game breakers that often result in euphoric eruptions of emotion from the users, making for moments of genuine camaraderie between group members:

Often each pairing would invent its own specialized celebratory gesture to increase this sense of solidarity (and to flaunt it ostentatiously to the opponent), such as unique 'high five' celebrations or long-winded 'secret' handshakes (enacted in an ironic manner). All rehearsed celebrations had an obvious comedic nature and seemingly served as satirical commentary on sports fandom, yet there were also spontaneous celebrations (most often performed upon the scoring of a crucial or unexpected goal) that displayed a genuine sharing of euphoric emotion; these would normally take the form of hugs or un-ironic high fives and handshakes, directly comparable to observing the sports fan celebrating their team's goal. (Conway, 2010, p. 345)

This tension and moments of both euphoria and disgust in users are often aided by the games inbuilt mechanics. One-goal-leads and stalemates are often broken by last minute scores, where in-built algorithms increase the likelihood of shots being successful in extra time, creating moments of ecstasy and despair alike. (Towell, 2012)

The element of competition, then, is very prominent in *FIFA Football* but, rather than generate antagonism, it nurtures camaraderie. Although men's small talk tends to be more competitive than women's- featuring verbal sparring matches, playful insults, and putdowns- it both creates and signals solidarity, portraying that they are comfortable enough with each other's company to be able to say these things without them being taken as insults. (Tannen, 1992, p. 6)

As humour or comedy, banter makes use of every kind of irony, sarcasm, pun, clichéd reply, and so is an example of the joke...The content of banter has a double function. Outwardly banter is aggressive, a form in which the masculine ego asserts itself. Inwardly, however, banter depends on a close, intimate and personal understanding of the person who is the butt of the attack. It thus works as a way of affirming the bond of love between men while appearing to deny it. (Kennedy, 2000, p. 3)

This competitive banter, like the element of social drinking, has manifested itself in a unique way in *FIFA Football* in the *FIFA Apologies* phenomenon. According to this custom, a player who has lost a match by a substantial margin must make a “public” apology for his poor performance and implied lack of skill (and, even more degradingly, for “wasting the victor’s time”), via social media and others means. This serves to cultivate an added element of competition and mock-shaming, providing fuel for male banter. The added element of social media such as Facebook, where the loser would post a status announcing his ineptitude on a public forum, provides an ever wider scope for continued banter among third parties. The popularity of this *FIFA Apologies* custom is attested to in the *FIFA* survey, where a considerable 53 respondents (40%) stated that they had taken part in a *FIFA Apologies* game.

Similarly to the *FIFA Drinking Games*, many rules exist that are particular to certain social groups. However, they tend to follow a similar framework, whereby the forfeits for the loser worsen with increasing losing margins and many internet sources provide variations on the rules. One such set of rules is exemplified below, as found on *FIFAapologyrules.co.uk*:

Lose by 5:

You must write a considered Facebook apology to your opponent, publicly explaining why and how you have disgraced the beautiful game. This rule is typically enforced when the player has lost by any score line of 5 goals or more, in addition to the rule for your specific loss. (FIFAapologyRules.co.uk, 2012)

The subsequent forfeits vary from writing a letter to the opponents parents explaining “how their offspring is superior to you in every way” and “knock on the door of a neighbour and proceed to explain and apologise for your performance” to playing the next game “completely bollock naked”. Social media plays a prominent role in the forfeits, whereby- along with the standard apology status on Facebook- losers may also be subjected to “[allowing] your opponent 13 minutes on your Facebook to do whatever they want...All changes have to stay intact for the rest of the night” and creating a group entitled “[Your name] is SHIT at FIFA” and invite their entire friends list to join, pronouncing their inferiority and the victor’s superiority to their entire social circle. The ultimate dishonour, on losing by 15 goals or more, is the snapping in two of the loser’s copy of the game, followed by uploading a picture of it on Facebook.

Similarly to how the *FIFA Drinking Games* satirise elements of real-life sporting football fandom, special *Apologies’* rules in the same vein exist. For example, on conceding a hat-trick (three goals) scored by Edgar Davids- one of the most recognizable players in the world in the 2000s due to his sports goggles- the player must “take [his opponent] to a 3D film of [his] choice”(Facebook, 2011). Similarly, an apology rule exists which references the John Terry scandal of 2010, where the player allegedly had an affair with the girlfriend of a former teammate: “Score a hat trick with John terry and the opponent has to slap three girls’ arses” (Facebook, 2012). This rule encapsulates the macho “lad

culture” atmosphere that surrounds the video game, whilst also alluding to the objectification of women that often features in male shared activities. (Thernell-Read, 2012)

This custom of *FIFA Apologies* is typical of hazing, whereby group members undergo abuse, harassment and humiliation but ultimately build a sense of solidarity and identify with their group. It provides an added element of competition and humour to the standard competition involved in the game, cultivating more banter and intragroup camaraderie.

Conclusion

The playing of *FIFA Football*, then, is a highly social and immersive experience for groups of young men. Male interaction is frequently characterised by shared activities and *FIFA Football* provides a fun medium for this type of indirect, filtered interaction typical in male pastimes. It creates a familiar, comfortable environment with prescribed roles and patterns of behaviour that induce group cohesion, while its gameplay and wider association with real-life football provides cues for thematic conversation patterns and complimentary transactions, acting as a social support for interaction.

Typical of male pastimes, it glorifies traditional perceptions of masculinity through perpetuating the association of men and sport. Indeed, it serves as another expression of football fandom in general, acting as a group norm that serves as a shared interest and aids in group identity formation. The inextricability of *FIFA* and football fandom is attested to in its associated subcultures of *FIFA Apologies* and *FIFA Drinking Games*, which directly reference real-life football culture and add even more to the social merits of the game, providing greater scope for banter and camaraderie. *FIFA Drinking Games* have emerged as a unique manifestation of the age-old theme of male binge drinking and present another social element to the medium, while *FIFA Apologies* encapsulates the highly competitive nature of the game, adding to its humour and amusement in mock dominance displays.

Clearly, *FIFA Football* functions as a male pastime that delivers in the three most prevalent aspects of male friendships; it provides a central shared activity, it glorifies masculine norms, and it provides a high element of competition. This paper has gone some way to illustrate this hypothesis, but there are various limitations to the research. The proposals made, that *FIFA* serves as a platform for scripted conversation, is predominantly conjecture-based and, although Conway's (2010) research supports these assertions, ideally more primary research in the form of several focus groups would be observed playing the game in order identify recurring themes of complimentary transactions as proposed. Likewise, although the aim of this research paper was to analyse the social merits of *FIFA* in an intimate, living room context, its widespread popularity as an online game is deserving of further research, for which this paper could provide a foundation. Finally, although the popularity of *FIFA Drinking Games* and *FIFA Apologies* in Ireland and Britain is well attested to by the range of British websites and forums concerning the latter online, further research into their popularity worldwide is necessary to assess their extent as a global phenomenon.

That said, the continued dominance of *FIFA Football* in annual game sales after more than twenty years stands as the strongest testament to its success as a platform for male bonding. Through its mixture of masculine norms, highly competitive nature and associated drinking games and forfeits, it fits the mould of the archetypal male activity. Indeed, one could argue that it ought to join the pantheon of great male pastimes as one of the first male bonding activities of the digital age.

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