

Get your uber micro down:

Exploring the gaming community and its
language

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The Interface of Technology and Communication

- **Fall 2008, LIN200 ‘Language in the US’**– *History of English* lectures; several students offered the idea that there was a robust community of gamers, and that many of the terms used when “*in the zone*” were trickling out to non-gaming contexts. This came up during a discussion of texting and abbreviating language.

Inquiries

- **Fall 2009** – began meeting with Kevin O'Donnell, to continue our discourse about the gaming community
- Set up meetings with students from LIN200 who had an interest in gaming
- Personally invited to a '*gaming night*' on campus to observe students in action.
- Spent a considerable amount of time viewing various games, clarifying terms and behaviors with experienced players

Questions

Questions which developed after listening to students discuss *gaming*:

- Can we define what gaming language is?
- Is it related to a culture of users? And if so, what are the values of this culture?
- Do these young people feel they are part of a *community*? And what contributes to such a feeling?
- How do they communicate in a game? What does it look like, sound like? How is the vocabulary integrated?

Questions (2)

Questions which developed after listening to students discuss gaming:

- Why do they select certain words, or phrasing for their team players, their partners?
- Do the women interact differently than the men in organized, team competition?
- What cooperative actions are taken to defeat the enemy and what language choices are made to make that successful?
- Which words or phrases are found outside of the gaming zone? What are some examples?

Testimonials

Do you believe it is really a ‘community’? *“The gaming world is definitely a very strange, but true community. There are many people who fall into niche categories, called "fanboys" who defend their favorite game system to the death. Most people are rather collected about it however. But whenever you play a game online you develop quick bonds with people over games, as friendliness helps overcome obstacles and challenges. It's a true form of friendship that I feel exists on a different level; and is carried by an on/off switch...”* (O'Donnell, December 2009, p.c.)

Testimonials

Why is gaming important to you? *“Honestly, its an escape. There's a lot of stress in today's world and how we deal with it differs person to person...Playing a good game with a story I relate to or enjoy is like taking a good book and reading it over and over. If you really enjoy it, it really never gets old...”* (O'Donnell, December 2009, p.c.)

Testimonials

Why is gaming important to you?

“It gives you an edge...a way to get rid of stress.” (anonymous gamer on campus)

“Gamers are easy to get a rise out of...” (anonymous)

“People around me wouldn’t understand a gamer conversation...but I might expect them to pick up a word or two now...I’m surprised...it’s no longer exclusive.”

“People act very differently in character.” (anonymous)

What is gaming?

Simply the act of playing video games... a competitive activity involving skill, chance, or endurance on the part of two or more persons who play according to a set of rules, usually for their own amusement or for spectators.

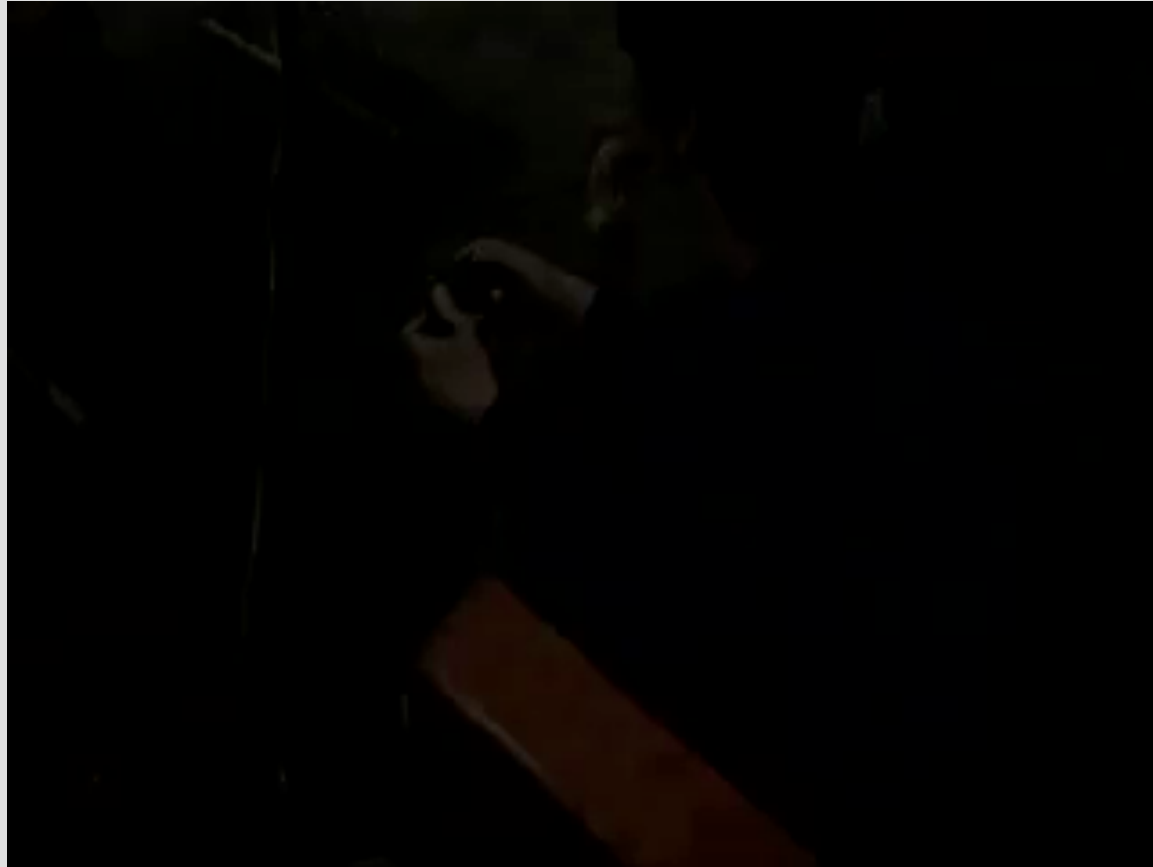


Guitar hero – Wii or Xbox360

- Scenes and game messages



controls



Gaming history

gaming language or **game speak** also known as "1337" or "Leet", or "hacker speak" from the words *leet* or *elite*. (originating from Dead Cow Cult, a hacker group, to access Windows 95 using Back Orifice, an old hacking program)

The gaming community picked it up playing Counter Strike (CS) and World of Warcraft (WOW), among other games.

Gaming and memes

meme – is an image, video, phrase or simply an idea that spreads from one person to another seemingly for no logical reason at all. The action or phrase normalized through repetition; an isoteric inside joke; someone can post an image, another adds to it, and it spreads;

- originated in the 1980s from computer programmers who would perform “pants status” (announcing what they were wearing)
- In gaming culture memes are common, appearing on gaming forums and gaming locales. (Backseatgaming.wordpress.com)
- ***Encyclopedia Dramatica*** catalogs the memes of 4chan.org
- “the internet has become an *infinite* amount of differing subcultures which overlap each other” (Sveningsson, 2008)
- **4chan.org** is what has been called the *wild west* of memes; there are no rules about posting images; an image can be up and gone in minutes.

Examples of memes

meme – an action or phrase normalized through repetition; someone can post an image, another adds to it, and it spreads

Hitler learns that Obama has won – video

LOLZ cats A lolcat (pronounced LOLL-kat) is an image combining a photograph, often of a cat, with a humorous and idiosyncratic caption in a variety of English called “lolspeak” or “kitty pidgin” which makes fun of the poor grammar of internet

NSFW – refers to a meme or some image that is “not safe for work” (meaning you would not want your supervisor catching you with it on company email)

Kayne West – from 4chan.org (in response to Kayne’s insulting interruption of Taylor Swift as she accepts the Moonman for Best Female Video)

Memes are very much about exaggerating and mocking

4chan.org – called the “cesspool of the internet...”



Terminology

- **A massively multiplayer online game (also called MMOG)** is a video game which is capable of supporting hundreds or thousands of players simultaneously. They are played on the internet; not necessarily on personal computers. Many of the platforms such as PSP, PS3, Xbox 360, Nintendo DSI and Wii can access the internet though. Also mobile devices such as Apple iPhone are also using more MMO games (Wikipedia, 2009)

Common terms

- **IRL** (to mean “in real life”)
- **IG** (to mean “in game”) When players are *in the zone*, they become engrossed, they escape into an alternate reality, and so terms were needed to distinguish real from fantasy.
- **PWN** – [pronounced “pown”] originates from “OWNED” which was simply misspelled (on a keyboard ‘p’ is near ‘o’)
- **Epic fail** – originated from the popular imageboard 4chan, which applied it as an internet meme. Bloggers argue over the initial “game” that spurred “fail”; combined with another meme term, ‘Epic’, meaning something of enormous magnitude. Essentially, Epic Fail means you totally screwed up and are a total loser. Can also mean someone “asks a stupid question”

Common terms (2)

- **gtfo** (to mean "get the fuck out")
- **GG** – (to mean "good game")– (sarcastic) in this sense "GG" is a synonym for *epic fail*
- **GG nub** – (sarcastic compliment to a new player; more insulting with "nuhb" than "noob")
- **Nøøb** (with "null" symbol) – more acceptable & common
- **EPIC LULZ** – (recall AIM – "LOL"?) same idea, however indicates that something was so funny, went on FOX News; "newsworthy"
- **FTL** – for the loss; meaning your character (player) died or made a major error in movement, & you announce it.
- **Nooblet** - a tiny nub (pronounced "noob")
- **Trash talk** –bad mouth another player (or person, outside context)
- **Griefers** – person who derives pleasure from causing difficulty for noobies

Common terms (3)

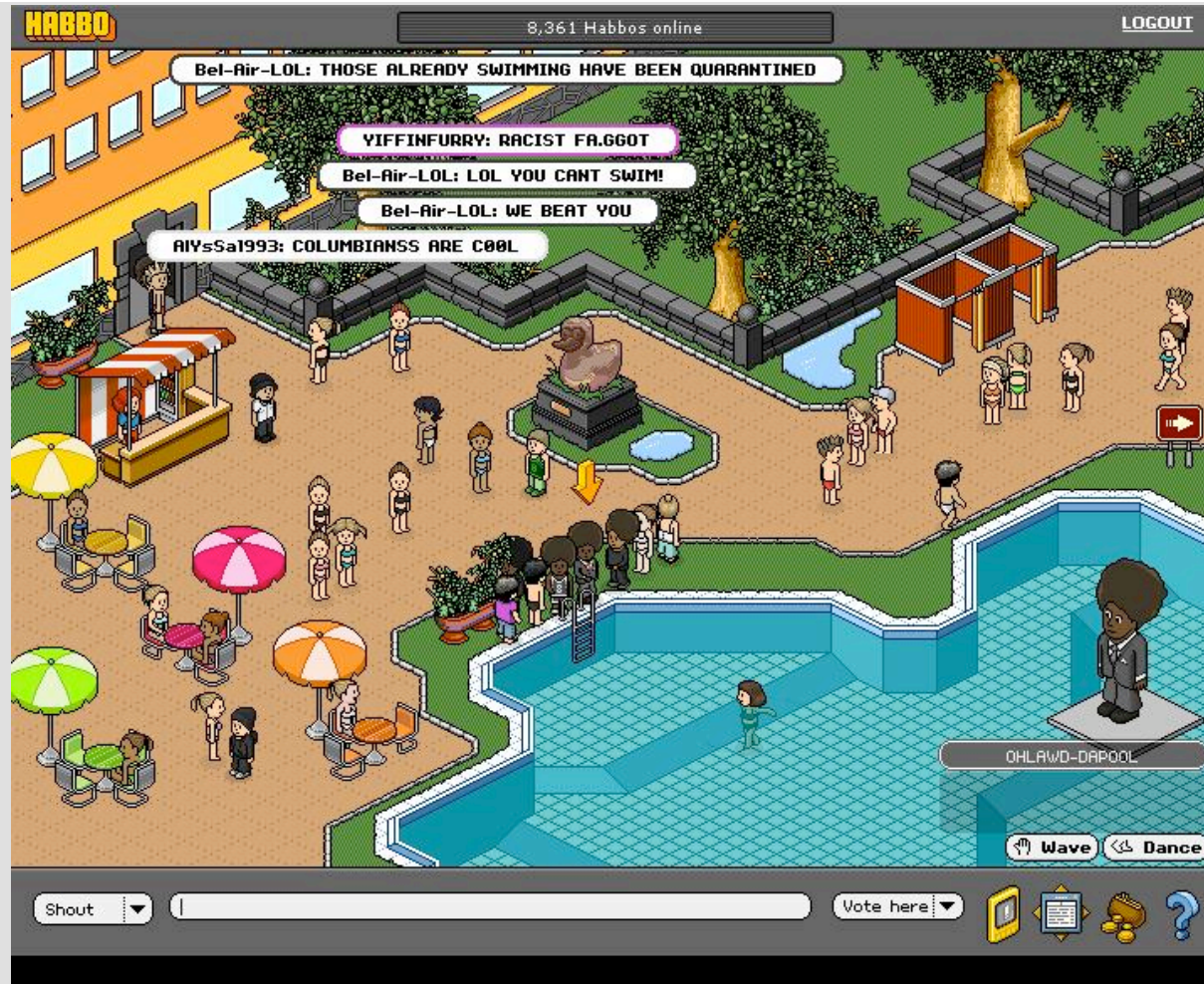
- **Wts** (to mean “willing to sell [weapons or items]”)
- **wtb** – (to mean “willing to buy”)
- **Rp** – “role play” (avatars, self-created, can even have demeanor, emotions, outfits; engages in live action)
- **Ooc** – “out of character” (within your avatar character, but to convey a real-life message)
- **Larp** –live action role-play. This indicates individuals who dress up in character, meet, and have combat engagement.
- **Noob combo** - in the game HALO, one of the easiest moves as a noob (new player) is a combination of 2 weapons (plasma pistol & battle rifle) (especially if you don't know how to handle other weapons)
- **Kara** – technique where you use one move to another, smooth transition, punch-to-a-kick (only advanced players) **kara punching**
- **Mana** magic, little blue bar shows the energy you have. Often players choose avatars that have magic powers. You can use it to heal or attack whatever you're fighting: monsters, aliens, people
- **Buffed** as in “he's a buffed character” –you will treat him differently
- **Trolling** -type of person, getting angry. (From game forums, more than game itself)
- **Pyro** – flame throwers in Team Fortress II

4chan.org & games

- **Habbo Hotel**
- Designed for tween demographic
- Free, online game
- **Second Life** – virtual game world
- 4chan.org exploited it by creating raiding avatars who were African American males in suits, with afro style hair. They felt Habbo Hotel moderators were racist, banning black characters. They took replicas of the character, anonymously logged onto Habbo Hotel, and had them stand in formation to build a swastika, and used titles “nigras”; they blockaded the Hotel’s pool while shouting “Pools closed” to users trying to enter.



Habbo Hotel & invasion of nigras



Different games

- **HALO** - shooting games (xbox)
- **WOW** - World of Warcraft (you sell weapons or items) recall the terms *wts*, *wtb*
- **Gears of War** – also a shooting game
- **Team Fortress 2** –shooting games
- **Left for Dead** (survivors in zombie outbreak)
- **HALF-LIFE** (home game; not online) – science fiction, first person shooter videogame

Words outside of gaming context (1)

- Some players will use “wts” outside of the gaming context of **WOW**, but typically only when selling games; restricted context
- In *Half-Life*, there is a main character Freeman, who is an MIT graduate. He encounters a security guard Barney who pokes fun of his degree saying the MIT education “Really pays for itself”. Despite having obtained a Ph.D, the laboratory work that the player actually does as Freeman (pressing a button and pushing a cart) does not require any intellectual expertise at all.
- Players familiar with Half Life will use dry humor, remarking about a friend’s uselessness by saying “**way to use that MIT education!**” (Saunders-Merchant, 2009, p.c., O’Donnell, 2009, p.c.)
- **Trolling** Outside of gaming context (ex. You’re with a Pro-life person, & make a pro-choice comment. “Whoah, he’s trolling.” or “That’s a troll right there.” “Why are you trolling?” Used to describe gamers who try to get a rise out of other emotional ones.
- **Bonk** – or “bonk [around]” –originally running around sporadically with your melee weapon, hammer , or bat (Team Fortress II)

Words outside of gaming context (2)

- An example: one informant explained a case of a skateboarder, who had just hit a female student outside of SAC, knocking her over. Onlookers exclaimed “She just got rocked!” This is clearly a reference to **Combat Arms** to describe her impact.
- At the workplace, it is not unlikely to have a colleague say “I sent you a link, but it’s **NSFW**.” (meaning it’s pornographic and should be viewed at home)
- Use of the term “**raped**” to indicate that you took advantage of someone to such a degree, you made them emotional.
- Gamers have indicated that using “game speak” or even “memes” or “jokes” from these virtual games or picture forums are common. You reference and then counter-reference, all in an effort to **bastardize** the language. (O’Donnell, 2009, p.c.)

Words outside of gaming context (3)

- **“dude, you just got pownd!”** (“did something stupid due to your own stupidity” as in you tripped and dropped your food (Reyes, 2009, p.c.). An example would be in baseball, hit well, but some dude steals home and then gets a double-play, in other words the victory is snatched from you.
- **“This kid totally just pownd you”** (Reyes, 2009, p.c.)
- **“Oh look, I’m playing Ken Fighter 4”** (sarcastic, as in “what a shocker”) , a jumping up move & shooting a fireball. Ken Fighter is one character who is **“nubi-friendly”**.
- **“Spam”** is in reference to using the same technique repeatedly.
- For ex. In **Street Fighter** (played on xbox 360, you can play one-on-one (you against the computer system), or against another player in room, or against a person online (who does not have to be physically co-present)

PS3 – Playstation

- You have a screen name and a headshot (image) *not to be confused with term for killing!
- **PSP**= “playstation portable”(wifi built-in); players Instant Message, you can “get in on their game”

Examples of PS3 games:

- **Star Craft** (SBU lounges full of students playing this type)
- **Resident Evil** (not to be confused with the film, made after); players attain ranking
- **HALO** – (use of term “pwnd”). Other common terms are “rpg” for *missile*; this game involved tremendous screaming. Other terms include “righteous kill”, “peg” (to mean peg down someone), “head shot” (to mean you either shot someone in the head, or got shot yourself)
- **COMBAT ARMS** – (“rocked” – to mean you were killed, or attacked hard) PS3

PS3 – Playstation

- **CALL OF DUTY** - #1 ranked online PS3 game; you communicate with an entire team. For the most part regular grammar is used, but specialized terms include: flank left, hold, break left/right (means a 'quick exit'), tea-bagged (after you kill someone, you sit on their face to disgrace them further & glorify in your conquest)
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO 4** – (uses the term “wasted” to mean die, or kill someone); players indicated more noises through headset, described as a “very noisy game”; you can hear sound through headset or the TV speakers
- **The Sims** (<http://thesims.ea.com/>) Initially, inspired by the Native American code-talkers of WWII, Sims creators suggested experiment with Navajo to create Simlish. But they eventually decided Simlish worked best as gibberish that can't be translated, so the meaning would be partial to each player in the game.
 - Ex. Cheery wave (“sool sod”), average mood (“a-aj”), bad mood (“klow-klow”), or they simply sigh loudly.
- **GOD OF WAR (2004)**

Resident Evil (females)



What are the values of the gaming community?

- **(1) ranking**- when you are a noob, you will definitely be mocked; ranking is everything in these games; it is one of the most valued elements. Each player strives for a worthy ranking, so others will want him/her on their team. Every action affects others.
- **(2) effective & efficient communication** -it is essential that you know what language is used in each game, and how to give and react to commands. You don't have time to have another translate, nor do you have the time to use complete sentences. For example, if you hear a teammate yell "RPG!", you instantly *move*, you don't ask questions or hesitate.
- **(3) system** – without knowing your equipment, or having functioning equipment, you jeopardize yourself and your team; *glitches* or *lags* in your system will affect your team. (these are two words also used in gaming; *lag* means there is a delay in your internet); *glitch* means your character froze, but then came back again. ***There is a clear rivalry between xbox and PS3 players.**

Survey of LIN200 gamers

- (1) Do you game? **92/189?**
- (2) How many hours per day? **90** (1-5 hours per day) **5** (5-10 hours per day)
- (3) Do you use gaming expressions outside of the game itself?
35/189 (most popular responses – noob, pwnd)

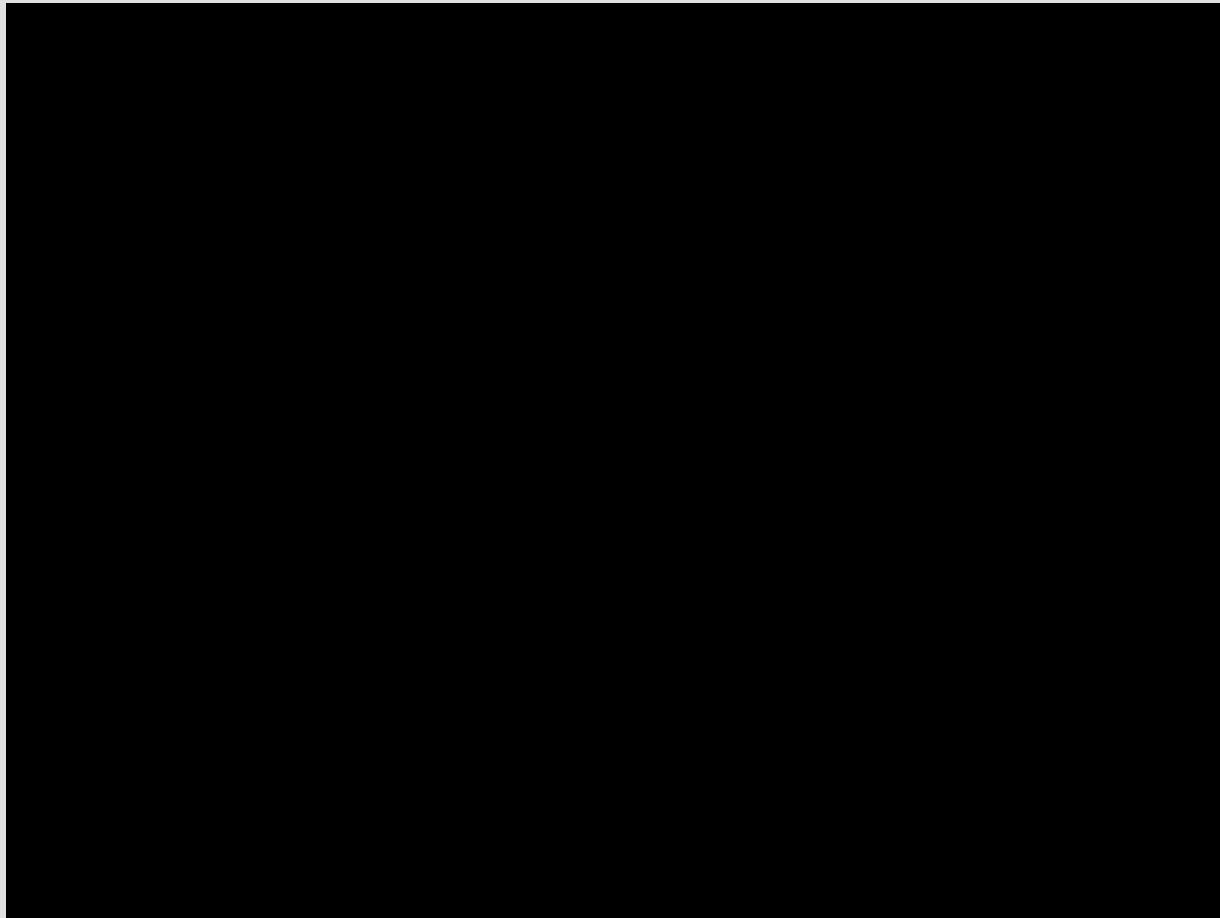
Differences between male & female team playing

- In the observed games on campus (Wii), including *Smash*, and *Guitar Hero*, Resident Evil, team players were all grouped by gender. There was relatively little mixing within games.
- Female players of PS3 games such as Resident Evil, indicated that they felt female players were better at carrying out maneuvers successfully, that they devised “clearer commands” to teammates, “better strategies”

SMASH and GUITAR HERO

- In **Smash**, four players in this case, using old characters from other games. For ex. "Earth Bound" NES, Nintendo "Bowser".
- Players are indicated on the screen as P1, P2, P3 and so forth
- In **Guitar Hero**, specialized phrasing included *star power* which means you earn extra points for shaking the guitar neck or do a "fancy move"; it can also mean the game is warning you that you are about to fail, so you better do *star power*.
- The game is played in collaboration with others as a "band". "*100 note band steak*" means your band has reached 100 points. Bands choose the difficulty of song, and follow color sequences on screen to sync notes with their fingers on the guitar, or drums. Your co-guitarist can affect your overall score.

Guitar Hero (females)



Guitar Hero (males)



Guitar Hero – screen shot



Summary

- The gaming community is an active, creative group of people; players connect socially often across distances, share specific values, and utilize fine motor skills, and intellect to coordinate movements and decisions that benefit each other's status (ranking) in the community
- There are words and their meanings that seem to transcend the gaming context itself (*Street Fighter* sarcasm, *noob*, *pwnd*, *headshot*, *rocked*)
- Many of the word choices or phrasing is game-specific (it would be unusual to hear "head shot" in Grand Theft Auto, more appropriate to hear "wasted" and "headshot" for HALO)
- The gaming realm is used as a means of escape, to defuse stress. Some players may feel a connection to others with whom they play
- Virtual co-presence supersedes physical co-presence. Exuberance or disappointment is shared only through the virtual world, despite proximity to team player. (No physical contact)
- Because of forums like 4chan.org or other gaming wiki's or forums, neologisms appear, there is rapid turnover of terms, a lot of humor, sarcasm, and creative play to the point of ridiculousness or overuse, which is the intended goal

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