



## What's in a game?

Narrative therapy approaches with people who have relationships  
with gaming and online communities

by Dale Andersen-Giberson

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### Abstract

This article outlines various approaches in working with people who have relationships with gaming and online communities, and includes transcripts to share the co-learning that unfolded in narrative conversations. Discoveries include the helpfulness of using narrative therapy to enlist positioning around gaming and the vast possibilities that exist for unpacking the significance of online communities as arenas for preferred identity construction.

**Key words:** video games, gaming, online communities, identity construction, externalisation, re-membering conversations, narrative therapy

Video games are significant in the lives of young people and adults in societies throughout the globe. While the people I consult with give particular definitions of their relationship with video games, it appears that much of the defining power is allocated to those other than people who use games. The act of gaming becomes defined as a 'trivial engagement', where young people are totalised and described as 'zombies plugged into a screen'. Totalising of identity is extended to those who engage with online communities and people become labelled as engaging in 'addictive behaviour'. While the significance of online communities is minimised, the privileging of dominant conventions of relationship are practiced and discourses of value around traditional relationships ensue. What becomes obscured is consideration of the vast richness of online communities and stories of preferred relationships with video games.

In my work as a narrative therapist in children's mental health and primary care in Ontario, Canada, it has become clear that video games can bring both benefits and detriments into people's lives. Many people who consult with me speak about their relationship with gaming as a relationship of difficulty. It appears that games have the potential to get between families, take young people away from their values, and take adults away from their responsibilities. Games can have tricks to keep people playing and are often made by companies with the intention of 'hooking people in'. When words like 'addiction' are applied to the experience of gaming, gaming is not to be taken lightly. Yet, as a narrative therapist, I have come to learn not only about the difficulties that people experience from games, but also about the preferred stories that can be uncovered within video games. This double story of video games becomes apparent through the narrative therapy lens and offers unique opportunities for therapeutic conversation with people who use video games that will be explored in this article.

## Research around facilitating change and video games

A number of therapeutic approaches have either worked with people who are experiencing difficulty with the effects of video games or have used games to benefit therapeutic change. Wilkinson, Ang, and Goh (2008) speak of the possibilities available with the use of video games for therapy and give considerations for the use of simple society games and online worlds. Other studies have found effectiveness, or potential for effectiveness, with using different types of video games in facilitating change with people with mental health difficulties (Fernández-Aranda et al., 2012), eating difficulties (Fagundo et al., 2013; Fagundo et al., 2014), and with young people

in general (Steadman, Boska, Lee, Lim, & Nichols, 2014). Other work has been developed around supporting responses to people experiencing difficulties with the effects of video games in families (Phan & Bastard, 2012), and in employing narrative therapy with conversations around using the skills developed in video games to bridge to other areas of life (Graham Jr., 2014).

## Purpose and ethics

My purpose through this document is to share and explore the various approaches I have taken as a narrative therapist in the exploration of people's experience with video games. I will explore both the approaches that I have found useful for helping people evaluate their relationship with video games, and the approaches that I have found helpful in illuminating preferred stories and in thickening the re-authoring of preferred stories. I will note that this is by no means an exhaustive list of approaches, and I encourage the continued exploration in narrative therapy and its application with people who use video games.

In the following text, it may be noticed that I have replaced the word 'client', with the word 'consultant', and this is intentional. The practice of understanding the people who come to therapy as consultants represents an effort to move toward a decentering of the therapist's professional knowledge and a centering of the expertise and knowledge on the consultant. With this paradigm shift, therapy moves from a traditional transferring of knowledge from therapist to client, to a co-researching of the problem story and alternative stories that constitute the consultant's life. Expertise in the therapist's realm turns from knowing about change to facilitating change and helping the consultant move from what is known to what is possible through therapeutic lines of enquiry. The result is a collaborative engagement with consultant and therapist that is about identifying the problem story, identifying preferred stories, and then strengthening and expanding the existence of preferred stories in the presence of the consultant's life.

Furthermore, I would like to note that I will not use this document to capture or illustrate the supposed 'truths' of addiction or difficulties with gaming. This professional naming of difficulties in gaming is a practice that has been engaged in for over twenty years by a number of researchers who have unpacked the harmful effects of gaming and who have created dozens of assessment tools to capture problems (Kiraly, Nagygyogy, Griffiths, & Demetrovics, 2014). As a social worker, I find it hard to see how this act of professional capturing of problems is helpful for facilitating change with people. It appears to me that when people are having difficulties with video games, and they are interested

in consulting about their difficulties with video games, they are well-equipped to define the difficulties that video games bring into their lives. I hope that the ideas presented in this document help narrative therapists to develop the lines of enquiry and to develop agility in conversational scaffolding to centre problem definitions with the voice of those with whom we consult, instead of the voice of institutional professionals.

## Naming and externalising the game

The naming and externalising of the game is a practice that can have a number of significant outcomes for people consulting around gaming. Externalising, as defined by White (2007), is about providing an antidote to the truths that are made about people and objectifies the problems instead of objectifying the person. Externalising re-appropriates naming rights from the institutional definer back to the individual community member. This is a political act that features a repositioning of power (Carey & Russell, 2002). As defining power is re-appropriated, consultants can experience a separation of themselves from the apparent truths of problems. Furthermore, externalising offers opportunities to help discover ways that the person is more than a problem, giving clues into the values, hopes, skills and other intentions that a person stands for (Hayward, 2006).

When a person enters the room having being recruited into understandings of themselves as an 'addict', or being 'weak' for playing video games, the separating of their identity from this prescribed identity can be empowering. Consider the difference between the following definitions of someone who plays video games:

- 'I'm addicted to the game. I'm such an addict that I can't get through a day without at least thinking about gaming.'

compared to:

- 'The game continues to get the best of me. Its influence is huge and I'm having a lot of trouble keeping it at arm's length.'

While each definition shows, equally, the impact of gaming, the latter offers a separation and un-totalising of identity. As this process happens, it becomes more possible for those we consult with to dispel the 'truth' that can be ascribed to their experience and for people to objectify the problem, instead of being objectified themselves.

## George: Unpacking notions of 'addiction'

The following is a transcript with George<sup>1</sup>, a 29 year-old father of two who came to consult with me about his relationship with video games. We arrived at the name 'Video Games' to define the problem and are now exploring the effects of the problem:

**Dale:** Would you care just to say a bit about your relationship with Video Games?

**George:** I pretty much grew up on Video Games. I had an Atari ... I've been gaming for the better part of my life. I used to play a lot of console games and then I used to play World of Warcraft a lot, these social games.

**Dale:** So it went from console to social games?

**George:** Yeah, PC gaming, and I've gone back and forth. Over the last eight years, my interest in Video Games has been a funny relationship, because I've always bought games for systems when I shouldn't have – when I didn't have the money or I wasn't working. Every game system I've had, I've had to turn around and sell, because I didn't have money.

**Dale:** How is it that the Video Games got you to buy them when you didn't have the funds?

**George:** It's actually a stress-reliever. When I'm worried about finances, I'll go and buy something. It makes no sense at all but ...

**Dale:** And do they always give you the stress relief when you buy them? Do they ever follow through with that?

**George:** Sometimes yes, sometimes no. I'll focus on one game for months at a time and it will become more important than spending time with my wife and everything. It's almost like an addiction really.

**Dale:** I have a sense of what that word 'addiction', might mean, but would you care to teach me about what addiction means?

**George:** I'm not saying that Video Games are addicting like heroin – I don't go through withdrawal or anything – but I'm addicted to the feeling I get when I'm playing them, the escape. Especially when I'm under a lot of stress, then I'll play a whole lot more games.

While lines of enquiry are posed, both consultant and the consulted participate in the re-appropriation of defining power. In the example with George, not only do opportunities arise for an experience-near definition of the problem, but also an opportunity for a decentering of professional jargon. When I enquire about the definition of 'addiction', I get a chance to travel into George's understanding of addiction and Video Games and learn that it is about the feeling of escape from stress much more than an experience that can induce withdrawal. Ultimately, the political act of externalising brings about numerous opportunities that can have significance in the conversation.

## Using the statement of position map

It can be helpful to utilise the statement of position map (White, 2007) to facilitate the mapping of effects and positioning of the person around the problem. This map is structured as follows:

1. Getting an experience-near definition of the problem
2. Exploring the effects of the problem
3. Evaluating the effects of the problem
4. Justifying the evaluation.

This structure helps to get a thorough understanding of the experience of the problem. Furthermore, it encourages those we consult with to take a position on the problem and identify a stance. Helpful questions through each stage can include:

- Naming the gaming/tech experience:
  - What is the name you use to describe this experience?
  - We have been referring to this as Gaming; does that work to describe this?
- Mapping the effects:
  - How does Gaming affect your schooling?
  - How much of your time does Gaming get?
  - Are there ways that Gaming enters into your relationship with your partner?
  - How does Gaming affect your relationship with your parents?
  - Who do you find yourself becoming when you are online?
  - Does Gaming enter into your life with other allies?
  - If Gaming was to stay in your life in this way, what might it hold for your future?

- Evaluating the effects:
  - Is it okay, not okay, or somewhere in between that Gaming is having this effect on your life?
  - Where do you stand regarding your relationship with Gaming?
- Justifying the evaluation:
  - Why is it [okay, not okay or somewhere in between]?
  - What does it say about what is important to you that you've come to this conclusion around Gaming?
  - What do you make of this conclusion?

This structure is not in any way static. I often begin by exploring the effects of the experience, and then after a few minutes of exploration, enquire about the name that is given to this experience. As the justification of the evaluation is achieved, we can then take that justification as an entrance into the preferred story development.

## Deconstructing while externalising

I wish to note the deconstruction questions that are possible in these conversations and that are fairly unique to people who use video games. These lines of enquiry can help to illuminate the social and cultural connections of problems and define the operations that gaming incorporates. The following is an approximation from a conversation I had with a secondary school class as we worked to understand the effects of video games:

**Dale:** As we've been having this conversation about the effects of video games, it got me to wondering: if someone from [a big gaming company in the USA] was to be here listening in on the conversation, what might they be interested in?

**Group member A:** Gaming companies are interested in one thing: money. They know that people will buy other things when they get into gaming, including books and downloadable content.

**Dale:** What might you notice them doing if they were here in this room?

**Group member B:** Well, they'd probably be taking notes on us if they were here right now and they'd want to know more about the group age 8 to 18. They'd see that we have a lot of time on our hands and that we have money to buy their downloadable content ...

**Group member D:** Yeah, and they'd see that if they get us addicted now, we could stay addicted as adults.

**Dale:** Huh, and what is your position around this observation?

**Group member B:** It's definitely not okay that companies want to make money off of us.

**Group member C:** But we're not that stupid.

**Group member B:** So realistically, I'd try not to let them know how addictive these games can be on me. That way I could keep them from making a lot of money off me.

As the influence of political impact on communities is unpacked, conversations can unfold that maximise the influential enquiry of the therapist and explore the expertise of the consultant. As therapists maintain curiosity, they can map the influence of problems and simultaneously situate the political implications in the lives of individuals and community members.

### *Alias identity migration and online gaming as a conduit for preferred identity development*

As clues to preferred stories are uncovered in therapeutic conversation, avenues that are specific to video gaming can be explored that can uncover previously untold richness in consultants' lives. One such area is in the conversation about the particular aliases that people choose to represent themselves in online gaming. Whether in massively multiplayer online games, first-person shooters, or virtual worlds, players often get a chance to construct the appearance and identity of their character and live out preferred identities which are marginalised in other areas of life. The alias can then be engaged with to uncover preferred identities both online and offline in the consultant's multiple realities.

The following is a conversation with Matthew where we explored his alias and the significance of his identity construction in his intentions as a career gamer. In this conversation, Matthew had attended a session with me at Oolagen Community Services walk-in clinic in Toronto, Ontario. He had been directed by the courts to attend six sessions of counselling and we started to unpack the 'disrespect' that he had experienced with members in his life. I had also learned that Matthew had taken up a career in gaming and found great meaning in his engagement with the game Counterstrike.

**Dale:** You said something earlier that, um, 'no-one would respect me' ...

**Matthew:** No-one would respect how far I've gone. [referring to the advancements Matthew has made in his gaming career]

**Dale:** [writing] 'How far I've gone?' Okay, and that immediately brought the question to me, what do all of these people not get to see in you?

**Matthew:** Oh, I don't know, they haven't seen me play I guess?

**Dale:** 'Haven't seen me play.'

**Matthew:** They haven't watched me play a match with my team, so they can't really ... they all just think it's a joke I guess.

**Dale:** I see. What do you think, if people had a chance, like if we really sat people down, and, I know there's review of the games ... what did you call it, a demo?

**Matthew:** Uh yeah, recording a demo, they're called demos.

**Dale:** Oh, okay, what do you think would really surprise people about watching your performance?

**Matthew:** Wow. I guess they would say [wow].

**Dale:** 'Wow.' [writing and documenting]

**Matthew:** Like, is that even him playing?

**Dale:** [continuing to write] 'Is that even him playing?'

**Matthew:** That would probably be their reaction, most likely.

**Dale:** 'Is that even him playing'; they might not even recognise this person on the screen?

**Matthew:** Yeah, you don't see myself playing, but you just would see how co-ordinated I am, like all the skill and stuff. They'd be like, 'This can't be Matthew! This is like amazing! This guy is very talented'. They probably wouldn't even think it was me, to be honest.

**Dale:** Brings me to wonder, are there social expectations of young men in this society that would lead people to see you a certain way instead of seeing you as this skilled, co-ordinated person?

**Matthew:** I don't really pay attention to society.

**Dale:** And I brought myself to thinking, would you correct me if I'm wrong, expectations to be a business person?

**Matthew:** Yeah, just to get a 'normal' – quote, unquote – job. Like, that's what I'm expected to do, so I guess, because that's what my whole family does.

**Dale:** When those expectations are around, that expect that young men become businessmen, what happens to a young person who is good at games?

**Matthew:** They just get disappointed. I put a lot of time and effort into this, like it's a very big passion of mine and they're completely disregarding it and putting me on a different path. To say the least.

**Dale:** 'Put on a different path.'

**Matthew:** Yeah, instead of just being happy that you have a passion and stuff, they're just, like, 'No, this isn't what we want you to do, you're gonna go to university, you're gonna major in this and the outcome is gonna be this job'.

The conversation comes to an end and I enquire about the impact of us meeting:

**Dale:** I have a couple questions here: Who was the person who I got to experience over this last hour? Who was this person who I got to meet? Could you describe him to me?

**Matthew:** Um, describe him?

**Dale:** Yeah, who I got to meet over this past hour.

**Matthew:** Hammer, I guess, that's my game name.

**Dale:** Ha! Hammer! And can you guess what most struck me about meeting Hammer?

**Matthew:** Um, how chill he was, I guess? I don't ever really cause problems for people, I don't say things that aren't needed to be said, I'm really dedicated and motivated, I'm a good person, I guess ...

**Dale:** When you look at what we've talked about today and look over the hour that we've shared and picture yourself leaving out the door and down the elevator and back home, what do you say stays really close to you?

**Matthew:** Probably that someone got to see and listen to the other side of me, I guess? Like the side of me that I want to pursue, like my motivated, dedicated side, my passion, and my career, and they got to hear all about it. I guess it's good to know, because no-one else has ever really cared to hear about it. I know it's your job and stuff but no-one has ever heard about that stuff.

**Dale:** And I will really work to honour that side of you that I got to meet today.

As we explored the alternative identity of Hammer, an alternate world opened up and Matthew and I collectively enquired into the capacities he possesses in this world. The power in this conversation resides in the rendering of his Hammer identity as real through 'loitering with intent' (Winslade & Hedtke, 2008) and positioning myself as both enquirer and witness to the impact of his life as Hammer. Contrary to the popular obscuring of the validity of this existence, we engaged in an alternative discourse that featured Matthew as a skilled, motivated, and dedicated person.

The exploration of the alias and rendering-real of the preferred identity is significant work in itself. Yet, if those who we consult with are interested, the uncovered identity can serve to assist in approaching difficulties in a person's life in alternative ways. Graham Jr. (2014) speaks of migrating skills and knowledge from the game to other areas of life. Other migrations can include taking the perspective generated in games to other areas of life and bridging the presence of the online identity to other areas. Questions that encourage considerations for migration might include:

- Now that you've taught me about Hammer and I have got to know this part of you a bit more, do you find yourself experiencing your old problems any differently? What do they look like through the eyes of Hammer?
- I have had the chance to bear witness to this side of you and, now that I know you in this way, who else would you care to invite into this understanding of yourself?
- If you found yourself inviting Hammer into other areas of your life, where might you take this part of you?
- What becomes possible in your life, knowing that you have Hammer as a part of you?

As the people we consult with realise possibilities for migrating the uncovered identity into other areas, potential can open up for people who use games and those around them to enter into alternative paradigms and engage with problems in different ways.

## Nick: Applying skills from the world of gaming to 'real life'

The following is a transcript from a conversation with Nick, an eight year-old who was having difficulties with the frustration that was getting between him and his brother. Nick taught me about the skills involved in building up his Wizard with the Clash of Clans mobile phone game. In the conversation, we started considering how he might use these skills in responding to the frustration:

**Dale:** You've taught me about all of the skills that a person needs to use in Clash of Clans. I've learned about following, watching, patience, pushing on, reacting, memory, and just calming yourself. If you were to take one of these and use it with the frustration and your brother, what one would you use?

**Nick:** Just calming yourself.

**Dale:** Oh, and if I was a fly on the wall, what would I see you doing to use calming in the middle of a frustration?

**Nick:** Taking a deep breath.

**Dale:** [scribing] 'Taking a deep breath.'

**Nick:** Yeah, and ignoring.

**Dale:** Should I write that down too?

**Nick:** [giving two thumbs up] Yeah.

**Dale:** Any other skills that you'd find yourself using?

**Nick:** Patience.

**Dale:** [scribing] 'Patience.' Thank you. And I got to wondering, if you were to find yourself 'levelling up' one of these skills, much in the same way that you would in Clash of Clans, what would happen if you took one of these skills to the next level with your little brother?

**Nick:** I would take patience to the full bar and then it would be maxed out.

**Dale:** Oh, and do you have a sense of what difference that would make with your little brother?

**Nick:** I would be able to make chocolate in the kitchen with him.

The skills from the game that Nick starts to identify are applied to the problem and we get a chance to collaboratively consider what is possible with this migration. This uncovering of potential may not have otherwise been possible if we had not discovered Nick's Clash of Clans skills in building up his Wizard.

## Alex: Gaming and gender identity

The operations of dominant discourses can contribute to people experiencing a marginalising of the possibilities for their preferred identity performance. This marginalising appears to be particularly experienced by those who feel resonance with identities that stand outside of the norms of the dominant culture, such as those within the LGBTQ community. When games offer possibilities for identity performance in preferred ways, people who use games get a chance to manifest their preferred identity and, consequently, get to explore the preferred construction of themselves in online communities.

The following is an excerpt from a conversation that I had with Alex, a 17 year-old member in a group home in Toronto. For years, Alex had felt more resonance with dominant constructions of femininity than masculinity. Although Alex associated more with femininity, she continued to be referred to by family and friends as 'he', and by her birth name, instead of her chosen name. I became interested in the relationship that Alex had with gaming and her gender identity, and Alex agreed to be interviewed at a workshop that I was facilitating on video gaming. In the workshop, I asked Alex a number of questions and then workshop participants had a chance to ask questions. Our hope was to co-research the application of narrative enquiry with someone who uses video games, while at the same time engage in learning with Alex that could be disseminated to other people who use video games. The conversation went as follows:

**Dale:** Would you care to say a bit about what you've come to talk about today?

**Alex:** I've come here to talk about my gaming experience, its positive sides and its negative sides, and just how it has affected me and my life and my experiences.

**Dale:** When were you first introduced to gaming?

**Alex:** Gaming happened around the time of my adoption, at age four, where I was introduced to a computer and I got very intrigued very quickly.

**Dale:** What did you start to notice about these games?

**Alex:** I started to get interested in a rollercoaster game where you could build your own world ... I'd spend two to three hours on a weekend and then not much time on weekdays.

**Dale:** As you found yourself going into your own world – would you care to speak to that experience?

**Alex:** I guess going into this digital world, I found myself being able to have a lot more self-expression. I mean, that was the first place that I really experimented in a more real way with other people with gender expression. When I went online, I was able to have my character be female and I was able to live that online life as female. People saw me as female and it was a very comfortable experience. In another way, going into this digital world was also the ability to call the shots and nobody was affected in a negative way from it. It was an experimental time for me to learn about leadership, to learn about what works and what doesn't.

Participants were offered the chance to ask Alex a question and a number were posed. Alex chose to answer, 'What was it like having more control?':

**Alex:** I started experimenting with the 'God-mentality' games where you are controlling multiple people's lives completely, so you're almost the parent to these people but they don't even know it. You can make their life really good or you can make it really horrible.

**Dale:** What continues to be your experience of yourself as the parent to these people?

**Alex:** Most of what I enjoy is building the buildings for people, but when it comes to the parenting thing, most of the time I go to online role-playing with servers that allow for families to be made. You have people acting as parents, kids, pets, whatever, usually people really enjoy it.

**Dale:** As people get to experience you online in this way, who is the person they get to meet?

**Alex:** Definitely a much more relaxed and comfortable version of me. When you're online, there doesn't need to be a filter put on, so you can experiment and you don't need to worry about what these people are thinking about you. There are thousands of other servers you can head off to and it is a very safe space to try things and experiment. I've gotten

to a point right now where the persona I have in the games is much of where I see myself in the future in the public. A very feminine, a much more developed version of me which I'm not necessarily comfortable to do live.

**Dale:** Could you tell me what it is like when you log on and you get to that moment when you get to be the feminine?

**Alex:** Well, first of all, the one thing that is relieving to me is that nobody sees me as somebody who is trans or as someone who is biologically male, because they have no idea. The assumption is made online that [I am] that certain gender and it is very comfortable. You are completely approached as you are the gender which you portray yourself as. It is how some people in the trans community, including me, would say that they wished that society outside of games acted, that there are no questions asked. It's quite a relief.

A participant asked the following question that Alex wanted to speak to: 'What steps might be involved in becoming the person you want to be inside and outside of the game?'

**Alex:** The first preparation I made in the game was experimenting with appearance and slowly feminising my character inside the game. It started off with a very masculine character with black hair and a leather jacket. Eventually, I put a rainbow symbol on the back of the jacket and that was a big step to me because that is something that is widely considered to be feminine. Then, eventually – step two – I replaced my [character] with a female. Suddenly people were using female pronouns with me and suddenly something felt very right. If you are in a game and you express your gender differently, you are treated in an entirely different way! It's almost an exaggeration of what you would see in the real world.

**Dale:** Perhaps is there another step?

**Alex:** I started thinking about transferring this into real life and I started doing research on what transgender means. So I started changing my name from the masculine name I had from before, and so this year was the main year for implementing it in real life.

**Dale:** Is there a name you give to this whole experience?

**Alex:** I think an interesting name for this is online identity or digital identity.

**Dale:** Okay, digital/online identity. And as you look at your experience of the digital/online identity, is it okay with you, not okay, or somewhere in between, that you're having this experience with it?

**Alex:** It's very positive for me simply because it gives me freedom to express without limits.

As Alex described her experience of the significance of the digital identity, it also became apparent that there were a number of steps involved to arrive at her current engagement with her gender. By using narrative enquiry into the use of Alex's alias in games, a richness and thickening of an alternative plot unfolded and was witnessed by me and the participants. Alex spoke about this not only being important to herself but also important to know that many therapists in the room were learning about the significance of games for exploring gender identity.

## Re-membering within online communities

Exciting opportunities exist for enquiry about the vast and diverse communities that exist online. People who use games interact with online communities in different ways and the community members have particular experiences of the player's constructed alias. Some players will be part of clans which gather together to take on missions in massively multiplayer or first-person shooter games. These clans must work to communicate and cooperate to achieve goals and mission objectives. Other players will interact with communities through creating worlds for other players to interact with. The worlds are then presented to the community of players to experience and community members can explore the dynamics of the world that was created. In my conversations with people who use games, I have been taught that the validity of these communities is often marginalised and belittled against the dominant valuing of 'real life' and relationships in the 'real world'.

As therapeutic enquiry into preferred stories develops, the membering, or re-membering, of the gaming communities can be explored and the impact and possibilities that these communities contribute to the consultant's life can be engaged with. A basic re-membering map (White, 2007) to explore this significance can be used:

- Who would really respect the person who you create, who comes across to people on the screen?
- What impact has this person had on you?
- What is different in your life now that this person has had this impact on you?

- What do suppose the impact is on this person, since you have been in their life?
- What becomes possible for them, as you are in their life?

These questions serve to expand on the socially-formed identity and uncover the witnesses who have encountered the preferred expression of identity from the consultant.

## Matthew: From 'lone wolf' to valued team member

In the following transcript, Matthew and I partake in a re-membering conversation about one of his team members:

**Dale:** In any place in your life, who is someone who would really respect how far you've come in your gaming career?

**Matthew:** Nobody. Yeah, I'm just like a lone wolf. My family wants me to be like, some businessman, and I'm really not just that kind of person. I'm basically the only one who really realises, who really pays attention. Well, everyone else who plays with me realises it ...

**Dale:** Okay Matthew, and if you had to pick one of your online teammates, who really notices, who is quite proud of what you've done and really respects the gamer you've become, would there be one person?

**Matthew:** Yep.

**Dale:** Who is that?

**Matthew:** His name is Andrew and his online name is Drew.

**Dale:** [scribing] D,R,E,W?

**Matthew:** D,R,E,W. He's, I don't know, he's always been a really supportive guy, he's always telling me how good I am, I'm always telling him how good he is. He's an all-around great person. Like if there was a three-man team and I got invited and we said we need one more person to choose, I would definitely choose him in my life because he's a really cool guy.

**Dale:** How has he impacted you, knowing that he's such a great guy?

**Matthew:** Um, he hasn't really impacted me at all, it's just good to know that there's someone there who realises like how much effort you've put into the

game and may have actually gone somewhere. Like, if there weren't people like that, it would be hard to keep going because no-one would be realising the outcome of the amount of time that I put into the game. It is a ridiculous amount of time.

**Dale:** 'That there are people like this' ... Could you complete that sentence?

**Matthew:** It's good to know there are people like him in the world who actually appreciate what you do. Because having him as a team-mate, he appreciates all the time and work I put in. Because I heavily impact the results we get in matches because of my amazing aim, my amazing teamwork. If I wasn't as skilled as I was, I doubt he'd be complimenting me all the time, because I hadn't really put in the practice. He'd be like, 'Dude, you gotta practice more, like what do you expect the results are gonna be if you're just not practicing?'

**Dale:** And Matthew, would he be able to tell me about a time – if he was here in the room right now – would he be able to describe a time when he really realised that you're putting in the time?

**Matthew:** Yeah, many, many, many, many, many occasions. I see occasions with him too, like we all make strong and individual plays every once in a while because we are all really skilled players.

**Dale:** And what becomes possible in your life that you have team-mates like this, especially people like Drew who would know this about you?

**Matthew:** I guess doors to other teams and stuff. I could use him as a referral. If I ever wanted to join a team that is invite, which is the highest possible division, like the teams that compete for the \$250,000 tournaments, \$100,000 and all that stuff, he'd be a good referral. If they were like, 'Where's all the proof you've done all this stuff?', I'd be like, 'Talk to Drew'.

**Dale:** They hold the proof?

**Matthew:** Yeah.

**Dale:** I find myself just as interested in the impact you have on him. If you could guess, what do you think it's like for him to have you on his team?

**Matthew:** Probably positive, like really positive. Because I guess he wants to win just as much as me and

I guess it's good for him to know that there's not just one amazing player on the team, there's also me and everyone else.

**Dale:** In you he gets an amazing player on his team?

**Matthew:** Like, we really want to make Main this season and without me and without him and without everyone else who's currently on the team who's really skilled, we're not gonna do it. We all need to appreciate each other, appreciate the time and effort; we really gotta appreciate it in all the ways we can because if no-one was there to appreciate it, we wouldn't be doing all the things we do to get better.

**Dale:** And what do you suspect this makes possible in Drew's life that there's another amazing player that contributes ...

**Matthew:** If he ever needs a fifth for a game, I'm that guy. I'm the one person he can go to if he said, 'Hey dude, we need you tomorrow, in New York, for this game, bring your PC'. I'd be like, 'Yes, I'm there'. I know for a fact that he would pick me over anyone else.

As the re-remembering map is used as a map for the conversation, the vast richness of the online relationship opens up. These significant relationships, which are often rendered insignificant, come to life in the room, and stories of support, connection, and possibility unfold. It has been my experience that young people take great pride in these connections and leave the conversation with a new value around these significant people in their lives. The hope for possibility in relationships can fill a void where hope and potential in the relationship was otherwise lost.

## Conclusion

As I continue to use the ideas of externalisation, deconstruction, and the ideas of the gaming world as a valid source of preferred story development, the people who I consult with report great satisfaction with their conversations with me. Young people often speak of the joy of getting to unpack the significance of their online relationships and the importance of rendering-real the gaming communities which are often devalued by dominant discourse. Furthermore, people speak of the helpfulness of these conversations in terms of the effect they have on their gaming life. People often report decreases in unwanted influence from games and increased satisfaction in their relationship with games.

Getting to engage in this way with people is also wonderful for me. I am afforded the privilege of delving into worlds that have been given very little air-time in people's lives. I get to meet members of sophisticated online communities which are buried deep within the recesses of the internet. As I work to respectfully co-research these groups, I get a window into what is precious and important in people's lives and often get to see parts of my life through the lives of these community members. Here, therapy turns into a privileged co-discovery

of unexplored territories, and I work to uphold the significance of the invitation as I travel into the vast expanses of the online community.

## Note

1. Alternative names have been used throughout the document to uphold confidentiality.

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