

eSport, work, sport and play; relationships and pathways to a new continuum model

Master of Research Thesis

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by

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Declaration

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Abstract:

eSports are an emerging topic of study and interest both to the academy and the wider world given the rapid growth in both interest and funding of eSports competitions and teams that has been seen over the past few years. There are many definitional approaches proposed for eSports, however these tend to be essentialistic and do not properly account for differences eSports and traditional sport, and how eSports participants engage with and interact with eSports, and the degree of interaction.

This thesis examines categories of eSports engagement and introduces an updated and re-imagined version of the play-games-sport continuum using play, leisure and work as non-binary or non-opposed factors. This updated model, which bypasses the strictures of a stipulated and essentialistic definitional approach, will assist in the understanding of how those who participate in eSports do so, from a non-essentialistic point of view. A new theoretical concept, termed the proximity to professionalism is explored. Proximity to professionalism, whilst requiring further developmental work, at its core suggests that eSports at all levels of activity display a greater proximity to professional behaviour than other forms of sport.

Contents

Declaration	1
Abstract:	2
1 eSports, a social construct	5
1.1 eSports categories of engagement	6
1.2 Questions:	8
1.3 Aims of the thesis	8
1.4 eSports and research.....	8
2 Foundational Concepts for Understanding Engagement with eSports.....	9
2.1 Foundations in two categories – attitudes or states and actions or entities.....	10
Actions or entities (Games, Sport)	10
<i>Games</i>	11
<i>Sport</i>	11
Attitudes or states (play, leisure and work)	11
<i>Play</i>	12
<i>Leisure</i>	12
<i>Work</i>	14
3 Play, sport and eSports, and their relationship	15
3.1 The simple eSports definition	16
3.2 The problem with irlSports definitions	17
3.3 Play as a grounding for eSports, and a method of engagement with eSports	18
3.4 The play problematic.....	18
3.5 Play: Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations	21
3.6 Playspace – limitations to play?	22
3.7 Games don't tell us enough about eSport	23
3.8 Phenomenology of games.....	24
4 eSports as work and labour; connection to the digital economy.....	25
4.1 Devaluation of domestic work, play and by extension eSport	27
4.2 The digital economy and (free) labour.....	28
4.3 Playbour, iSlavery and eSport	30
4.4 eSports growth and regulation	32
4.5 Towards a theoretical eSports concept - Proximity to professionalism	33
5 The nexus of sport and eSports: definitions and approaches	34
5.1 Non essentialist views of sport	36
5.2 The Suits/Meier formulation for sport.....	38
5.3 Sport definitions and physicality	39

Fine versus gross motor skills	40
Philosophy of Mind, and physicality.....	40
Broad view of physicality in sport	41
Narrow view of physicality in sport.....	41
5.4 What is irlSport?.....	42
5.5 The continuum bypasses physicality.....	43
6 eSports and the play-leisure-work continuum	44
6.1 eSports can concurrently demonstrate the foundations.....	46
eSports as Game	46
eSports as Sport	46
eSports as Play.....	46
eSports as Leisure	46
eSports as Work.....	47
6.2 The play-leisure-work continuum model.....	48
Figure 2 Exploded view of the factors in the new continuum model:.....	49
6.3 Categories of engagement and the play-leisure-work continuum	50
7 Conclusion	50
8 Thank you	51
9 References	52

1 eSports, a social construct.

eSports has emerged as a rapidly growing and diverse activity, with global revenue tipped to reach over US\$1bn in 2019 (Impey, 2019) and participating players numbering in the millions. eSports has attracted considerable academic interest, often centring around how eSports relate to other, existing, forms of Sport or how their nature as videogames enables detailed analytical consideration. What has received less attention is an understanding of how participants engage with eSports and how this may be informed by related concepts such as play and work.

The computer games industry is one of the fastest growing and largest industries in the world (NewZoo, 2017, 2018). eSports, competitive computer games, has grown out of social and technological change and the revolution in computer gaming. While important eSports work has been undertaken, such as in re-examining the relationship between sport and eSports (Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olich, 2016; van Hilvoorde & Pot, 2016), the nature of eSports, and the ability of participants to engage with in it multiple forms and formats requires continued investigation. eSports derive, in part, from videogames, which are primarily a leisure activity. But eSports requires considerable labour from its participants, which can often go unrewarded (Hollist, 2015; Kücklich, 2005). It is important for society to develop a greater understanding of eSports, its nature and how it relates to play, games, sport and work.

eSports and other forms of digital labour have become a significant generator of surplus economic activity and profit. Because of the rapid growth of eSport as a profitable venture there occurs a lack of regulation and protection for digital labourers. Activities such as labour price manipulation and social and cultural devaluation of eSports activities act to reduce the cost of labour input into various online for-profit endeavours. Therefore it is important to understand why eSport labour is often mislabelled as leisure rather than work, how exploitation demonstrates that real work is being undertaken and the connection between both of these states for the same activity.

This thesis will examine eSports and the manner in which eSports participants engage with eSports. It will re-examine the play-game-sport continuum model and re-interpret and update that model to include eSports participation in an effort to make sense of eSports in term of how eSports relates to those who engage with it.

1.1 eSports categories of engagement

People may engage with eSports in a variety of ways, as professional players, coaches, part-time players and fans. They may also play the videogames that are the basis of eSports outside of any formal arrangements. The categories identified below are by no means an exhaustive list as eSports, being a social construct, may change, grow and contract over time and add new or different categories of engagement. The four identified are simply examples of the forms that engagement may take:

The eSports professional; who derives all or a significant portion of their income from the provision of eSports services. The prime example of this is the travelling and training elite player (Foroughi, 2016, p. 2119), but may also be a coach, team manager or professional commentator. Income may also be earned through endorsements, merchandise sales or other aligned income reliant upon the individual's popularity and reach. Hollist (2015, p. 833) suggests that eSports players often practice up to fourteen hours per day; definitely suggesting a work-like activity.

The eSports aspirational; the person who currently engages with eSports in a non-professional, semi-professional and/or fan capacity. Who aspires (and potentially possesses the necessary contacts, skills and competitive ability) to move to a professional eSports role. Duffy (2016) suggested that the aspirant's income is variable and uneven; the eSports aspirational may derive minor income (occasional wins or monetisation from stream subscribers from providing eSports services), however said income would be unpredictable and likely insufficient to meet the economic needs of the individual.

eSports casuals; these are the players who regardless of skill level engage with eSports games in a casual play mode; typically they will not be engaged in competitive or ranked play. Instead they engage with eSports for the fun and leisure of play. They may not consider themselves eSports participants; but may be an opponent for an aspirational or practicing professional, and as such are possibly engaged in work-based eSports without their direct knowledge.

Fans and spectators; these are the individuals who watch or may engage with eSports in a manner other than direct eSports practice. These are the people who watch matches at eSports events or via streaming platforms, who talk and tweet about eSports. They write fanfiction, create fan art, engage in cosplay (Jenkins, 2011; Lamerichs, 2011; Winge, 2012) and other

secondary or non-direct practices and activities. The category of fans and spectators could easily be split into separate categories of fans (including active creatives) and spectators (engage purely via passive mechanisms), however for the purpose of this thesis they are kept together purely to reduce complexity.

Fans and spectators appear to engage in a social manner that crosses several factors, prompting a new look at the old play-games-work continuum from a less summative point of view:

...esports, as a new form of social gameplay intertwined with sports, collaboration, competition, cohesion, comradeship, blurred boundaries between online and offline social interactions, as well as game culture itself. (Freeman, 2016, p. 2119)

eSports facilitates “high level social skills (e.g., interaction, communication, cooperation, negotiation, and management)” (Freeman, 2016, p. 2119). Freeman further suggested that there is value in exploring the social relationships of eSports participants specifically in relation to collaborative learning, social interaction, and sociability, enjoyment both online and offline.

eSports are becoming increasingly popular with young adults (Hollist, 2015) and there are seemingly many more eSports fans, casuals and aspirants than there are professionals. Those fans, casual and aspirational eSports participants are both the product and the target market. Duffy (2016, p. 454) suggests that the aspirational labour pool are used by media as ‘audience building and advertising generation’. They are sold to potential advertisers as both the advertising content which encapsulates the product message and as motivated, self-selecting audiences to receive the message. It is in these transactions that eSports participants are exploited for their eSports digital labour. By framing eSports labour as being fun, new, exciting, fulfilling, and, having possibility and potentiality, the reality that the eSports fan is actually working is not always obvious (Duffy 2016; Tokumitsu 2014). The change and variable nature of engagement with eSports as simultaneously play, leisure and work reinforces the need to develop our understanding of how people variously engage with eSports.

The above (and other as yet unidentified) categories of engagement show us that there are different levels of participation and seriousness of intention within eSports practice, and that a particular individual may engage with eSports in one or more of the categories and at varying levels of participation, differing over time, and that those participants are used and exploited in different ways. These complex and inter-related modes of engagement merit further investigation if nature of engagement with eSports is to be better understood. The re-developed continuum

model will be used to situate the different categories of engagement and show that a single continuum model does not adequately describe or represent the different categories of engagement, and provide some further enlightenment on how people engage with eSports and hopefully allow us to think about the impacts of eSports participation and engagement.

1.2 Questions:

This thesis proposes to answer the following questions:

- How do play and sport and related concepts inform or influence our understanding of eSports?
- How do these concepts inform our understanding of how people interact with eSports?

1.3 Aims of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to revisit, analyse and re-develop the play-games-sport continuum model into the play-leisure-work model. This model will be re-invigorated and applied to eSports to increase our understanding of the categories of engagement with eSports and how eSports participants variously interact and engage with eSports. Additionally, the new model will assist in situating eSports against other similar social constructs such play, games, sport, and work. The second aim of this thesis is to investigate and enquire as to whether the re-imagined continuum model says anything further about eSports from a conceptual point of view.

1.4 eSports and research

Early sport philosophy dealt largely with ontological/conceptual analysis matters (Arnold, 1979; Champlin, 1977; McBride, 1979; Meier, 1995a; Osterhoudt, 1979, 1991; Paddick, 1975; Schneider, 2001; Schneider & Butcher, 1997; Suits, 1989, 2004, 1973; Weiss, 1969). While much work has been done, there is still some ambiguity in terms of what are play, games and sport, which leads into ambiguity in understanding eSports. Ludology and narratology never seemed to noticed that the sport philosophy discipline exists (they got as far as Caillois (1955) and seem to have left it there) and missed all of the good work done in that body of knowledge. However, significant work has been done on eSports by games researchers, primarily in attempting to define it in relation to games and in examining eSports play from an analytical point of view. The former has provided several working definitions for eSports, as will be discussed later, but they are increasingly coming under strain as eSports attracts more money and interest. The latter is outside the scope of this thesis.

This thesis will develop the play-games-sport continuum model and use that re-imagined model to identify conceptual structures that may evolve from the newly re-invigorated play-leisure-work continuum model.

2 Foundational Concepts for Understanding Engagement with eSports

This chapter will revisit several foundational concepts in how participants may engage with eSports. In doing so it will lay the foundation for the following discussions and the development of a new understanding of engagement with eSports.

eSports, at least by its name, is related to sport. Non-definitional approaches to sport (and by extension eSport) encompass predominantly categorisation systems (inheritance-cascading class objects), and have a long history in the systematic study of sport, games and play (Caillois & Halperin, 1955; Edwards, 1973), especially those studies originating from sociology. From the sport philosophy point of view, non-definitional approaches towards understanding sport have been for the most part relegated to history in favour of the more analytic definitional systems; culminating with the Suits-Meier formulation and its variants.

In the development of sports philosophy and theory, there have been three different periods or approaches towards developing an understanding of the phenomena commonly labelled as sport. These three different periods have evolved in an evolutionary manner, with each subsequent system based upon a framework developed from the previous era.

The three periods are: ad hoc or observational systems; taxonomic or categorisation systems; and finally analytic functional definitional systems. Ad hoc or observational systems came into their own in the early 20th century, founded upon the research of the likes of Graves (1900) Veblen (1997) and Strutt (1838). This period was superseded by the taxonomic systems. The taxonomic systems further developed our understanding of sport and sport theory by improving upon the ad hoc systems, they did this by identifying various constitutive sports traits and placing them into various categories. This is the era of theorists such as Caillios (1955), and Roberts, Sutton-Smith, and Kendon (Roberts, Sutton-Smith, & Kendon, 1963) The third and final era of sport philosophy and sport theory development is the modern analytic functional definitional

approach. The analytic functional definitional approach took command from approximately 1980 onwards, and is exemplified by the Suits/Meier formulation (Meier, 1981; Suits, 1995).

Soon after Meier's 1981 paper (1981), the sociological categorisation method fell out of favour with members of the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport (IAPS) and essentialistic philosophical definitional approaches (essentialistic approaches are those holding that there is an essential or absolute truth to any question) became the new normal. This ultimately resulted in the Suits/Meier formulation (definition) of sport – *all sports are games that require the non-random application of physical skill*. However as will be discussed later in this thesis, physicality is a problem for both sport and irlSport.

Therefore, as an alternative approach to philosophical definitions of sport/eSports reliant upon physicality and with all of the issues attached to definitions, the play-games-sport continuum model will be revisited as there is still merit in aspects of the approach and potential to use that approach to further understand eSports engagement.

2.1 Foundations in two categories – attitudes or states and actions or entities

In order to understand, develop and extend the play-game-sport continuum (in its new form the play-leisure-work continuum) and its relationship to eSports it is necessary to contextualise the foundations that it rests upon; play, work, leisure, games and sport. These foundations are divided into two categories; *attitudes/states* (consisting of play, leisure and work) and the overarching *actions/entities* (consisting of games and sport), all of these foundations exist across the continuum in layers. These concepts are introduced in brief here for contextual purposes but will be examined in more detail in succeeding chapters.

Actions or entities (Games, Sport)

Games and sport are related with sport nested as a dependent sub-set of games. As will be discussed below eSports are both games and sport. In the continuum model proposed in this thesis games and sport are required hurdle states that must be achieved for an activity to be considered an eSports. That is to say, if game = yes and if sport = yes, then can engagement with that activity can be positioned on the three separate continuum lines/factors (play, leisure and work). Therefore, in this new model, games and sport as separate categories above the play-leisure-work continuum. In essence the games and sport factors are pre-requisites before the

play-leisure-work model is applied to categories of engagement; as the play, leisure and work continuum lines do not directly interact with games and sport.

Games.

Everybody knows, or at least think they know, what a game is. However, it is a concept that is much harder to actually pin down and directly define once it is considered in detail. As will be discussed in the following chapters the generally accepted and philosophical definition was provided by Suits (1967, p. 148):

...To play a game is to engage in activity directed toward bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by specific rules, where the means permitted by the rules are more limited in scope than they would be in the absence of the rules, and where the sole reason for accepting such limitation is to make possible such activity.

Much of our modern philosophical understanding and definitional approaches to games (and sport) derive from Suits' definitional approach to games.

Sport.

The Suits/Meier formulation (Meier, 1995b; Suits, 1988, 1995) indicates that all sports are games that are also predominantly physical and non-random. The problematic with this essentialist view is that physicality has degrees of granularity (Kobiela, 2018). It has been argued that without a physical body the mind cannot function, and therefore all human activity is physical, including thinking (Dennett, 1991). Following this line of thinking physicality, as a defining feature of sport, loses any meaning it may have possessed. As such, this problem collapses the definition of sport back into that of games. Therefore all sports are games that are non-random. The non-essentialistic approach to sport is derived from Wittgenstein (2009) and takes a family resemblance view of sport. The non-essentialistic view is the preferred representation of sport and thus eSports for this thesis.

Attitudes or states (play, leisure and work)

Stebbins (2009) introduced the concept of serious leisure; the leisure that sits both between and in both the work and leisure category; meanwhile the theory of both play and work informs that play and work are attitudinal states and can exist in any activity.

Play.

Eberle (2014, p. 220) suggested that play has always been viewed as a thing, but should be viewed as a state instead. This position that was put forward by Vossen (a sports theorist, not play theorist) a decade earlier. According to Vossen (2004, p. 55), play is a state that should be overlaid on both games and sport, as “both games and/or sports can be pursued in the presence or absence of the spirit of play.” Play should be characterised as an attitude taken towards any particular activity (Vossen, 2004, p. 64). Vossen further suggested because games and sport can be pursued with or without play being a feature, that the entire continuum model would fail. However, referring to recent work completed by Larsen and Walther (2019), this thesis contends that the model is not fatally flawed and, once modified, has value in aiding understanding how people interact with eSports.

Leisure

Leisure is, according to Stebbins (2009, p. 764) an “uncoerced activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, in either a satisfying or fulfilling way (or both), use their abilities and resources to succeed at this”. Stebbins describes three forms of leisure:

1. Serious leisure – leisure directed towards finding employment or career, “special skills, knowledge and experience.” (Stebbins, 2009, p. 764)
2. Casual leisure – “...relatively short lived pleasurable activity...” (Stebbins, 2009, p. 764)
3. Project-based leisure – “short term, reasonably complicated...creative undertakings...free of disagreeable obligation.” (Stebbins, 2009, p. 764)

eSports clearly can exist in both the casual and serious leisure categories. It would be unusual to categorise eSports practices in project-based leisure, however eSports art (fanfic, fanart, cosplay) and events might qualify, but in that case, an eSports event or art piece is a different entity from the eSports played within them.

Stebbins (2009) suggests that serious leisure pursuits can be converted to career or work, and that for many serious leisure enthusiasts, transition to a career is the ultimate goal of the serious leisure pursuit. The concept of serious leisure is of particular interest when combined with the categories of engagement identified in Chapter One. Here we can draw a direct line of conceptual similarity between eSports aspirational and the extreme end of the serious leisure spectrum.

Within serious leisure Stebbins identified six basic qualities:

1. Perseverance
2. Career seeking
3. Specialty knowledge, training, skill and/or experience
4. Durable benefits are acquired from participation (self-development, self-enrichment, self-expression, self-image, lasting physical product, social interaction or belonging)
5. Social world associated with the serious leisure pursuit
6. Strong identification with the leisure pursuit

Several of the above qualities describe the eSports aspirational, with particular focus upon career seeking, speciality knowledge and strong identification with the eSports leisure pursuit.

Components of the six qualities may also describe eSports fans (1, 3, 4, 5 & 6), eSports spectators (1, 3, 4, 5 & possibly 6), and eSports professionals (1, 2, 3, & possibly 4, 5 & 6)

[Occupational devotion and spillover leisure.](#)

Occupational devotion is described as “...a strong positive attachment to a form of self-enhancing work, where the sense of achievement is high and the core activity (set of basic tasks) is endowed with such intense appeal that the line between this work and leisure is virtually erased.” (Stebbins, 2009, p. 768). Stebbins states that leisure, especially serious leisure, pre-figures work in pursuits such as “art, science, sport and entertainment” (Stebbins, 2009, p. 768). It is possible for amateurs to transition to professional (Stebbins 1979 in Stebbins, 2009). Within eSports we see both the aspirational player (see also Duffy, 2016), the serious leisure participant who wishes to transition to professional, and the Occupational Devotee; the professional eSports player who enjoys the game immensely.

Spillover leisure as described by Kando and Summers (1971) is the concept where professionals enjoy their job so much that they engage in core employment activities in their spare time. This is different from extending work into leisure time (longer work hours) as the projects in leisure are usually different. Consider the example of a costume designer engaging in cosplay in their leisure hours, or a professional eSports player playing the same or similar eSports title for fun. As yet, there has been limited research done to establish the extent to which this occurs in eSports, but there are anecdotal accounts of professional players engaging in this practice.

Stebbins closes by indicating that “serious leisure is enormously attractive” (Stebbins, 2009, p. 772). A contention that we would agree with and which is, in our opinion, a growing area of impact in the modern liberal western economy.

Work.

“Play is a complex, overdetermined term fraught with contradictions and ambiguities; it is used in a wide variety of ways, often for the purposes of invoking the binary oppositions...” (Rouzie, 2000, p. 629). Play is usually referred to in terms of its opposition to work: I was only playing, I’m not playing around, all work and no play. There is a rhetoric distinction between the authentic self versus the in-authentic other self, the player, the role played.

According to Thorns (1971, p. 543) work is:

- “...necessary though not enjoyed”
- “...organised by others”
- “...requires exertion.”
- “...productive.”

However, it appears that work is a difficult object to define (Provis, 2009), in much the same way that play is, and should be considered to be contextual.

Blumenfeld appears to be one of the first theorists to indicate that whether an activity is work or play is contextual: an activity may be play or work depending upon the “state of mind or attitude of the person which makes it [the activity] one or the other [play or work] and which can even transform it from one to the other.” (Blumenfeld, 1941, pp. 472–473). This work, of course, paved the way for further theorising in the discipline of the philosophy of sport in terms of conceptualising sport as existing upon a discretionary “continuum” ranging from intrinsic play through to alienated labour (Edwards, 1973; Hemphill, 1992; Meier, 1981; Schmitz, 1979; Vossen, 2004); this is the original play-game-work continuum.

Work is a state with a predominately external locus of control. Work may or may not be alienated; in that an individual may work at their own behest or work for others (alienated labour (Mészáros, 1975)¹). Work generally implies activity instrumental in survival modalities. Work

¹ Alienated labour is derived from Marx’s theory of alienation, where the capitalist system treats people as labour, an input only, a part of the mechanized system; reducing the person merely to the economic value of their output. Alienated labour is therefore the labour provided by workers who typically do not derive the full benefit of their labour. See (Mészáros, 1975) for more.

may be remunerated or not; internships or volunteer work, and slavery are unpaid modes of work. Additionally certain examples of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2009) may constitute unpaid work modes as well.

Work in eSports is often submerged or obfuscated under the guise of not being work because it is ‘fun’. However, being fun does not divest an activity of its work properties (Duffy, 2016; Hollist, 2015; Kücklich, 2005; Tokumitsu, 2014). eSports-based labour is often denied work status because it is conceived of as fun and frivolous behaviour. Kücklich (2005) coined the phrase “playbour” to describe the situation where, in digital spaces work and play have begun to merge and appear to be indistinguishable. Kücklich was specifically referring to the modding community but the concept can easily be applied to eSport. Duffy (2016) spoke about aspirational workers and the devaluation of their work, whilst Tokumitsu (2014) investigated the devaluation of labour via the ‘do what you love’ movement; and indicated how gendered and digital labour is subjected to devaluation via the DWYL (Do What you Love) mechanism. All of these concepts assist to locate the various categories of engagement on the ‘work’ line of the new continuum.

eSports as a form of digital labour is poorly understood and often dismissed as only play rather than being capable of being play, work or both. It is in this assumption of frivolity that eSports digital labour is manipulated, purposefully undervalued, and exploited by predatory capitalistic entities. It is evident from both Vossen (2004) and Eberle (2014) that work and play are not contradictory states and eSports can exist both as work, and play at the same time, therefore, as that is the case, clearly the play-games-sport model needs to change to accommodate engagement with eSport.

3 Play, sport and eSports, and their relationship

One of the purposes of this investigation is to situate eSports participants within the broader context of sport and recreation. In order to do that eSports must be examined in relation to sport and play. As eSports emerge from the niche ‘gamer-nerd’ sector to be embraced by a wider, mainstream, commercial audience and culture there is an increasing need to clarify our understanding of what eSports is and how it relates to traditional embodied sports or ‘in-real-life’ (irl) or irlSports². Clearly, decisions are being made, laws enacted, resources invested based

² irl = in real life. A term used by gamers and other online populations to mean anything that happens in real life, or outside of the game/MMO/internet environment.

upon a lay understanding of eSports and how various categories of participants interact with eSports. This thesis will attempt to rectify part of the problem by investigating the various philosophical definitions that we have of eSports and irlSports³, in an effort to situate and understand subsequent eSports participation modes. It is widely accepted that eSports and sports are based upon games⁴; games which find their foundation within play (Edwards, 1973; Schmitz, 1979; Segrave, 2000). Therefore any discussion of eSports participation styles must acknowledge the role of games and play, and eSports' particular relationship to play, as eSports both exists as alienated labour (work and work-like) and is observed as play; seemingly existing in a dichotomous relationship.

3.1 The simple eSports definition

eSports commonly refer to competitive (pro and amateur) video gaming that is often coordinated by different leagues, ladders and tournaments, and where players customarily belong to teams or other "sporting" organizations which are sponsored by various business organizations (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017, p. 211)

and

"Esports is computer games played in a competitive environment" (Schubert, Drachen, & Mahlmann, 2016, p. 1)

eSports is considered to be, in general, a competitive approach to computer games. For example, Hamilton, Kearne and Robbins (2012, p. 310) defined eSports to be "the high-level play and spectating of digital games". Several other authors and theses agree in general terms with the simple definition of eSports as competitive computer games (van Ditmarsch, 2013; Wagner, 2006). Later in this thesis the definitional approaches to eSports will be explored in greater detail, however for the moment the simple idea that eSports is competitive computer gaming will suffice as a grounding.

It is reasonably apparent that eSports can be related to a number of other social constructs such as games, play, sport and work. The existing definition of eSports will be discussed in detail later. However before we comprehensively consider eSports we need some understanding of these related concepts and how they might relate to or inform our understanding of eSports.

³ Hemphill started the inquiry in 2005 with his work, Cybersports. In that paper he questioned the privileging of the 'real' over the virtual. Part of the underlying thesis of this paper harks back to that investigation of Hemphill's – to question the othering of the virtual as not real, and to challenge the notion that sport must be likewise grounded in the physical or the 'real'.

⁴ Luschen (1972, p. 127) noted that play theory had provided the basic building blocks for the concept of sport, in fact, sport is often treated as "...an agonistic form of play." However, there has been some dissent over the years to the notion that all sports are games; in fact, Suits himself recanted this initial position. However, it has become a default position that all sports are indeed games.

3.2 The problem with irlSports definitions

Simply from the terminology it appears that eSports may have some relation to other sport. Therefore it may be useful to consider eSports through the lens of irlSport. However, there are several issues with the current definition of irlSports. Any of these issues is sufficient to demand a new look at how irlSports and eSports are defined, and the relationship (if any) between them.

First, consider some of the identified issues with the current (philosophical) definition of irlSport which have a bearing or impact upon the subsequent definition or understanding of eSports, and how people engage with eSports. It is impossible to define an open system without reverting to arbitrary stipulation⁵. All sport activities are social systems, social systems are open to change and thus constitute open systems. Therefore sports are open systems and impossible to define without arbitrary stipulation.

I contend that the notion of physicality is one such an arbitrary stipulation. Physicality itself is problematic in terms of monist embodiment (no mind/body split) (Dennett, 1991) and distributed communication/embodiment systems. Online, distributed personality (leaky body concept (Shildrick, 1997)), genetic modification technology, body modification, prosthetics, anthropomorphism and nanotechnology (not an exhaustive list by any measure) all muddy the concept of physicality, humanity and embodiment. Again leaving the current definition of sport on shaky grounds – eSports adds further to the problematic definition that sports are at their core games with the skilful exercise of physicality as their distinguishing feature from the aforementioned said core class of games.

There has been little new investigation of our understanding of what sport really is (ontology) since the emergence of eSports and similar practices (Meier, 1989, 1995a; Schneider, 2001; Suits, 1973). Therefore, the emergent sportive practice of eSports, which came after the development of the current prevailing definition of sport, does not fit comfortably within the current definition of sport, and as such leaves that definition outside of the necessary and sufficient conditions to ontologically describe sport in all of its forms. Chapter 5 contains an in-depth discussion of the nexus of irlSport and eSports and how these two related but different social constructs are conceptualised.

⁵ Stipulation; the practice of defining any object or thing by declaring it so. Stipulation is not a desired method of philosophical inquiry or a preferred definitional approach as it can lead to arbitrariness, and the fuzzy edge of a set becomes a problematic case for any stipulation.

3.3 Play as a grounding for eSports, and a method of engagement with eSports

...sport emerges from play....sport is free, self-conscious, tested play....the objectives of sport and its founding decision lie within play and cause sport to share in certain of its features – the sense of immediacy, exhilaration, rule-directed behaviour, and the indeterminacy of a specified outcome. (Schmitz, 1979, p. 27)

Play is seemingly both a grounding for sport and subsequently eSports, and a manner in which eSports participants might engage with eSports. eSports are videogames, generally available for participation as leisure activities in addition their existence as eSports. The latter will, in many cases be more financially important to their publishers, although the lines can blur (Hollist, 2015). There is an entire body of knowledge formed around play. However traditionally, the philosophy of sport tends to limit its exposure to this body of knowledge to that of Huizinga (1995), Schmitz (1979), Rojek (1995, 2005) and Blumenfeld (1941)⁶.

The play literature informs us that play is voluntary (Blumenfeld, 1941; Huizinga, 1995; Schmitz, 1979), non-serious (Blumenfeld, 1941; Huizinga, 1995; Schmitz, 1979), occurs in a place apart from the real world (Fink, 1995; Huizinga⁷, 1995; Schmitz, 1979; Schroeder, 1996) and according to fixed rules (Huizinga, 1995). The nature of a virtual world sets it apart from the real world and the rules are fixed by the code that creates the virtual world. Play, according to the above theorists, is seemingly finite, developing with the child and becomes surplus to needs once childhood is over. It can easily be seen that eSports can be play, at least for some participants. A casual player can choose to engage with a game such as League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009). Such casual engagement is non-serious in terms of the above quoted theorists.

3.4 The play problematic.

This pitting of hard, meaningful work against the empty frivolity of play is endemic in our culture's thinking about play...This way of thinking can be seen in the extent to which play has been purged from much language use, reflecting both the rationalist clarity demanded by objective science and the legacy of Taylorist efficiency in our educational systems. (Rouzie, 2000, p. 627)

Our western society has often, in general, relegated play to a frivolity, purposeless (Eberle, 2014; Henricks, 2006); an unnecessary distraction from the day to day business of business and work;

⁶ This is by no means an exhaustive list of play theorists, only an indicative one. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to introduce too much of the theory of play, rather to examine the relationship between eSports and play.

⁷ Rouzie (2000) has problems with Huizinga due to the overarching thesis that play is outside of ordinary life. Rouzie claims this outside of the ordinary stance helped to ingrain the trivialised perception of play.

an external other to only be legitimately experienced by children. Play by the unemployed, under-employed and the ‘kidult’ (Bernardini, 2014) are popularly reviled as other, pointless at best and a disgraceful drain on resources that should be otherwise gainfully employed. Play, even when work-like or paid, is often devalued and diminished as ‘just play’.

Play is an attitude, with an internal locus of control; an individual predominately decides if they are playing or not. Play theorists have attempted to define play for many decades, and still disagree on what play actually is (Eberle, 2014; Fink, 1995; Lancy & Tindall, 1977; Shen, Chick, & Zinn, 2014).

Fink (1995) argued that the characterisation of play as voluntary, non-serious, idleness and the opposite of work is not correct, and only seeks to trivialise the role that play fills in our psyche and society. Fink held that play is more than just a supplementary thing to ease our burdens of work; stating that play, “...comes under the ontological dispositions of human existence.” (Fink, 1995, p. 102), and that play cannot be considered a derivative activity, but a fundamental existential phenomena. (1995, p. 104). This is important to eSports engagement because eSports is seemingly trivialised as a child’s or frivolous activity, which, given the levels of investment and growth (NewZoo, 2017, 2018) is clearly not the case. Fink’s argument also points out that work and play should not be considered as opposites, but as separate concepts.

Schwartzman and Barbera (1977) characterise play in terms of four assumed functions “(1) play as socialization, (2) play as recreation, (3) play as projection, and (4) play as functionless.” (Schwartzman and Barbera (1977) in Lancy & Tindall, 1977, p. 11). Burghardt (2005) indicated that there are twelve aspects to play whilst Henricks (in Eberle, 2014) described five qualities of play – fun, purposeless, voluntary, outside of the ordinary and rules focussed.

According to Sutton-Smith (Sutton-Smith, 1999, p. 253 in Eberle, 2014, p. 219), play is almost impossible to define simply as it is entwined with a surprisingly large amount of varied academic rhetoric, power, identity, politics and practice; as to be impossible to unravel to clearly identify play, let alone define it.; however define it he did:

Play, as a unique form of adaptive variability, instigates an imagined but equilibrial reality within which disequilibrial exigencies can be paradoxically simulated and give rise to the pleasurable effects of excitement and optimism. The genres of such play are humor , skill, pretense , fantasy, risk, contest, and celebrations, all of which are selective

simulations of paradoxical variability. (Sutton-Smith, 1999, p. 253 in Eberle, 2014, p. 219)

Eberle (2014) characterised play in terms of six basic elements; anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength and poise. Eberle suggested that a problem with attempting to define play is that play has always been viewed as a thing, rather than a state, moment in time, or a process. (2014, p. 220). Eberle (2014, p. 231) defined play as, "...an ancient, voluntary, 'emergent' process driven by pleasure that yet strengthens our muscles, instructs our social skills, tempers and deepens our positive emotions, and enables a state of balance that leaves us poised to play some more."

Shen, Chick and Zinn (2014, p. 59) claim that the fundamental problem encountered when investigating playfulness and play theories is the lack of a clear understanding of the concept. "...the fact that an agreed upon definition does not exist..." (2014, p. 63). Mainemelis and Ronson (2006, p. 82) also suggest that play is an ill-defined construct and one of the "...least studied and least understood organisational behaviors."

Shen, Chick and Zinn (Shen et al., 2014, p. 63) provided the following play behaviours (collated from numerous academic sources – refer to Shen et al for the complete details): Laughing, clowning, teasing, joking, relaxed, light-hearted, enthusiastic, mischievous, naughty, frivolous, silly, exaggerating, novel, imaginative, metaphoric, humorous, investigative, and explorative. However Shen et al (2014, p. 64) distilled that rather full list down to three main characteristics of play:

1. Intrinsic Motivation – fun seeking
2. Freedom – disregard for consequences external to play
 - a. Uninhibitedness as the underlying dispositional quality of Freedom
3. Spontaneity – uncertainty and unpredictability.
 - a. Also related to uninhibitedness.

Freedom (as described by Shen et al (2014) as disregard for consequences external to play) is an interesting concept when related to eSports as it suggests that gamers have a higher level of autonomy and self-determination because they seemingly have less concern for external consequences. Leiberman (1977) in Shen et al (2014, p. 65) "identified three levels of spontaneity-cognitive spontaneity, physical spontaneity, and social spontaneity and conceived them as theoretically equal components of playfulness."

The above theories demonstrate that play is such a vague, ill-defined and still conceptually challenged notion, that it is almost impossible to clearly define with any degree of certainty. However, it is generally accepted that play is the foundational discipline of sport, and also, by virtue of family resemblance, eSports (Wittgenstein, 2009). Therefore, although play is contentious, and its definition is lacking in clarity, it can still be regarded as an important component of the engagement with eSports. Play does not exist as a binary or on-off state but instead can be regarded as a graduated experience. This will allow it to be mapped onto a continuum structure for the purpose of illuminating the categories of eSports engagement and thereby facilitating a greater understanding of how people engage with eSports via play.

3.5 Play: Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations

Shen et al (2014) indicated that play is intrinsically motivated as a fun activity. Intrinsic motivation is the state of being motivated to action via internal or personal factors, or driven by internal reward. Extrinsic motivation is the state of being motivated by external rewards such as money or other payment for services. The difficulty with motivational states, however, is not their existence as such, but identifying when a person is operating according to internal or external motivation, or both. Put simply, in an eSports context, it is very hard to observe and identify which motivational state a player is in at any particular time. This can lead to a situation in which intrinsically motivated players are playing with those who are extrinsically motivated, or players who switch between both states in a single play session, or who are equally motivated by both internal and external factors. This difficulty indicates that separate play, leisure and work continuums may make sense as these would assist in reducing any issues with intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations, or combinations therefore.

Edwards (1973, p. 44) suggests that Huizinga's accepted definition of play has two major flaws; firstly that infants and animals play without knowledge of or reference to the rules and that play may be seriously pursued. Edwards notes that under Huizinga' and Caillois' play definitions," In order to be play, an activity must be devoid of utilitarian value." (Edwards, 1973, p. 47). This is clearly a problem when we consider play as a pathway to learning and skills development. Therefore, we must raise an objection with the notion that play must be "devoid of utilitarian value" (Edwards, 1973, p. 47). In addition, this can be a particular problem when viewing eSports players who switch between motivational states or who are motivated by both states.

Loy notes that play is free, but qualifies that the freedom is not a distinguishing feature of games as many games are not freely entered into; especially those of a professional nature (Loy Jr, 1968), such as professional sport or eSports engaged in as work by professionals or a work-like manner by eSports aspirationalists. Alternatively, Weiss contends that play is not necessarily free and that it may be forcibly started and terminated (Edwards, 1973, p. 44; Weiss, 1969, p. 139). However Edwards disagrees with Weiss' position, indicating that the order to play may be forcibly given, but it is always the voluntary choice of the "player" to engage in actual play or some other play like activity. This situation of course reinforces the fundamental problem of using an internal state (such as motivation) as a defining factor. It seems much more sensible to use a defining factor that is observable and testable, such as the structure of the activity or its outcomes.

3.6 Playspace – limitations to play?

The concept of a play space exhibits significant impact upon eSports engagement. There is a notion that play (and its subsequently evolved forms such as eSports) takes place in a special or mystical time and playspace (Huizinga, 1995; Schroeder, 1996); Schroeder's (1996) interpretation of playspace is that play exists in a mythical or "special" environment. Loy agrees that games and sport, like play, are separated from the ordinary, that they are removed from everyday events and conducted in "spatially and temporally limited" locations (1968, p. 2). Further, eSports, sports and games have limited time spans⁸ and are, in the case of eSports, always conducted in specially programmed and realised virtual environments that may be enjoyed at any time due to the video-on-demand (matches recorded and saved and available at any time and place [via download or streamed via from the internet] seemingly forever) systems employed by streamers and online eSports broadcasters.

It is these specialised environments in which eSports are conducted that indicate the nuanced methods of eSports engagement. Professional players can exist in the same playspace, in the same game instantiation, even in the same team, as amateur players and fans, aspirational eSports players, eSports casuals, serious leisure enthusiasts and fellow eSports professionals. Speedruns offer an interesting take on the playspace; where eSports players compete against

⁸ Kretchmar (2005b) argues that sports that are designed to be "time regulated" (p.38) are a superior design than those that "event regulated" (p.38)

each other to post the shortest time completing a level in game. Speedrun competitions are asynchronous in nature, further expanding the concept of playspace.

3.7 Games don't tell us enough about eSport

“Games are the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary or gratuitous obstacles.”(Hemphill, 2005, p. 197)

One of the earliest approaches to games, developed in 1801 by Strutt, found that games fell into three simple cultural and geographic categories: “rural exercises practiced by persons of rank,” “rural exercises generally practiced” and “pastimes usually exercised in towns and cities, or places adjoining them.” (Strutt in McIntosh, 1971, pp. 29–30). Our concept of games and sport has evolved over time. There have been multiple approaches and variations to how games are defined and viewed. Parlett identified that there are informal games (play) and formal games (Parlett, 1999, in Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 78). Abt (Abt, 1970, in Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 78) proposed that games should focus upon the active role of players. Caillois (1955), developed an extensive categorisation system for games and play, identifying four basic styles of game play – Agon (competition), Alea (chance) Mimicry (pretence) and Ilinx (vertigo) (Caillois & Halperin, 1955, p. 74)

Sutton-Smith in many studies (Roberts & Sutton-Smith, 1962; Roberts et al., 1963; Sutton-Smith, 1968, 1977; Sutton-Smith, Roberts, & Kozelka, 1963) provided great insight into games over a lifetime of study. His work with Avedon provided a good overall definition:

“Games are an exercise in voluntary control systems, in which there is a contest between powers, confined by rules, in order to produce a disequilibrium outcome.”(Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971, p.405 in Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 78)

Games themselves do not reveal a whole lot of truth or understanding of the relationship that eSports participants have to eSports. This thesis accepts that all sports are games and that all video games are also games. This is self-evident in the latter and the subject of much research across many disciplines for the former (Caillois & Halperin, 1955; D’Agostino, 1995; Roberts et al., 1963; Schroeder, 1996; Suits, 1967, 1990; Sutton-Smith, 1968; Sutton-Smith et al., 1963).

eSports are video games (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Schubert et al., 2016). This is not disputed and therefore any general analysis of video games will not serve to distinguish the sub-category of eSports, as whatever can be said about video games in general can be said about eSports. Therefore this thesis will not look at games in detail. Accepting and following Suits (1988, 1995) formulation, games:

- Are goal oriented,
- Are rules based,
- Have rules which prohibit the use of more efficient means over less efficient means, and,
- Have rules that are accepted just because they make the activity possible

eSports are covered by this definition, but the definition makes no reference to the participants, let alone how such participation may vary. The same can be said about the vast majority of other definitions proposed for both games and videogames.

3.8 Phenomenology of games

Games, generally speaking, are about the present (here-and-now) and how to get from this present to a desired future state (there) ... Play is on the path, perhaps even in danger, of turning into a game. Similarly, gaming risks turning into work (Larsen & Walther, 2019, p. 3)

Larsen and Walther's (2019, p. 3) suggest that games are about being in the here and now but trying to get an object (token, or body) to the then and there. By suggesting that play and games are symbiotic and on a pathway from here and now to there and then they acknowledge that games exist upon a continuum. Their phenomenological approach towards gameplay supports this thesis' revisit of the play-game-sport continuum model; and supports this thesis' contention that a re-visited continuum model is a suitable system for describing the relationships between the eSports categories of engagement and play, work and leisure.

Larsen and Walther's (2019) work reinvigorates Suits' notion that games are goal oriented, and that by being goal oriented games can move from one state to another, suggesting that the pathway between play to game (and back again) is well worn, with potential for games to also move to a work state. Further, the Suits-Meier formulation suggests that sports (including eSports) are games that exhibit the additional class states of being non-random, games of skill, that are physical in nature. However, this thesis stipulates that all things are physical and the physicality feature is no longer a necessary sport-class feature (physicality will be discussed in detail below). Therefore this thesis accepts both Suits' (1988, 1995), and Larsen and Walther's'

(2019) contentions and accepts that there exists a transitory state between play and games, operating within a phenomenological ‘here’ and ‘there’ existence upon a non-discrete continuum.

This thesis will further develop this notion of a transitory state and expand the continuum to appear in three separate but related dimensions (play, leisure and work) and by doing so provide a structure to illuminate how people engage with eSports.

The next chapter will explore the idea of eSports and other digital endeavours as alienated labour and work. The chapter will uncover how eSports are devalued and treated as play or leisure alone, and why this manipulation and denial of eSports as work occurs.

4 eSports as work and labour; connection to the digital economy

eSports game playing is often burdened with the social assumptions that it is frivolous and does not add to the external real work economy. However, there are considerable misconceptions about the nature of digital labour and the distinctions between digital labour, work and leisure. To understand how this impacts on the forms of engagement with eSports there is a need to examine the relationship between work, exploitation and the social value placed on unpaid work (Provis, 2009) as it is applied to or experienced in digital labour industries such as eSports and similar allied digital labour-based profit-seeking endeavours. As will be discussed below, the distinction between digital labour and leisure is not as clear cut as may initially be imagined.

It is clear that the professional eSports player or coach is engaged in a work activity. They derive their income from this activity and it constitutes full-time employment. An eSports professional’s work activities may occupy time beyond those of other occupations (Hollist, 2015) and their engagement may also include play and leisure elements, as previously noted. However, the engagement of other participants in eSports (coaches, managers) may include activities that are distinctly work-like in nature. The same may be said for a professional eSports reporter or sports-caster. Such eSports participants are not playing the game when they are commentating. That they might play at other times indicates that engagement with eSports can be fluid. There may be elements of leisure in their commentary activities, but they are observing the play of others, not directly playing themselves. This again indicates that engagement in eSports activities is multi-faceted.

For the purposes of this discussion, this thesis proposes that digital labour refers to any labour that either is conducted primarily within the digital domain or in support of activities in the digital domain. For the former it may include activities such as modding and open source development as well as the professional playing of eSports (Kücklich, 2005; Resurreccion, 2015). For the latter it may include streaming, organising fan events and cosplaying. These activities all reflect and depend on the underlying property and, if nothing else, raise its profile and hence serve as a form of advertising. Duffy (2016, p. 443) provided a definition of the aspirational labourer that is useful in this context:

Aspirational labourers pursue creative activities that hold the promise of social and economic capital; yet the reward system for these aspirants is highly uneven. Indeed, while a select few may realize their professional goals – namely to get paid doing what they love.

All eSports players, regardless of skill or motivation for engagement with the eSports game title, are to some extent engaged in providing labour and economic activity. For example, any game design that presents interaction with other human players requires those human players to exist. When a player logs into League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009), Overwatch (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016) or Fortnite (Epic Games, 2017) they expect, and require, other players to also be playing the game. The experience of those games is promoted as occurring in a multiplayer environment. The games cannot occur without sufficient other players. Even in games such as World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), where grouping is not mandatory, the experience is still presented as one that involves other players. Consider the text on the World of Warcraft home page (Blizzard Entertainment, 2019), ‘Fight nine new bosses in the epic Battle of Dazar'alor raid, meet your foes in the Arenas and Battlegrounds, and test your mettle in challenging Mythic Keystone Dungeons to earn fabulous rewards!’ None of these activities are possible without other players.

When the player base engages with an eSports game title (or other multi-player game) and plays the game (or at least logs into the game lobby or matchmaking system), they become available as an opponent or partner for other players to play against or with. If there are no other players the game fails (see Kretchmar (2005a) for discussion on game structures and flaws). These other players are contributing to the presentation of the experience which the game producers are promoting. Therefore the active player base can, broadly speaking, be considered to be generating economic value for the game developer or publisher and ultimately their

shareholders/owners, simply by existing and participating in the game. This is one example of how such participation can be a form of digital labour and therefore work, while at the same time being play and/or leisure activities.

4.1 Devaluation of domestic work, play and by extension eSport

Modding, on the other hand, still has to struggle to free itself from the negative connotations of play: [...] the perception of modding as play is the basis of the exploitative relationship between modders and the games industry. (Kücklich, 2005, p. np)

The fuzziness in the definitions or conceptualisations of digital labour (e.g, modding, eSports, streaming etc.) finds its roots in several key areas. The concepts and issues raised here are all significant and are discussed in detail by other researchers, commentators, and by other schools of thought. By necessity, this thesis only addresses these in passing in order to ground the current discussion and, as such, the reader is encouraged to pursue these topics in their own domains. Duffy (2016, p. 442) detailed the contemporary labour narrative of Do What You Love (DWYL) as the somewhat flawed notion that paid work and pleasure should co-exist in the same activity; and that for creative producers, the dominant narrative is to strive for the conflux of passion and income. This again indicates the potential co-existence of eSports-based work, leisure and play.

The line between work and play or work and not-work has been eroding with the development of the information society and the increase in digital labour and digital workers. (Bell, 1974; Castells, 2010). It is important to understand how and why eSports digital (fan) labour is devalued or (potentially deliberately) mislabelled as leisure rather than external or productive labour. To do so it requires a small foray into the history of labour. Davis (1977, 1983 in Fuchs, 2018, p. 680) suggests that there is a fundamental difference between domestic-feminine-home labour and public exchange labour (work done in the external capital market, outside of the private family home). Work inside the home (coded as domestic work or women's work) was classified as non-work and uncompensated in monetary terms, or less valued work compared to work external to the home (coded as real work or men's work) as conducted in the external capital market and monetarily compensated. This led to a de-valuation of domestic work and the assumption that domestic work is less important. Activities associated with the home were de-valued when considered next to external paid work and as such there was a distinct and easily identifiable demarcation between home (leisure and family) and work.

The devaluation of domestic work was generally combined with and based upon gender identity and inflexible or traditional gender roles. Historically dominant patriarchal valuations privileged “male” externally compensated work over the predominately “female” and “children” domain of domestic life; such as housework, child rearing and games and leisure (Fuchs, 2018).

Duffy (2016, p. 444) notes that the trend towards individualised creative work is bound up with the global neoliberal economy. This suggests that the combined forces of the emerging global narrative of ‘freedom’ and ‘DWYL’ push towards individualised creative work as a promoted desired state, combined with the devaluation of the domestic-feminine-child work sphere (as indicated above) to synergise a perfect storm of low perceived value and low individual negotiating power to depress and reduce digital labour value.

Therefore, it can be suggested that the domestic domain and work de-valuation has been subsequently inherited by eSports and other gaming digital labour, due to the association games and play has with both children and the home combined with the DWYL ideology that pleasurable work is its own reward, and should be treated as leisure and unpaid. Increasingly the demarcation between home = leisure and work != home has been eroded and the distinctions are no longer easily discernible (Duffy, 2016; Kücklich, 2005; Scholz, 2013). Kücklich (2005) indicated that there is a very strong case that the separation of play and work are devolving:

There are strong indicators, however, that this concept of play is no longer appropriate. Due to the fact that work has been rendered more “flexible” in regard to its temporal, spatial and institutional contexts, more and more people can now be said to “play for a living”.(Kücklich, 2005, p. np)

While this thesis does not accept Kücklich’s rejection of the concept of play, the idea of playing for a living does indicate the co-existence of work and play, rather than a positioning of them as polar opposites.

4.2 The digital economy and (free) labour

‘[the games industry] benefits from a perception that everything to do with digital games is a form of play, and therefore a voluntary, non-profit-oriented activity’ (Kücklich, 2005, p. np)

eSports professionals benefit financially from their involvement in an activity that is based in play. Kücklich also noted this in the context of modding [“modding’s uncertain status in respect

to traditional notions of work and leisure” (Kücklich, 2005, p. np)]. While modding is not typically connected with eSport, the basis of eSports in videogames invites the same comparison.

...the internet is about the extraction of value out of continuous, updateable work, and it is extremely labour intensive. It is not enough to produce a good website, you need to update it continuously to maintain interest in it and fight off obsolescence...the sustainability of the Internet as a medium depends upon massive amounts of labour...
(Terranova, 2000, p. 48)

Labour is a central core of the digital economy due to the need for ongoing content and input. With the advent of streaming services and the 24/7 content and news cycle, there is an increasing need for content creation and delivery. Twitch and Twitter guides advise that we should be tweeting five times per day, a minimum of five times a week for base level engagement. Further, that we should have a social media posting strategy, integrated across all major platforms, designed to support engagement. There is a never-ending need for content in the ever-expanding social media sphere (Ellering, 2017; Foreman, 2018; Vivial, 2017).

There is a notion of citizen participation or participation culture at the core of co-creation, but that participation is limited by the attitude of the media according to Hermida (2011, p. 184 in Malmelin & Villi, 2017, p. 184) ‘The audience is considered more a source of content rather than as co-producers or co-creators.’ Malmelin and Villi (2017, p. 185) go further to state, ‘co-creation entails a potential exploitation of consumers in corporate value production.’ Further they investigated media and co-creation of content and established that media must develop ‘new platforms and distribution modes’ that support co-creation of content that ‘are meaningful to individuals and that generate value to businesses.’ (2017, p. 184). They proposed a collaboration model (2017, p. 191) that is less-exploitative and can be applied to the digital labour issue inherent in eSports. Malmelin and Villi noted that a key aspect in the co-creation process was creating and maintaining an audience sense of ownership and engagement (2017, p. 193). Duffy likewise indicated the importance of the appearance of realness or authenticity within the new-tech media domain and the continued appeal to ordinariness made by advertisers trading in manufactured ‘authenticity’ (Duffy, 2016, p. 447). In some respects this mechanism of ‘authenticity’ is a simple mythological creation cycle as detailed by Barthes (1973). It appears that a need for digital content for the news and streaming platforms puts upward pressure on digital content labour costs that employers and for profit entities in this space do not wish to bear, and seemingly have taken action to mitigate by blurring the lines between play, leisure and work, and further reinforcing the need for the new model proposed in this thesis.

4.3 Playbour, iSlavery and eSport

Free labour is the moment where this knowledge of consumption culture is translated into productive activities that are pleurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited. (Terranova, 2000, p. 37)

The notion of outrageous exploitation of digital labour, NetSlaves and iSlavery is not exactly a new concept in the literature (Castells, 2010; Haraway, 1991; Terranova, 2000) and the base idea of the exploitation of labour by capital has been something of a feature of the western way of life. However, in this space this thesis hopes to shine a light on the particular exploitation and devaluation of eSports labour, and reinforce the notion that eSports is (economically exploited) work, carried out in several engagement modes – such as fan, semi-professional and professional.

Game-playing labour such as modding and eSports creates surplus productive value. Qui (2016) suggests that there is a form of manufactured slavery existing in digital work; a kind of voluntary servitude developed by addiction⁹ and enticement for reward that never materializes. Such involuntary work includes student internships, work for exposure, competition requiring work or performance for the chance of winning prizes, and overtime (Duffy, 2016; Qui, 2016, p. 92). eSports fits this model of voluntary servitude via manufactured consent. As such, Qui suggests that boundaries of work and play have begun to break down (Qui, 2016, p. 104). Kücklich developed the term ‘playbour’ to accommodate the lack of clarity:

This draws attention to the fact that in the entertainment industries, the relationship between work and play is changing, leading, as it were, to a hybrid form of “playbour”. (Kücklich, 2005, p. np)

The notion of playbour has particular impact upon eSports. eSportspersons, especially those aspirational fan participants who, via affective resonance and similar mechanisms, look to the future and imagine themselves as the 1%, the elite eSportsperson, are still tagged and described as gamers, and players, fans and nerds. The language and descriptors indicate the existence of play and leisure in their activities, as well as carrying derogatory overtones, while those activities also encompass recognisable work.

Hills (2002, in De Kosnik, 2013, p. 197) noted that ‘Fans are, in one sense, “ideal consumers” since their consumption habits can be very highly predicted by the culture industry, and are

⁹ Achievements are a good example of the type of mechanisms at play here. Achievement points are a powerful motivation and reward system for modifying player behavior.

likely to remain stable.’ As with all highly predictable entities, once their behaviour patterns have been mapped leading to predictable outcomes, those behaviours can be manipulated with a likewise highly predictable outcome of that manipulation. Or to put it another way, once we understand how a thing works, we can pull it apart to make it do slightly different things. Therefore, eSports players (digital workers), specifically and especially those aspirational eSports performers, are seemingly manipulated into the position of freely (or at very low cost) providing their performative-labour that produces audiences for digital media outlets. These outlets can on-sell those audiences to advertisers at a premium rate.

Interestingly, De Kosnik (2013, pp. 208–209) predicted accurately that ‘Fan labor could eventually be regarded as the first rung on the reputation ladder for aspiring creative professionals, with the highest rung being full time employment’, thus cementing the manipulative undervaluing of the eSports digital work structure in place. Alternatively, and to paraphrase Federici (1975 in Fuchs, 2018, p. 681), unwaged performance for prizes reinforces the notion that eSports gaming work is not work. Increasing in competitive ranking brings the player to the attention of professional scouts and teams. Highly ranked players and teams are often invited to participate in semi-professional leagues, professional leagues and Invitational cup style competitions. Often highly ranked players are pre-qualified at the “stage of 16”, or quarter-finals level. Winning cup style events brings prize money and exposure (e-Sports Earnings, 2018). Amateur success provides a pathway to professional status and may be considered work in itself, while also being a leisure activity that meets the requirements of play.

The gap between digital work and digital play is becoming narrower and fuzzier in the online gaming and competition space. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to separate play and work, work and leisure to the point where those two binary sets are losing their meaning; hence the need to expand these on the continuum to provide greater fidelity in mapping the various ways in which we engage or interact with eSports.

Fuchs (2018, p. 678) indicates that digital media users create both data and attention commodities for online media outlets (Google, YouTube, Twitch, Facebook etc.) to sell to advertisers. This leads to the question, how much of the eSports effort of non-professionally paid and semi-professional player-workers is given or otherwise extracted freely from those player-workers and provided to the various media platforms? That is to say, seemingly many eSports

players, especially aspirational players, being those that aspire to becoming professionals, work for free for the media organisations (and in certain instances, where entry fees for participation in broadcast competitions exist, may actually pay their employers to work) and bring audiences (both free and ticketed) for media to sell to advertisers with little to no compensation for that effort. Or distilled further, providers of digital labour via eSports participation are being paid in ‘exposure dollars’ to provide online content for premium advertising dollars.

4.4 eSports growth and regulation

Establishment businesses are beginning to invest in eSports teams and competitions. For example, within the Australian context, the Adelaide and Essendon Football Clubs have both purchased eSports teams (Legacy eSports and Abyss respectively). In addition the Adelaide Crows have partnered with Bastion Live to create the High School eSports League (Adelaide Football Club, 2017, 2018; Essendon Football Club, 2017). There is even talk that the 2022 Asian games will include eSports in the roster.

The rapid growth and commercial exploitation of the eSports sector has resulted in regulatory and legal issues. It is important to understand how eSports is commercially exploited:

1. The eSports sport performance is used as online entertainment content for broadcast channels (via previously identified mechanism such as websites, YouTube and Twitch). The eSports broadcast content attracts an online audience and fan base.
2. This eSports broadcast content attracts online viewership numbers. That audience and fan base is then sold to advertisers and merchandisers.
3. The content often has associated merchandise sales.
4. eSports is also exploited by the gaming and wagering industry as eSports leagues and events attract significant prize pools (e-Sports Earnings, 2018)

As the demarcation lines between work and leisure continue to dissolve there is a need to clarify their relationship. Whatever one’s position on the above issues it is clear that work and leisure can both be found in eSports. There is also interest developing in how the eSports industry impacts upon the regulatory environment of wagering systems and the regulations and laws surrounding eSports as legitimate (i.e. taxed) labour. Understanding eSports categories of engagement may assist in the development of regulatory responses.

Hollist (2015, p. 823) noted that eSports professionals are sometimes required to practice up to fourteen hours per day to maintain their professional standards and status.

eSports are work. eSports are commercial, exploited, manipulated and most definitely fall into the category of alienated labour or work. The existing continuum model does not address work, which this thesis contends is a major issue with that model, and prompts the need to address eSports as work in a meaningful manner.

4.5 Towards a theoretical eSports concept - Proximity to professionalism

All sports activity can display a certain proximity to professional play. The fan may attend professional games or watch on them online or via broadcast media. A casual player may use the same or similar equipment to a professional player and the activities of an amateur game may take place on a field of the same dimensions. Even a casual afternoon game in a park may use some of the same equipment (such as a ball) and related rules. It may even be that a professional player may take part in such casual weekend activity as a leisure exercise

The professional player, engaged in a pick-up game (pug) in a local park, whilst still playing football, is much further from professional play than the amateur player in a non-professional competition; and likewise, an amateur player engaged in that very same pug is even further away again from professional play; although from the amateur player's perspective they are actually closer in proximity to professional play than they might normally be. The further the professional player is away from professional play, the less work-like utility they are likely to derive from the activity. That is to say, a professional player is unlikely to learn anything new or derive any professional utility from pugging it down the park.

Similar practices exist in eSports. For example a professional Overwatch or League of Legends player (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016; Riot Games, 2009) engaging in a pug is in the exact same environment as their professional play. The same code is running. The interface is the same (admittedly the keyboard, mouse, etc. may not be of the same quality). There is no change in the environment or maps that they play in. The map they use in a professional match is exactly the same as the one they play in for fun or as part of a pug. Their proximity to professionalism is much greater. In addition, it is easier for them to try out moves or situations and see how they play out in the same environment. This is because the professional, aspirational and purely for-fun players in eSports all engage in the exact same play environment, and it is entirely possible

for all three players to be put into a single competitive team if those players all queue for competitive play as solo players. Whilst in the irlSport equivalent, there would be close to no possibility for a non-professional player to be pugged into a professional team, so the aspirational or amateur player is further from professional play. They would have to be recognised by a talent scout or win some form of promotional content to improve their proximity to professional play. Whereas an aspirational eSports player just has to queue for competitive play and has a chance to play with or against semi-professional and professional players.

The second example that expresses the idea proximity to professionalism is online queuing as work as discussed above. In this situation, the simple act of queueing for an online match is akin to doing work for the game developer. For example, just being online and queueing for a game (being in the lobby) impacts upon the game environment, and it could be considered that the queueing player is doing work for the hosting/gaming company simply by providing opponents for the other players. This is important in a team eSport, where a certain number of players are required to be online to play, whether the play is simply fun, serious leisure or professional eSports. The ‘work’ of being in the queue encourages others to engage with the eSports title.

In summary, the professional player may still derive some work value from their leisure activity, the casual player, as discussed above, is contributing work by supporting the existence of the game. All this occurs while the game is being played. This again shows that work, play and leisure can co-exist, in differing degrees, within the context of sport.

5 The nexus of sport and eSports: definitions and approaches

e-sports, a catchall term for games that resemble conventional sports insofar as they have superstars, playoffs, fans, uniforms, comebacks and upsets. But all the action in e-sports occurs online, and the contestants hardly move.(Segal, 2014)

This chapter will examine existing approaches to the definition of sport and what that can tell us about eSports and eSports engagement. Kretchmar (1972) informs us that sport is indeed play, even if it is often considered to not be so, in his opinion sport is play as a partner of work, not in opposition to it. Kretchmar (2008) goes further to claim that it is possible to ‘game up’ all aspects of life. Therefore, as eSports are sports, there can be reasonable justification to claim that eSports can be expressed as play, game, leisure and work. Sport has its own academic tradition, which has produced a range of different essentialist and non-essentialist definitions and

approaches towards understanding sport. Most of these definitions separate sport from related activities, such as play and games, by relying on a notion of physicality. Physicality is a problematic concept in itself when considering eSports. The following examination will reveal some of the problems with existing definitions of sport. While physicality is an issue the following is not intended as a comprehensive exploration of that concept, or related ideas. Instead it merely addresses how the notion of physicality is employed within definitions of sport and what shortcomings that produces.

Before considering sport, the relationship of eSports to it and what the definitions of sport can tell us about engagement with eSports, it is necessary to consider the existing definitions of eSports. There are a large number of eSports definitions in both the academic and non-academic literature. However, practically all of them are stipulative and as such should not be accepted as definitions from a philosophical point of view. Despite this, they generally suffice for a ‘working definition’ point of view.

Hemphill’s definition is arguably one of the closest to an acceptable eSports definition (Hemphill, 2005, p. 199): “electronically extended athletes in digitally represented sporting worlds.” (p199). Hemphill updated this in 2015 “...contrary to the claim about them being virtual or merely games, sport-themed computer games that involve human immersion and skilful, physical interactivity can be considered sport, at least in the classic formulation of sport as the demonstration of physical prowess in a game” (Hemphill, 2015, p. 346). The flaw with this definition is that it embraces physicality as a central feature.

Wagner (2006, p. 3) defined eSports as “an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies.” The problems with this definition are due to the broad foundation on which Wagner laid it¹⁰. Hamari and Sjöblom (2017, p. 211) approach eSports from a similar point of view: “a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the eSports system are mediated by human-computer interfaces.”. (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017, p. 211) The above definitions of eSports foreshadow one

¹⁰ Wagner bases his definition of eSports on that of the work of Tiedemann (Tiedemann, 2004), which was overly broad; so broad as to essentially include all human activity as sport. Further, Tiedemann does not take into consideration the generally accepted Suits-Meier definition of sport.

of the problems of physicality in definitional approaches; they demonstrate the lack of precision that exists within the term.

Hutchins (2006, p. 5) drew parallels between eSports events and traditional sports festivals while positing eSports as something distinct from previous sport. In his terms, that eSports should be understood as ‘sport *as media*’ (emphasis in the original). We do not dispute that eSports is its own phenomena. However, Hutchins relies upon the concept of sport to describe this new instantiation. It is not something completely new, rather that sports as media can be interpreted as a new form or category of sport, yet still sport. Or to put it another way if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck and looks like a duck, it must be a duck; essentially Wittgenstein’s (2009) family resemblance model.

Karhulahti (2017, p. 45) neatly summed up the working definitions of eSports as:

With nuance, they all perceive eSports through two criteria: technological specificity (computers, cyberspace, electronics) and advanced competition (athleticism, professionalism, sport). These criteria are directly connected to the videogame culture so that eSports is recognized as an “extension of gaming.”

Therefore the working definition can be distilled down to two generic views of eSport; eSports is computer mediated competitive behaviour that is either sportive or sport-like. To clarify:

- Sportive – has the features of a sport according to the Suits-Meier formulation of sport in the philosophy of sport literature, but does not necessarily ‘look’ like a traditional sport. E.g. League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009) or Overwatch (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016)
- Sport-like – a digital representation of an irlSports which on the surface appears to be a sport but may not be categorized as a sport according to the Suits-Meier formulation. For example, FIFA 17 (Electronic Arts, 2016).

Therefore accepting that eSports are sport, we then need to investigate the two differing views of sport, that is the non-essentialist and essentialist points of view of sport.

5.1 Non essentialist views of sport

It may not be possible to come to a unified and acceptable (analytic/essentialistic philosophical) definition of sport that will have the necessary and sufficient conditions to encompass both eSports and irlSports. Therefore the following viewpoints may have merit in the evolution of an acceptable understanding of eSports.

Karhulahti (2017) considered eSports not from the competitive and technology leveraged point of view that many authors have taken, but from the economic ‘pay-for-play’ point of view, and introduced the idea of “Executive Ownership” (p.46), where the owner of the intellectual property, i.e., the game company that develops and maintains the game, servers and ‘playing fields’, has ultimate power and ownership over when and even how the game/sport is played. Karhulahti further suggests that eSports be described as economic Sport, rather than electronic. Further, Karhulahti points out that her view of economic eSports should encompass any commercial game (with attached Executive Ownership structure – holder of absolute power in regards to property rights over the game) that has a competitive, social and instructional structure surrounding it. Interestingly, Karhulahti’s definition does have a remarkable similarity to Suits’ (1988, 1989) original definition of sport, sans the physicality component.

Wittgenstein’s (2009) notion of family and community that can easily be applied to a definitional approach to eSports. Wittgenstein claimed there cannot be an essentialistic¹¹ definition of irlSports because there are no necessary and sufficient conditions which are broad enough to cover all aspects but specific enough to limit out non-sport elements. If we accept Wittgenstein’s thesis then it is basically impossible to define the product of any social (human-defined) system. Therefore, sport, and presumably eSport, as the product of social systems, are both open sets and therefore cannot be defined¹². Thus any attempt to close the set is arbitrary and therefore stipulative; which ultimately defeats the purpose of defining the fundamental essence of eSports and irlSports.

Wittgenstein offered a different way in which it is possible to view eSport/irlSport; that the idea of family resemblance or commonality exists when looking at sport, and by extension eSport. Under this approach, eSports are sports because of the broad family resemblance between them and irlSports. The family name (eSports are in fact named *eSports*) automatically making them a sub-set of the class sport. It is all in the name, similar things share a similar name. Being a less analytic system, the non-essentialist view allow us to revert back to the non-essentialist continuum model structure, which allows an examination of the eSports categories of engagement (an open social construct) via that continuum model.

¹¹ Essentialistic is taken to mean any underlying essential or fundamental truth or knowing of a thing.

¹² However, a method (class membership) may be substituted instead of definition. To be honest we are delving into the semantics/deconstruction of the definition of ‘definition’; which is somewhat out of the scope of this paper

In addition, there is the socially accepted and leisure-based role that eSports plays in the eSports community. Within the gamer community eSports potentially fulfil the same social role as irlSports occupy in the broader community. As such eSports can be considered to be equivalent to irlSports for the social and leisure niches that accept eSports as sports. This is known as the equivalency clause. Evidence of an eSports community is provided by Kozachuk, Foroughi and Freeman (2016, p. 2118) who described the eSports as being in a state of “drastic growth”, with increasing numbers of player and competitions and “millions of spectators” globally. Likewise Freeman (2016, p. 2119) referring to the social and leisure role eSports has, added that, “esports players extremely emphasize the sense of community, belongingness, cohesion, and comradeship among them.”

The final word here goes to Gunatilaka, (2017, p. np) commenting on the Sydney leg of the 2017 Overwatch World Championship:

To anyone in doubt of whether esports should be considered a sport, take it from me - it is sport and it deserves to be. These tournaments feel exactly the same as packed out footy games. Forget the fact that compared to traditional sports, esports has little physical exertion. The amount of teamwork, training, skill and dedication required to compete at this level is legitimate.

5.2 The Suits/Meier formulation for sport

If eSports are to be considered sports then it is important to understand what sports are so that we can then differentiate eSports from irlSport, as these two entities and activities are related but different. The Suits/Meier formulation is generally accepted within the discipline of the philosophy of sport as the standard account for a definition of sport. Suits (1988, 1989) defined sport in relation to games. A game is also a sport if:

- It is a game of skill,
- The core skill is physical,
- The game has a wide following, and
- The following has achieved a certain level of stability

There were a few modifications to Suits’ original position and this is the current generally accepted philosophical definition of sport (Meier’s modification of Suits):

*...all sports are indeed games. That is, a game may also correctly be termed a sport if it possesses the additional characteristics of requiring **physical skill or prowess** [my emphasis] to be demonstrated by the participants in the pursuit of its goal. (Meier, 1995b, p. 24)*

Subsequent sport philosophy theorists disagreed with Suits’ position that a wide following and stability were necessary (Holt, 2016; Meier, 1995b).

Jenny, Manning, Kieper and Olrich (2016, p. 5, see inserted Table 1 below) delivered an excellent summary of the Suitsian position and its major variant factors. However, it will be argued later in this thesis that physicality should not be considered as a defining feature of sport due to its problematic nature. Additionally, it will be suggested that institutional stability is no longer a “debatable” issue given the institutions that have grown up around eSports practice and business (NewZoo, 2017, 2018), and as previously stated, sport philosophy theorists removed this requirement some time ago.

Table 1. Where eSports fit within the defining characteristics of sport.

Sport Characteristic	Sample Activity NOT considered a “Sport” due to Sport Characteristic	Do eSports Qualify?
A “sport” must... Include play (voluntary, intrinsically motivated activity)	Any activity not intrinsically motivating	Yes
Be organized (governed by rules)	Tag	Yes
Include competition (outcome of a winner and loser)	Solitaire (card game)	Yes
Be comprised of skill (not chance)	Dice games	Yes
Include physical skills—skillful and strategic use of one’s body	Board games	Debatable
Have a broad following (beyond a local fad)	Clarkball ^a	Yes
Have achieved institutional stability where social institutions have rules which regulate it, stabilizing it as an important social practice	Hula-hoop	Debatable

Note. Characteristics 1, 2, 3, and 5 are adapted from Guttmann (1978), while characteristics 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 are adapted from Suits (2007).

^aSee Seybert (2008).

Figure 1 Where eSports fit within the defining characteristics of sport (“Table 1” from Jenny et al., 2016, p. 5)

5.3 Sport definitions and physicality

The grounding rationale for redeveloping the continuum model is because there are distinct problems with the definitional approach towards sport; one of the main issues with that approach is that physicality is core to the current definition of sport; and physicality is a problematic term. There is a lack of precision as to what physicality means. Both from a philosophy of mind and phenomenological point of view there are very distinct problems with the notion of physicality in

sport and using it as a distinguishing feature between irlSport and eSport, or between eSports and other video games. Current theorists (Jenny et al., 2016; van Hilvoorde & Pot, 2016) have investigated the issue of physicality and embodiment in the sport vs eSports nexus, finding that there is a distinction between fine and gross embodied motor skills.

Fine versus gross motor skills

Jenny et al (2016, pp. 9–10) identified that there is a significant difference between fine and gross motor skills within sport and that difference constitutes an important distinguishing feature between irlSport and eSport; as to be classified as a sport, gross motor skills should be employed (Loy (1968) in Jenny et al., 2016, p. 10). Hemphill (2005) rejected the distinction as being arbitrary and unnecessary with either fine or gross or both motor skills being physical enough to qualify “cybersports” as sport. Similarly, Kobiela (2018) has addressed this issue recently by declaring physicality in sport to be on a continuum itself ranging from fine to gross motor skills. Therefore the degree to which physicality is expressed in sport is no longer an issue. Essentially the fine vs gross motor skill distinction is simply a question of how physical does a game need to be to be classified as a sport? Ultimately this is an argument of granularity or arbitrary placement of a line within a fuzzy edge zone. The degree of physicality does not appear to be a determinant of whether an activity is a sport. What can be concluded is that an activity, such as eSports, which includes physicality may be a sport.

Philosophy of Mind, and physicality

With the death of dualism (Dennett, 1991) all human activity, including thinking, is physical, therefore physicality is problematic. To contextualise, Cartesian dualism holds that the mind and body are separate. Within the discipline of the philosophy of mind this is now considered to be untrue, and that the mind cannot exist without the body. It follows that without a brain a human cannot think, therefore thinking must be physical. The death of dualism leads to the collapse of sport as a separately defined entity, as essentially the only differences between sport and games under the Suits/Meier approach is physicality and the application of skill. If everything is physical then games of skill=sport¹³. With the advent and growth of eSports the problem of physicality being a key feature of the definition of sport becomes more prominent. Physicality itself is a fuzzy notion. What is physical? Is thinking physical because everything is physical? Even discounting or rejecting the notion that everything is physical, to what degree of fine motor

¹³ Or, if institutionality is still considered, institutionally organised games of skill = sport

action do we drill down in order to determine whether an action is physical enough to be a sport? How much physicality is enough to qualify as a sport? If eSports are not sports, then can archery, shooting or motorsports still be considered sports? At what point do we place the, clearly arbitrary, line of physicality? And how do we justify the placement of that arbitrary demarcation line given the concept of liminality and the fuzzy edge of any category?

Broad view of physicality in sport

Taking a broad interpretation of physicality, it could be claimed that eSports meets all the aspects currently required of the definition of sport. A simple ‘in your own head’ analysis will confirm that eSports are games. Further, within the broad view of physicality, eSports fit into the currently accepted definition of sport, if we consider that physicality is inherent in any human embodied activity. That is to say we are all meat; thinking requires the physical brain to occur, therefore eSports are physical. Also, of course, using a controller or mouse and keyboard is also physical. As previously noted in Chapter Two, Kobiela (2018) also suggests that there is a continuum approach to the notion of physicality in sports and that certain activities such as chess can be considered to be sport, it is simply that they exist at the minimal physicality end of the physicality spectrum.

As previously established, eSports demonstrate skilful participation and enjoy a wide following; adhering to Suits (1967, 1973, 1977, 1988, 1990, 1995) definition of sport. Taking the broad view of physicality in sport essentially allows for many skilful games, not just eSport, to be included in the category of sport; poker, chess, backgammon etc. could all fall into the category of sport under the broad view. The problem with the broad is that the category of sport becomes so wide as to encompass many game activities that would not necessarily or ordinarily be classified as sport.

Narrow view of physicality in sport

The narrow view of physicality argues that eSports cannot be sports because the macro-physicality of a body in motion is not achieved. This position contains its own problematic. At what point is a body considered to be in motion? How much relative motion must the body be in to be considered sportive? Again, the problem of granularity or arbitrary stipulation of a ‘line of acceptable physicality’ and liminality plague the narrow view. In addition, taking the narrow view will also eliminate several activities already accepted as sport – for example archery, darts,

motorsports, and shooting could easily be removed from the category of sport. Further the narrow view of physicality brings complications with the ‘aesthetic’ sports such as gymnastics and other artistic or normative embodied movement activities.

Therefore taking a continuum model view of sport allows us to bypass the embedded problem of physicality entirely when looking at how an individual might engage with both irlSport and eSport.

5.4 What is irlSport?

The definitions of games, play and sport fail to take into consideration the changing nature of the online or virtual world and the technology, participation models and culture that drives, sustains and surrounds these worlds. The terrain has significantly changed since Meier (1989, 1995b) suggested some changes to Suit’s (1967, 1973, 1977, 1988, 1995) definition of games and sport. It has become important to re-examine the definition of sport and performance and, indeed, the western cultural understanding of what a sport is in light of the development and impact of eSports and its styles of engagement.

Any such ‘definition’ offered must, of course, be founded in an academic discourse, discipline or assumption; and as previously evidenced, there are many relevant and acceptable discourses within the sport, recreation and physical education sphere (Blumenfeld, 1941; Champlin, 1977)¹⁴. Each discourse presents a different viewpoint and aims to achieve a different agenda. In the case of sport philosophy, the discipline inherited its foundational discourse and understanding of physicality, humanity and activity primarily from physical education, and has never really challenged those inherited basic embodiment assumptions; arguably remaining basically essentialist throughout its existence as a distinct discipline.

It can be contended that the generally accepted definition of sport does not adequately cover eSports or virtual/online and distributed playing fields. Osterhoudt (1996) and Paddick (1975) are further examples of the state of the emphasis on physicality as “a necessary component (and intrinsic good) of sport” (Hsu, 2005, p. 48). By relying upon the concept of physicality, the current generally accepted understanding of irlSport excludes many eSports instantiations and

¹⁴ Blumenfeld noted these different points of view in terms of play. He indicated the difficulty in determining exactly what play is stems from “...the different points of view which must be, but have not always been, clearly distinguished...” (Blumenfeld, 1941, p. 470)

practices, and provides important gatekeeper and policy development organizations (such as government funding agencies) with an incorrect philosophical and in-practice foundation on which they base their activities and decisions.

5.5 The continuum bypasses physicality

Ideally definitions of sport should remove references to physicality as it is arbitrary, limiting and ambiguous. There is potential for conceptualizing sport in terms of goal directed skilful practice while still embracing Suits notion of unnecessary obstacles and the play-space. Characterizing sport in terms of outcomes within the world or impact upon an environment rather than privileging physicality would be a place to start such an investigation, where:

- Skilful can mean intentional, with skill and practice, and predominately non-random.
- Embodiment can mean any form of authentic cognitive lived embodiment regardless of physical form.
- Goal directed can mean any form of intentional action seeking a (prescribed/preferred) outcome; regardless of achieving the outcome.
- Playspace can mean any place in which play, games and sports are instantiated. The play space may be real, virtual, conceptual or imagined, or any variant as yet unidentified.

One method of further understanding the relationship between eSports and irlSport is through a re-visited and re-imagined version of the play-games-sport continuum model. The model that will be developed in this thesis (Chapter 6) is an improvement upon current structures as it removes the obstacle and problem of a precise definition of physicality by viewing sport and eSports from a non-essentialist, non-definitional point of view. In addition, the new version of the continuum developed in this thesis is an improvement over the earlier version of the continuum. It extends the view of the continuum across several different relevant factors, providing greater precision to the continuum model, and allows the exploration of the eSports modes of engagement. The new continuum model developed here affords a greater degree of fidelity when analysing both sport and eSports engagement.

6 eSports and the play-leisure-work continuum

The play-games-sport continuum is not suitable for capturing the nature of engagement with eSports but it can be amended for this purpose. In this chapter a new continuum, the play-leisure-work continuum, will be proposed that is better suited to representing such engagement.

Stevens (1978) suggests that the entire body of play theory to his time is incorrect and based upon a false conceptual dichotomy. In summary, Stevens contention was that the theory was guilty of confusing the play form (or class of object) with the play experience (member of that class). He indicates that there are two levels of interaction or engagement in play, games and sport: the level of interaction with the play form (class) and engagement in the experience (member of the class). Stevens states that the majority of play theorists miss the hidden or covert level rules when they state that play does not contain elements of sport. Therefore, Stevens suggests that theorists should accept that a player is able to shift from being intrinsically motivated (play-like), to being extrinsically motivated (work-like) and back again, and still be considered to be in a play state. This is consistent with the view proposed here for a re-cast play-leisure-sport continuum model.

Loy (1968) indicated that games are not part of play, but instead are play-like:

We purposely have not considered game as a subclass of play, for if we had done so, sport would logically become a subset of play and thus preclude the subsumption of professional forms of sport under our definition of the term. (Loy Jr 1968, p. 1)

Vossen (2004) added that over time sport and play have evolved apart.

One of the key non-essentialist theories developed for the understanding of sport is the “play-games-sport continuum” (Caillois, 1961; Caillois & Halperin, 1955; Edwards, 1973; Larsen & Walther, 2019; Meier, 1981; Schmitz, 1979; Vossen, 2004). This theory states that there is an X-axis continuum existing in which play (P) exists at the X=0 end, and sport (S) occupies the other X=1 end. Over the course of traversing the continuum, play transitions into games then again to sport in a smooth and predictable manner. Several classification systems of sport were developed or derived from this model (Caillois & Halperin, 1955; Meier, 1981; Vossen, 2004). According to Vossen (2004) the continuum has two basic interpretations; diminishing and evolutionary and both are substantially incorrect. There was a recent phenomenological foray offered by Larsen and Walther (2019) suggesting games are ‘here and now attempting to get to there and then’.

The diminishing continuum model (Edwards, 1973; Schmitz, 1979) suggests that play exists at one extreme end of the model, and ultimately disappears at the other (sport) end of the model. At the $X=0$ end play exists in absolute (100%) whilst at the $X=1$ end, play does not exist at all. This model suggests a zero-sum game approach. Where P is play and S is sport; At $X=0$, $P=100$, $S=0$, at $X=0.1$, $P=99$, $S=1$, through to $X=1$, $P=0$, $S=100$. This interpretation would suggest that eSports falls into the Marxist idea of alienated labour at the extreme end of the continuum (Hemphill, 1992). The diminishing interpretation also suggests that eSports and games can exist as mutually exclusive play or non-play instantiations.

The evolutionary interpretation of the model suggests that play is the basis for games, and games are the basis for sport; that ultimately eSports evolved from play. Therefore play is ultimately evident in eSports in some form. At any point on the X axis P exists with a non-zero value. This is to say, play is evident in every stage of the continuum. The corollary condition (does S exist likewise in a non-zero state across the continuum?) is less clear. If the corollary is accepted, then the problem of this model is expanded, as sport would at least exist in some form in every play or play-like activity upon the continuum. According to the evolutionary model it is impossible to experience non-play forms of eSport; for example, Loy (1968) and Stevens (1978) both suggest that all instantiations of sport demonstrate at least rudimentary aspects of play behaviour. That is to say play always exists in any and every instantiation of sport and eSport

Vossen (2004) concludes that the play-game-sport continuum model is flawed, and that any descriptive system based upon this model is necessarily also flawed. Vossen states that if the continuum model were to be correct, then play must be present in all sports, regardless of form, which, Vossen attests, it is clearly not. Vossen suggests for any instantiation of games or sport, “it is more accurate to suggest that both games and/or sports can be pursued in the presence or absence of the spirit of play” (2004, p. 55). Therefore, this continuum model, as presented in a single X axis (from play through to sport) does not allow for the complete or accurate description of eSports engagement possibilities. eSports engagement appears at multiple locations across the continuum. eSports can be experienced as game, sport, play, leisure and/or work concurrently, therefore the continuum model in its current form is insufficient to accurately describe the various engagement modes possible in eSport, as multi-faceted things like eSports require a multifaceted view of how they work.

6.1 eSports can concurrently demonstrate the foundations.

eSports as Game.

eSports are computer games before they are eSports. There are emerging computer and console game titles that have solely designed to be eSports, for example League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009), Overwatch (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016) and Paladins (Hi-Rez Studios, 2016) but for the original eSports most started out as computer games for example, Warcraft 3 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002), Starcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 1998), and Quake (id Software, 1996).

eSports as Sport.

Previous work in this area (McCutcheon, Hitchens, & Drachen, 2018) and that of many others (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Jenny et al., 2016; Schubert et al., 2016; Wagner, 2006), supports the claim that eSports are sport. This has also been previously stipulated as true in this thesis.

eSports as Play.

eSports demonstrates key features of play. If we consider play from Vossen (2004) and Eberle's (2014) point of view that play is indeed a state rather than a thing, and link eSports play to Shen et al's (2014) list of three main play characteristics then we arrive at the following:

1. Intrinsic Motivation – eSports participants engage in eSports because they want to. There is no enforced institutional pressure to play when engaged in as a play activity (as opposed to work activity)
2. Freedom – Free to engage or disengage as desired. It may be that eSports players (and gamers in general) have a higher level of individual agency because they seemingly disregard the external consequences of extended play time, and consequences from poor/toxic behaviour within game environments.
3. Spontaneity – demonstrated via pick-up games (pugs), and solo queuing which can result in highly skilled professional level players being matched with novice players (as each player has a skill rank), then the skill rank (SR) of the teams being balanced for fair play.

eSports as Leisure.

eSports demonstrates aspects of both serious leisure and occupational devotion. There are aspirational (Duffy, 2016) eSports players who are hard at work attempting to transition into a professional team or play position. Likewise, there are professional players who engage in spillover and occupational devotion where they just play for fun.

eSports as Work.

Easily and clearly demonstrated in the ranks of professional eSports players and the number of eSports events that are developed. Rankings, league tables and statistics on earnings and so forth can readily be found online (e-Sports Earnings, 2018; NewZoo, 2018)

A modification to the play-game-sport continuum can expand it across the factors indicated above and will allow for a more accurate description of eSports and its relationship to play, games, sport, leisure and work. Further, development of the continuum allows the advancement of theoretical work on the notion of proximity to professionalism; whereby all instantiations of eSports (computer game as play, computer game as work) demonstrates a closer proximity to professionalism than any other format or instantiation of sport. The expanded continuum model will be the basis for developing the proximity to professionalism theoretical concept.

Vossen (2004) argues that the continuum model itself is fundamentally flawed and the essentialist definitional approach is the correct interpretation of sport. However a definitional approach cannot ever hope to meet the necessary and sufficient conditions to describe social constructs such as sport and eSports that are open to change and evolution.

There is no play-sport dichotomy. This is too simplistic a view and flawed from three perspectives:

1. There are more than three discrete states on a single opposed continuum.
2. The existing continuum ignores work as an important aspect in the equation, and
3. There is a false equivalency in comparing/contrasting play to sport as play is typically a state/attitude (Eberle, 2014; Vossen, 2004), whilst sport is generally considered to be a category of action. To be more accurate the continuum model must divest itself of the binary/dichotomy approach. Rather than viewing the play-games-sport continuum as an opposed transitional scale solely existing on an X axis it is possible to view the play-game-sport continuum as a top-down collection of additive factors. That is to say, the continuum viewed as containing the five identified factors each existing on the Y-axis, that are not opposed and not binary.

In the model presented in this thesis, play, leisure and work are separate concepts; they are not paired or opposed. Stating that if not play then it must be game or sport lacks fidelity. These concepts (play, games, sport) are not in opposition or mutually exclusive. This new continuum model views play, leisure and work as a series of more open ended non-binary states; work or not work; play or not play, games or not games; sport or not sport. This works from the assumption that it is not possible to prove a negative, and as such only the positive state can be truly identified. Additionally, the new model enables each factor/state to be engaged with separately and/or collectively.

Therefore this thesis proposes a continuum consisting of the separate but related constituent factors; game and sport, play, leisure and work. When these constituents are placed in opposition, it does not present an accurate description/model of engagement with eSports. However, when layered and considered additive, the model makes sense.

6.2 The play-leisure-work continuum model

The new play-leisure-work continuum model developed in this thesis indicates that there are several discrete factors that should be considered and possibly rated. These can be used to situate and understand eSports and the categories of engagement with eSports. There is no implication of mutual exclusivity or interaction in the model. For example, if not work must be play is not implied.

The foundational factors, as previously identified are games and sport (as conditionals), play, leisure, and work as separate non-discrete continuum lines that add to describe how people may interact with eSports.

Whilst any individual human recreational activity may be considered as possessing any, all or none of the factors in various degrees ranging from zero through one, the model is specifically designed as a tool for the analysis and understanding of eSports and the eSports categories of engagement, and should be viewed with that in mind. Each of the play-leisure-work continuum factors are separate and stand-alone concepts which can and should be treated within their own silos, but come together to create an additive continuum when viewed from a top down perspective.

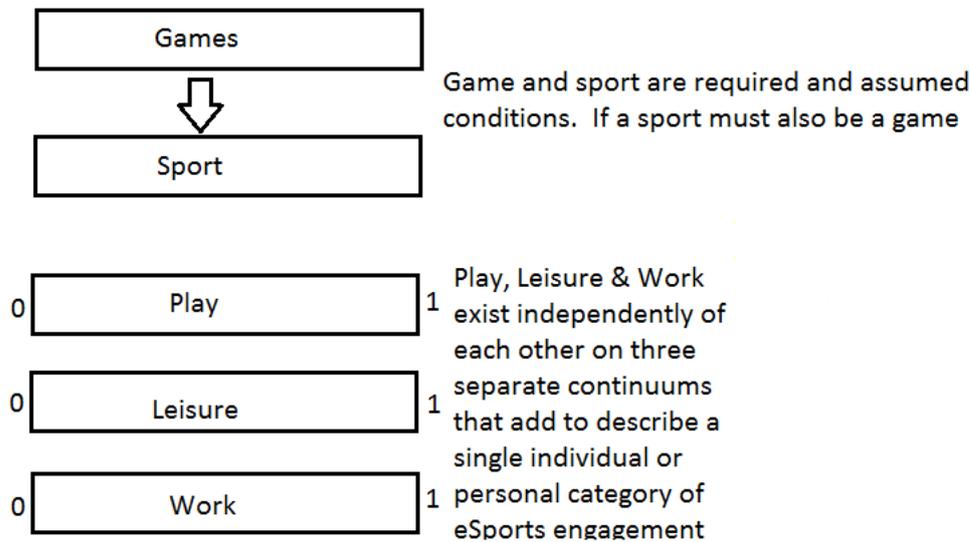


Figure 2 Exploded view of the factors in the new continuum model:

Historically, the concepts of play-games-sport have been dealt with in opposition, and as such have not worked to adequately reflect eSports, which is why the current model is flawed from an eSports point of view. Treating games-sport, sport-work, work-play, play-games, work-leisure as binary or opposing pairs overly simplifies the model and suggests that paired opposition is the only possible state, which is clearly not the case, given the evidence offered previously in this thesis.

Secondly, the eSports categories of engagement identified in this thesis (spectator/fan, casual, aspirational, and professional) do not exist in opposition at different ends of a continuum. Therefore the new continuum model allows us to examine each of the categories of engagement and place them individually upon each of the play-leisure-work continuum axes.

eSports category of engagement instantiations can be analysed on the new continuum model by obtaining a score derived from each of the layers/factors of the new continuum or by plotting on a radar chart (multiple axes graph in two dimensions). Finally it can provide a method/framework/tool for the development of the theoretical notion of proximity to professionalism as the concept grows out of the categories of engagement.

6.3 Categories of engagement and the play-leisure-work continuum

In chapter one, four categories of engagement were identified. As indicated there, these four are not an exhaustive list and are purely examples of potential categories in which people may engage with eSports.

Each of those categories of engagement can be plotted against the play-leisure-work continuum and in doing so provide a method of both classifying the differences in the way people engage with eSports, and provide us with a greater understanding of eSports and how eSports relate to the world without attempting to resort to a flawed definitional approach.

While there is not yet empirical work to gauge the exact positions of these forms of engagement on the continuum, some reasonable hypothetical possibilities can be advanced. Each of the four identified categories of engagement might appear on the new continuum thus, where P=Play, L=Leisure and W=Work.

- Spectator/Fan – Low to Medium P, High L, Low W
- Casual - High P, Medium to High L, Low W
- Aspirational – Medium to High P, Medium L, Medium to High W
- Professional – Low to Medium P, Low to Medium L, High W.

In summary, a single continuum model with play and work at opposite ends of the continuum does not provide sufficient fidelity and specificity to adequately make sense of the open-ended categories of engagement with eSports (or sports for that matter). The new continuum model permits greater understanding of these (and other) categories by expanding the axes of the continuum and removing their embedded opposition and allows us to understand how people engage with and use eSports. Such an understanding which will be of value to governments and other gatekeepers and decision makers as well as other stakeholders.

7 Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the literature of play, games, sport, work and leisure to demonstrate the key features of eSport. It sets out the differences between the essentialistic (analytic) and non-essentialistic (speculative and family resemblance) approaches to viewing sport and eSport. The

basic flaws in the essentialistic approach in regards to social constructs such as sport and eSport were identified, instead preferring to use the non-essentialistic system. Using the non-essentialist system it worked towards the development of a revised play-games-sport continuum and re-cast that as the play-leisure-work continuum model. That continuum model has been expanded to include three discrete factors – play-leisure-work, with each of those factors existing upon their own discreet continuum, which in a summative manner are capable of describing eSports categories of engagement, and provides a greater degree of understanding of how eSports are situated and engaged with than an essentialistic definitional approach is capable of.

Proximity to professionalism could be developed into an important distinguishing feature between irlSport and eSports and may pave the way for future methods and/or definitions of eSports. Proximity to professionalism and the eSports Continuum Model form parts of the effort to understand more of the nature of eSports engagement; to define and refine eSports for the purpose of both increasing the general body of knowledge, and exploring in greater detail how people interact and engage with eSport, but also to assist sport governance bodies and sport decision makers to include eSports alongside their more traditional counterparts when engaged in policy and decision making.

Future work may include empirical research involving eSports participants to gauge the accuracy and value of the proposed continuum model.

8 Thank you

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