

**Fictional Videogames
as Framing Devices
Suicide Communication in MMOs**

Julián Gutiérrez Carrera

Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture
Volume 16, issue 1 (Fictional Games), pp. 99–114

Fictional Videogames as Framing Devices Suicide Communication in MMOs

JULIÁN GUTIÉRREZ CARRERA

Abstract

In this paper, I argue that the use of fictional massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) as framing devices serves as a reflexive narrative tool that suggests an understanding of MMOs as spaces with their own internal rules of communication. To do this, I conduct a close reading of *Agony of a Dying MMO*, a singleplayer demo game that depicts the final hours of service of a fictional MMO through a series of semi-explorable vignettes showing the activities of fictional players. In order to analyse how MMOs are represented as spaces with internal rules of communication, I focus my analysis on three instances of direct suicide communication—communicative acts directly referring to past, present, or future suicidal intent. As suicide communication is often indirect, I focus on how the social logic and rules of MMOs enable direct suicide communication. Through the close readings, I found that MMOs alter, enable, and restrict specific types of communication through a combination of their game design features, their user interfaces, and their existence as (and contiguity with) online spaces. In particular, I found that written communication through an MMO's chat box can provide an alibi by turning seemingly serious statements into jokes; that acts embedded in the process of engaging with MMOs, like logging out and the consequent disappearance of a character, can serve as a communicative tool denoting finality; and that game design features meant to bring players together, like guilds and factions, can enable player authenticity and openness by attracting like-minded players, for better or for worse. As the use of videogames as framing devices presents a meta-referential commentary on videogames in the real world, these represented social affordances suggest that virtual online spaces provide unique opportunities and alibis for direct suicide communication.

Keywords

Fictional games; games within games; massively multiplayer online games; framing devices; suicide; suicide communication

In this paper, I argue that the use of fictional massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) as framing devices serves as a reflexive narrative tool that suggests an understanding of MMOs as spaces with their own internal rules of communication, social affordances, and social restrictions. I will argue this point through a close reading of the demo game *Agony of a Dying MMO* (Hughes, 2021). The game depicts the final hours of the fictional MMO *Garden of Widows*, an online first-person shooter (FPS), from the perspective of five different fictional players through a collection of semi-explorable vignettes. The vignettes are often brief, containing snippets of conversations, random encounters with a fictional player, or, in some cases, open areas to explore.

In particular, I focus on three scenes that represent direct suicide communication, which is a “[reference] to thoughts about the act [of suicide] and plans to commit it” that refers directly to past or present suicidal intent, and which may be verbal or non-verbal (Wasserman, 2016, p. 31). Since suicide communication is stigmatised (Fulginiti et al., 2015; Latakienė et al., 2015; Owen et al., 2012) and often relies on indirectness, ambiguity, and euphemism (Owen et al., 2012), direct suicide communication events offer the potential to analyse how their social context—in this case, the framing device of the fictional MMO—enable their directness. The three scenes in question consist of an exaggerated suicide threat written down in the fictional game’s chat box; a statement of suicidal intent spoken through the fictional game’s voice chat, immediately followed by the fictional player who uttered it logging off; and an extended conversation that starts with a confession of a past suicide attempt. As the direct suicide communication events in these three scenes appear in different forms and across different social contexts, they offer a window into the communicative rules, social affordances, and social limits imposed by the MMO framing device. Through my analyses, I found that the use of the MMO as a framing device is a meta-referential tool that suggests an understanding of MMOs as primarily social spaces with their own set of communicative rules and affordances that can either turn serious statements into jokes, provide implicit communicative tools, or create safe spaces for self-expression through their game design and user interfaces. These affordances combine to suggest that virtual online spaces provide unique alibis for uttering suicide communications directly.

In the following sections, I will explain the literary concept of the framing device and how it applies to videogames and to *Agony of a Dying MMO* in particular. I will use this concept to explain how *Garden of Widows* might be considered a fictional game despite being playable in some form, and to explain how this representation of an MMO suggests a specific understanding of real MMOs as social spaces with unique communicative affordances. Then, I move on to analyse how suicide communication is represented in *Agony of a Dying MMO*. I preface my analyses by looking at previous research on suicide in MMOs and on suicide related to MMOs. I do this in order to contextualise the representation of suicide communication as an outlier to previous research within Game Studies and as a continuation of existing discourses on online gaming addiction. Then, I do a close reading of the three scenes mentioned above,

focusing on how direct suicide communication is enabled through exaggerated communication, through implicit features of MMOs, like logging out, and through game design meant to create groups of players through shared interests and styles of play. Then, I conclude by noting that fictional videogames used as semi-playable framing devices are meta-referential; that MMOs should be understood as primarily social spaces where troubled individuals, people with fringe opinions or identities, outsiders, and other misfits can find solace; and that their social affordances provide unique alibis for suicide communication.

Framing devices and fictional videogames

I define a *framing device* as the application of a metaphorical *frame* within fiction: a narrative device used to delineate different ontological and fictional levels. *Frames*, in turn, are limits that separate the 'real' from the 'unreal'. In doing so, they prefigure horizons of expectations that alter the way the 'unreal' is interpreted: because the 'unreal' is an incomplete representation, it becomes a synecdoche that imposes a total—or primary—meaning of what is represented.

Within literary studies, frames have been understood as a device separating the real from the fictional. In 'The Literary Frame', John Frow (1982) argues that frames serve as a boundary between aesthetic objects and the world around them; they separate 'reality' from 'fiction'. They can take on many forms, be they material—like the frame of a painting or the covers of a book—or figurative—like the start and end of a narrative or discourses about the object. Because they surround an aesthetic object and the fiction within it, they also serve to establish horizons of expectations (Jauss, 1967/1970) that change how the aesthetic objects and their fictions are experienced and understood.

Frames also establish a representational relationship between the space inside them and the space outside them: the 'fictional' represents the 'real', and the 'real' is represented in the 'fictional'. Since fiction is not—cannot be—exhaustive, these representations are incomplete (Heintz, 1979; Sorensen, 1991; Walton, 1990; for an examination of this incompleteness in videogames, see Van de Mosselaer & Gualeni, 2022; Wildman & Woodward, 2018). This fictional incompleteness makes these representations work through the metaphor of synecdoche: a whole reduced to one of its parts, which becomes symbolic of the omitted whole (Burke, 1941). The frame imposes a concentration of meaning on this synecdochal representation: the 'fictional' can only represent a part of the 'real', but that partial representation takes on a totality of meaning. This totality of meaning suggests that the complete 'real' should be understood and conceptualised through its partial representation. In other words, the 'fictional' representation—an incomplete description of something 'real'—prescribes how the 'real' should be understood (Frow, 1982).

When they appear within fiction, these frames—as framing devices—often take the form of fictional aesthetic objects or contained narratives. Stefano Gualeni and Riccardo Fassone examined a similar device in their *Fictional Games* (2023), an exploration on what games do and how they behave when they appear in fiction. Gualeni and Fassone focus on games that are unplayable, as their incompleteness and unplayability relegates them to be imagined and understood more freely than if they had interactive or playable layers of meaning. These fictional games have a variety of narrative uses, but Gualeni and Fassone identify two broad functions:

1. as background elements of a fictional setting, and
2. as central narrative devices.

Gualeni and Fassone suggest that fictional games serve a ‘revealing’ or ‘explanatory’ function: they show something about the fiction around them—like fictional ideologies or additional information about characters—and about the world outside the fiction that contains them. By representing games, these aesthetic objects suggest new critical or satirical ways to understand real games, be it their design, their players, their marketing, or their place in culture (Gualeni and Fassone, 2023, p. 173). They do this by concentrating meaning within the fictional games being represented, which serve as a synecdoche of real games.

Framing devices and fictional games in Agony of a Dying MMO

Having clarified both framing devices and fictional games, there is now a sizable problem to tackle: *Agony of a Dying MMO* and its fictional game, *Garden of Widows*, do not map on neatly to the phenomena described by Gualeni and Fassone (2023) above. Their argument on the power of fictional games hinges on the games in question being unplayable, and *Garden of Widows* is very much playable. However, this playability is highly limited. *Garden of Widows* is a player-versus-player (PVP), faction-based FPSMMO, but the player never gets to engage with any of these gameplay systems. Throughout the game, the player can only make a character look around, move, jump, and shoot their gun (a purely audiovisual effect, as the fictional players and fictional non-player characters do not respond to the player’s shots). The player does not get to play the game as an MMO, nor as an FPS; the player is an observer.

While *Garden of Widows* is a fictional MMOFPS, *Agony of a Dying MMO* is, ostensibly, a walking simulator. As Melissa Kagen (2022) points out in *Wandering Games*, a walking simulator is “a game that takes the shape of a familiar genre and removes something crucial: a gun, a mechanic, a certain kind of interactivity, an ineffable quality of fun” (p. 24). This ‘lack’ is at the core of walking simulators (Consalvo & Paul, 2019, p. 110). *Agony of a Dying MMO* puts the other players and the combat back into the walking simulator, but it does so through a fictional game. While *Garden of Widows* is playable in a limited form, it retains the incompleteness necessary to be evocative and ontologically fluid (Gualeni & Fassone, 2023, p. 29). *Agony of a Dying MMO* is also

a demo with no full release: it is incomplete by design, meant to simultaneously evoke the 'complete' fictional game *Garden of Widows* and the 'complete', unreleased version of itself.

It is worth noting that the fictional world outside *Garden of Widows* is never visible to the player. The parts of it that bleed through the frame hint at the surrounding world being a fictional version of the real world. *Garden of Widows* is a framing device: it is both the backdrop where the events of the story take place, and the central driving force behind the game's plot. This absence of referentiality to a fictional world outside the fictional game displaces the fictional game's analytic

Suicide in *Agony of a Dying* MMO

Within MMOs and other virtual online spaces, suicide has been researched primarily through player-driven behaviours, like testing the boundaries of a game's physics simulation by jumping off high places, using death mechanics as exploits (Klastrup, 2008), using suicide to work around system limitations (Lin & Sun, 2003), telling other players to kill themselves (Karhulahti, 2020; Ruotsalainen & Meriläinen, 2023; Saleous & Gergely, 2023), or staging virtual suicides consisting of short quitting texts and videos showing a character being deleted when players stop playing the game (Dutton, 2007; Lau, 2017; Nagenborg & Hoffstadt, 2009; Webber, 2020). While this research is a valuable framework for depictions and simulations of suicide in online games, it is worth noting that none of these—or other similar—behaviours are represented in *Agony of a Dying* MMO. There are no explicit suicides in this game, only suicide communication events. The overall effect of these direct suicide communication events is to prompt the player to imagine the (fictional) person outside the (fictional) game.

Research on the connection between suicide and online games outside the virtual space of the game has noted an explicit link between excessive play of online games and suicidality, whether through correlation or complex causality¹ (see Ballard & Welch, 2017; Chen et al., 2018; Cole & Hooley, 2013; Erevik et al., 2022; Koga et al., 2025; Owen et al., 2012; Spain & Vega, 2005; Zhengchuan et al., 2012). This discourse is prevalent in research as a result of wider, older discourses on videogame addiction (see e.g. Egli & Meyers, 1984; McCutcheon & Campbell, 1986; Soper & Miller, 1983) and its recognition as a diagnosable disease by the World Health Organization in the form of Gaming Disorder (WHO, n.d.). *Agony of a Dying* MMO absorbs this dis-

¹ This causality is twofold: excessive play of MMOs is associated with being suicidal, and being suicidal might make excessive play of online games more likely, as suicidal individuals seem to spend more time in online social spaces (Harris et al., 2014).

course through its suicidal characters: the three examples of direct suicide communications I analyse below all feature players who either explicitly or implicitly note that they have played the game too much.

I analyse three scenes where direct suicide communication appears in *Agony of a Dying MMO* to explore how the framing device of the fictional MMO is used as an alibi for direct suicide communication. I organise my close readings of the three scenes representing direct suicide communications based on a progression from text-based messages, to spoken utterances, to extended conversations. These analyses will reveal how the framing device is used as an alibi for jokes, as an implicit communicative tool, and as an enabler of player authenticity. While there is a fourth suicide scene where a fictional player spouts an apocalyptic prophecy that requires their own death, I will not analyse it to avoid repetition: the ambiguity of whether the utterance is earnest or not is explored in the first scene (Exaggerated Communication in MMOs), and that scene has the benefit of using a different mode of communication than the other examples.

Exaggerated communication in MMOs

The first scene appears close to the start of the game. Fictional player CRIMSONTEMPLAR sends a message in the fictional game's chat log, where they state: "I'M GOING TO KILL MYSELF WHEN THIS GAME SHUTS DOWN" and, after other fictional players try to calm them down, they continue with: "SOMEONE DESERVES TO DIE". "THAT'S MY OPINION". While the literal text of their messages suggests both suicidal and murderous intent, the expression seems to be a way to vent frustration, rather than to express real suicidality or a real desire to kill someone.

Discerning whether CRIMSONTEMPLAR's message is sincere or not is complicated. In online contexts, reading suicidal ideation in a text, even one that expresses it literally, is already difficult because of the prevalence of hyperbole (Ali et al., 2024; Cash et al., 2013; Smith & Linker, 2021; Spates, Ye, & Johnson, 2018). Even the other fictional players interpret CRIMSONTEMPLAR's message as a serious statement of suicidal intent at first. The fact that the message only appears in the chat log contributes to that ambiguity: since CRIMSONTEMPLAR never speaks through the fictional game's voice chat, the additional information available through the spoken word (Jones, 1948; Nolan, 2020, pp. 391-397) is never conveyed. The absence of this layer of information grants CRIMSONTEMPLAR deniability over whether their message is serious or not.

This moment reveals a playful, if antagonistic, possibility for text-based communication in MMOs. By occurring in the final hours of service—a context where players would be upset—the suicide threat loses its power and becomes an exaggerated, even humorous, expression of frustration. Even if it were honest, this context provides plausible deniability (Ask & Abidin, 2018; Owen et al., 2012). That it is expressed

as text contributes to its lack of seriousness, as the implied loudness by being in uppercase letters (Heath, 2021) serves to further exaggerate the statement.

CRIMSONTEMPLAR appears in the chat log at a later point in the game, bragging about being level 99 and having played *Garden of Widows* for over ten thousand hours. Within the fiction of the game, this behaviour is associated with a ‘curse’, where the cursed player loses their social connections outside the game. Of course, there is no curse: the loss of social connections outside the game is a result of dedicating too much time to the game to the detriment of everything else. It is fitting that CRIMSONTEMPLAR, a fictional player who has likely undergone the ‘curse’, would make an exaggerated suicide and murder joke: they are a player who might lack social connections outside *Garden of Widows*, and the imminent loss of the game is likely the loss of one of their most important social spaces.

The communicative semiotics of MMOs

The second scene is an optional encounter in an open area. In an otherwise empty corner, a fictional player, Judger77, is standing alone. As the player approaches them, they speak through the fictional game’s voice chat, “I’m going to go kill myself. I wish I never played this game”. Shortly after saying that, they log out, and their character disappears.

Their statement is comprised of three parts: the suicidal statement, the expression of regret at playing the game, and their disappearance. This spoken “quitting text” (Webber, 2020) seems straightforward. While the expression of regret at playing the game hints at a self-destructive relationship with the fictional game, the first part is more ambiguous. The phrase “I’m going to kill myself” is a direct suicide communication, but it is unclear whether it is serious, or an exaggerated response to the fictional game’s end of service, like CRIMSONTEMPLAR’s statement above. It becomes less ambiguous and more concerning when Judger77 logs out. Unlike CRIMSONTEMPLAR, whose name is ever present in the game’s chat log, Judger77 does not reappear at any point of the game. The immediate act of logging out lends weight to their suicidal statement.

Within the semiotics of MMOs, logging out—and the associated disappearance of a player character—signal that a player has disconnected from the game and ended their play session. The dead air that follows Judger77’s statement prompts the player to imagine what is happening behind the fictional screen, to wonder whether the threat should be taken seriously or as an exaggerated expression of frustration. Thus, *Agony of a Dying MMO* uses an intrinsic feature of MMOs to highlight their implicit communicative potential: a suicide threat becomes more serious than just a spoken utterance by using an implicit part of communication in MMOs.

Player authenticity and toxicity in MMOs

The third scene appears halfway through the game. In it, FlowerPower—a trans woman who serves as the perspective character for this section of the game—and her friend, Vivianis, are going on a virtual road trip through the world of the game. The scene starts with FlowerPower opening up to Vivianis about a past suicide attempt,

It was... uh... New Years Eve and... um... I was really high. And... uh... When I hung myself in the bathroom something came in the room. Um... it sounded like at first the emergency alert signal in the other room. And then some horrible crying like a dying animal. I passed out from choking on the rope attached to the shower curtain bar. But, that broke. And when I woke up I could still hear the crying and I tried to hang myself on the... um... towel rack. But, that didn't work. So, I opened the door to the hotel room. And as soon as I did the noise went away. I don't know what it was. (Hughes, 2021)

This confession is significant because of the implied social backstory that enables it. A confession like this could only occur between friends, and the framing device of the fictional game lays bare the conditions that led to this moment. MMOs enable social connections and friendship between their players through a combination of user interfaces and game design (Crenshaw & Nardi, 2016; Eklund & Ask, 2013), both of which play a role in FlowerPower and Vivianis' friendship in *Garden of Widows*.

On a game design level, *Garden of Widows* is a faction-based game, and these factions are presumably the main enablers of the game's PVP systems. FlowerPower and Vivianis are both members of the same faction, which places them on a gameplay system where they have to play together against others. A faction, however, seems to be too large to enable meaningful connections; rather, it seems that FlowerPower and Vivianis' friendship formed on a guild—a social network of players (see Taylor, 2006) likely smaller than factions. This friendship was maintained despite the guild's functional dissolution (see Poor & Skoric, 2016), as FlowerPower notes that it has been years since most guild members were online. It seems likely, then, that FlowerPower and Vivianis became friends through their shared positionality within these two gameplay systems.

The moment they share at the end of the game takes place because of user interfaces. The fictional user interface of *Garden of Widows* is split in horizontal thirds: the bottom third of the screen is reserved for the chat log, the middle third is for seeing the game world, and the top third is for other game tools, like options, player information, inventory, etc. One of the tools is a friend list, which includes the names of other fictional players that the perspective fictional player has added as friends. Like friends lists in real MMOs, the friends list in *Garden of Widows* has markers that say whether a specific fictional player is online. In the case of FlowerPower, her only

friend online during the events of the game is Vivianis. *Garden of Widows*, again like other MMOs, also has a private messaging system through which fictional players can talk to each other without broadcasting their conversations to the fictional players around them, and which can enable communication independent of the fictional players' location in the fictional game. FlowerPower, at the time the player gets to see her perspective, only has one message, and it is from Vivianis: "Hey, I know it's been awhile [sic], but I was wondering if you want to get together and hang out a bit?" This message is the catalyst for them meeting up. FlowerPower feels free to talk about her past suicide attempt with Vivianis because the game's design and interface create the social affordances necessary for her confession. The framing device of the MMO signals that these design and interface choices contribute to the creation of safe spaces for trans people like FlowerPower (Cabiria, 2008; McKenna & Chughtai, 2020).

However, the same design choices that create a safe space for FlowerPower break that safe space. As she notes, "This game really was a lot better before they added Nazis as a playable faction. It was a really welcoming community. It was... uh... a safe space". So, at some point in the fictional history of *Garden of Widows*, Nazis were added in as one of the factions available to players. This is noteworthy, as games often sidestep the ethical and moral implication of playable Nazis by omitting the word 'Nazi', the imagery of the swastika, or mentions of Hitler. Giving players the agency to control Nazis and act as them is seen as problematic, because it either trivialises them or flips the moral implications of Nazis from archetypal villains to heroic protagonists (Chapman & Linderoth, 2015). That worry is realised within *Garden of Widows*, as the inclusion of Nazis as an explicitly-named faction attracted right-wing extremists into an online space that they had previously ignored. While the presence of right-wing extremists in both videogame spaces and online spaces is not a new phenomenon (see Conway et al., 2019; Massanari, 2024; Wells et al., 2024), *Agony of a Dying MMO* suggests that the same aspects of game design that create communities for marginalised players can also create community for extremists. Likewise, it suggests that explicit representations of various identities can serve as factors that attract people who identify with them.

In other words, the use of *Garden of Widows* as a framing device suggests that representational features, aspects of game design, and user interfaces in MMOs all come together to create social affordances for their players. In particular, they allow like-minded players to find each other, form community, and make friendships, which results in the creation of safe spaces for some and unsafe spaces for others, as hate groups and minority groups share the same social affordances the game offers. This conflict, however, highlights a metacommentary on the types of people who play MMOs through the use of *Garden of Widows* as a framing device: MMOs are online social spaces that provide solace to people who might be marginalised for their identities or fringe opinions, where they can find others they can open up to, for better or for worse.

Conclusion

The suicides depicted in *Agony of a Dying MMO* emphasise the connections between suicide and excessive play of MMOs described in previous research. *Agony of a Dying MMO* absorbs the discourses surrounding the risks of Gaming Disorder and turns them into aesthetic discourse through its explicitly, implicitly, and jokingly suicidal characters. Despite representing suicide communication events, rather than actual suicides, *Agony of a Dying MMO*'s suicidal characters seem to serve the function of the "suicidal other", characters that are not part of a cultural hegemony and who are differentiated by their suicidal actions as mad, irrational, deviant, or aberrant (Kosonen, 2015). *Agony of a Dying MMO*'s representation of suicide further stigmatises Gaming Disorder as a form of madness or irrationality, and yet it seems to serve as a cautionary tale against excessive play.

Despite seemingly stigmatising Gaming Disorder, the game is compassionate about why someone might find solace in MMOs: the actual loss at the heart of *Agony of a Dying MMO* is not the loss of *Garden of Widows* as a game; it is the loss of *Garden of Widows* as a social space and of the social connections it enabled. This loss becomes evident through the framing device of the final hours of an MMO and the player's agency within it. While the game is closing down, the player never gets to engage with *Garden of Widows* as a game, only as an observer to various players socialising. The model of MMOs presented in *Agony of a Dying MMO* is highly social. This conception of MMOs as social spaces is not particularly new (Eklund & Johansson, 2010; Lehdonvirta, 2010; Ramirez, 2018; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; Taylor, 2006), but *Agony of a Dying MMO*'s use of a fictional MMO as a framing device reveals social affordances and limitations on communication within MMOs. In particular, the three scenes I analysed revealed:

1. that the chat boxes of MMOs, in conjunction with the frame of the game, can turn seemingly serious statements into jokes;
2. that MMOs have a set of communicative tools that are not always presented as such, like the act of logging out, which serves to punctuate the finality of a statement; and
3. that MMOs enable player authenticity by enabling connection through multiple social forms imposed as part of the game's design—guilds, factions, friend lists.

These communicative affordances are changed through their framing: the final hours of service of an MMO are presented both as a space for loss and as a space of communicative possibility. In particular, the quasi-apocalyptic framing of the game is used as an enabler for direct suicide communication. The suicide communication events are also complicated by the different communicative tools used to utter them and the contexts they manifest in: they are either presented as jokes,

imbued with a worrying sense of finality, or enabled through a complex interplay of social forms created by game design choices. This representation suggests that virtual online spaces—including but not limited to MMOs—provide unique opportunities and alibis for uttering suicide communications directly. The face-threatening aspect of direct suicide communications (cf. Owen et al., 2012) is overridden by the imminent dissolution of the social network of the game. Further research into how suicide communication events typically manifest in online games is necessary to assess the real-life validity of this representation.

Similarly, fictional videogames as framing devices within videogames present a similar meta-referential commentary on videogames in the real world as other types of fictional games, as Gualeni & Fassone (2023) suggested. This meta-referentiality is still present when fictional videogames are used as framing devices, despite their semi-playable nature (cf. Gualeni & Fassone, 2023, pp. 28–29), because they still retain a sense of fictional incompleteness (Gualeni & Fassone, 2023, p. 28). Future research should test the limits of this approach with videogames that use more complete fictional videogames as framing devices.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Academy of Finland project Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies (CoE-GameCult, 353266) and by a research grant from the Kone Foundation (202405656).

References

- Ali, N. S., Qadir, S., Alsoubai, A., De Choudhury, M., Razi, A., & Wisniewski, P. J. (2024). "I'm gonna KMS:" From imminent risk to youth joking about suicide and self-harm via social media. *Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '24)*. ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3613904.3642489>
- Ask, K., & Abidin, C. (2018). My life is a mess: Self-deprecating relatability and collective identities in the memification of student issues. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(6), 834–850. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1437204>
- Ballard, M. E., & Welch, K. M. (2017). Virtual warfare: Cyberbullying and cyber-victimization in MMOG play. *Games and Culture*, 12(5), 466–491. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015592473>

- Burke, K. (1941). Four master tropes. *The Kenyon Review*, 3(4), 421–438. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4332286>
- Cabiria, J. (2008). Virtual world and real world permeability: Transference of positive benefits for marginalized gay and lesbian populations. *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.4101/jvwr.v1i1.284>
- Cash, S. J., Thelwall, M., Peck, S. N., Ferrell, J. Z., & Bridge, J. A. (2013). Adolescent suicide statements on MySpace. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 16(3), 166–174. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0098>
- Chapman, A., & Linderoth, J. (2015). Exploring the limits of play: A case study of representations of Nazism in games. In T. E. Mortensen, J. Linderoth, & A. M. L. Brown (Eds.), *The dark side of game play: Controversial issues in playful environments*, pp. 137–153. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315738680>
- Chen, K. H., Oliffe, J. L., & Kelly, M. T. (2018). Internet gaming disorder: An emergent health issue for men. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 12(4), 1151–1159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988318766950>
- Cole, S. H., & Hooley, J. M. (2013). Clinical and personality correlates of MMO gaming: anxiety and absorption in problematic internet use. *Social Science Computer Review*, 31(4), pp. 424-436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439312475280>.
- Consalvo, M., & Paul, C. A. (2019). *Real games: What's legitimate and what's not in contemporary videogames*. MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/12109.001.0001>
- Conway, M., Scrivens, R., & Macnair, L. (2019). *Right-wing extremists' persistent online presence: History and contemporary trends*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19623>
- Crenshaw, N., & Nardi, B. (2016). "It was more than just the game, it was the community": Social affordances in online games. *49th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)*, 3781–3790. <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2016.471>.
- Dutton, N. T. (2007). *Participatory quitting: Quitting texts and World of Warcraft player culture* [Master's thesis, Ohio University]. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ohiou1172851023
- Egli, E. A., & Meyers, L. S. (1984). The role of video game playing in adolescent life: Is there reason to be concerned? *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*, 22(4), 309–312. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03333828>
- Eklund, L., & Ask, K. (2014). The strenuous task of maintaining and making friends: Tensions between play and friendship in MMOs. *Proceedings of DiGRA 2013: DeFragging Game Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.26503/dl.v2013i1.686>

- Eklund, L., & Johansson, M. (2010). Social play? A study of social interaction in temporary group formation (PUG) in *World of Warcraft*. *DiGRA Nordic '10: Proceedings of the 2010 International DiGRA Nordic Conference: Experiencing Games: Games, Play, and Players*. <https://doi.org/10.26503/dl.v2010i1.504>
- Erevik, E. K., Landrø, H., Mattson, Å. L., Kristensen, J. H., Kaur, P., & Pallesen, S. (2022). Problem gaming and suicidality: A systematic literature review. *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.abrep.2022.100419>
- Frow, J. (1982). The literary frame. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 16(2), 25–30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3332274>
- Fulginiti, A., Pahwa, R., Frey, L. M., Rice, E., & Brekke, J. S. (2015). What factors influence the decision to share suicidal thoughts? A multilevel social network analysis of disclosure among individuals with serious mental illness. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 46(4), 398–412. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.12224>
- Gualeni, S., & Fassone, R. (2023). *Fictional games: A philosophy of worldbuilding and Imaginary play*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Harris, K. M., McLean, J. P., & Sheffield, J. (2014). Suicidal and online: How do online behaviors inform us of this high-risk population? *Death Studies*, 38(6), 387–394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2013.768313>
- Heath, M. (2021). NO NEED TO YELL: A prosodic analysis of writing in all caps. *Proceedings of the 44th Annual Penn Linguistics Conference*. <https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/45306>
- Heintz, J. (1979). Reference and inference in fiction. *Poetics*, 8(1–2), 85–99. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X\(79\)90016-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(79)90016-0)
- Hughes, S. (Version 3.8, 2021). *Agony of a dying MMO* [Microsoft Windows 10]. Digital game developed by Salem Hughes, published by Salem Hughes. <https://saalem-hughes.itch.io/agony-of-a-dying-mmo>
- Jauss, H. R. (1970). Literary history as a challenge to literary theory (E. Benzinger, Trans.). *New Literary History*, 2(1), 7–37. (Original work published 1967). <https://doi.org/10.2307/468585>
- Jones, D. (1948). Differences between spoken and written language. *Le Maître Phonétique*, 26(63), 1–8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44705274>
- Kagen, M. (2022). *Wandering games*. MIT Press.
- Karhulahti, V.-M. (2020). *Esport play: Anticipation, attachment, and addiction in psycholudic development*. Bloomsbury Academic.

- Klastrup, L. (2008). What makes *World of Warcraft* a world?: A note on death and dying. In H. G. Corneliussen & J. W. Rettberg (Eds.), *Digital culture, play, and identity: A World of Warcraft reader* (pp. 143–166). MIT Press.
- Koga, Y., Kawano, K., & Kawashima, D. (2025). Does video game play elevate suicide risk?: A cross-sectional study of Japanese young adults. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 67(1), 49–61. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpr.12442>
- Kosonen, H. (2015). The death of the others and the taboo: Suicide represented. *Thanatos*, 4(1), 25–56. <https://journal.fi/thanatos/article/view/137417>
- Latakienė, J., Skruibis, P., Dadašev, S., Grižas, A., Dapševičiūtė, I., & Gailienė, D. (2016). “They don’t take it seriously”: Perceived reactions of surrounding people to suicide communication. *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 24(3), 123–136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1054137315589691>
- Lau, K. J. (2017). Masculinity and melancholia at the virtual end: Leaving the world (of *Warcraft*). *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 28(3), 44–66. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-4260531>
- Lehdonvirta, V. (2010). Virtual worlds don’t exist: Questioning the dichotomous approach in MMO studies. *Game Studies*, 10(1). <https://www.gamestudies.org/1001/articles/lehdonvirta>
- Lin, H., & Sun, C.-T. (2003). Problems in simulating social reality: Observations on a MUD construction. *Simulation & Gaming*, 34(1), 69–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878102250607>
- Massanari, A. L. (2024). *Gaming democracy: How Silicon Valley leveled up the far right*. MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/14531.001.0001>
- McCutcheon, L. E., & Campbell, J. D. (1986). The impact of video game playing on academic performance at a community college. *Community Junior College Research Quarterly of Research and Practice*, 10(1), 59–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0361697860100105>
- McKenna, B., & Chughtai, H. (2020). Resistance and sexuality in virtual worlds: An LGBT perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.106199>
- Nagenborg, M., & Hoffstadt, C. (2009). A life no longer worth playing: Some remarks on in-game suicide. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, 1(2), 83–95. <https://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.1.2.83/1>
- Nolan, F. (2020). Intonation. In B. Aarts, A. McMahon, L. Hinrichs (Eds.), *The handbook of English linguistics* (pp. 385–405). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119540618.ch20>

- Owen, G., Belam, J., Lambert, H., Donovan, J., Rapport, F., & Owens, C. (2012). Suicide communication events: Lay interpretation of the communication of suicidal ideation and intent. *Social Science & Medicine*, 75(2), 419–428. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.02.058>
- Poor, N., & Skoric, M. (2016). Play together, stay together? Community cohesion and stability in an MMO. *2016 49th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)*, 2266–2275. <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2016.283>
- Ramirez, F. A. (2018). From good associates to true friends: An exploration of friendship practices in massively multiplayer online games. In K. Lakkaraju, G. Sukthankar, & R. T. Wigand (Eds.), *Social Interactions in virtual worlds: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 62–79). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316422823.004>
- Ruotsalainen, M., & Meriläinen, M. (2023). Young video game players' self-identified toxic gaming behaviour: An interview study. *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*, 14(1), 147–173. <https://doi.org/10.7557/23.7270>
- Saleous, H., & Gergely, M. (2023). Uninstall, noob!: Views on rampant toxicity in online gaming. *2023 IEEE Intl. Conf on Dependable, Autonomic and Secure Computing, Intl. Conf. on Pervasive Intelligence and Computing, Intl. Conf. on Cloud and Big Data Computing, Intl. Conf. on Cyber Science and Technology Congress (DASC/PiCom/CBDCoM/CyberSciTech)*, 183–190. <https://doi.org/10.1109/DASC/PiCom/CBDCoM/Cy59711.2023.10361444>
- Smith, N., & Linker, S. (2021). Suicide-memes as exemplars of the everyday inauthentic relationship with death. *Mortality*, 26(4), 408–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2021.1987668>
- Soper, W. B., & Miller, M. J. (1983). Junk-time junkies: An emerging addiction among students. *The School Counselor*, 31(1), 40–43. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23900931>
- Sorensen, R. A. (1991). Fictional incompleteness as vagueness. *Erkenntnis*, 34(1), 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00239432>
- Spain, J. W., & Vega, G. (2005). Sony online entertainment: *EverQuest*® or EverCrack? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 58, 3–6. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25123495>
- Spates, K., Ye, X., & Johnson, A. (2018). “I just might kill myself”: Suicide expressions on Twitter. *Death Studies*, 44(3), 189–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1531085>

- Steinkuehler, C. A., & Williams, D. (2006). Where everybody knows your (screen) name: Online games as “third places”. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(4), 885–909. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00300.x>
- Taylor, T. L. (2006). *Play between worlds: Exploring online game culture*. MIT Press.
- Van de Mosselaer, N., & Gualeni, S. (2022). The fictional incompleteness of digital gameworlds. *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*, 6(1), 61–94. <https://doi.org/10.26503/todigra.v6i1.130>
- Walton, K. L. (1990). *Mimesis as make-believe: On the foundations of the representational arts*. Harvard University Press.
- Wasserman, D. (2016). The suicidal process. In D. Wasserman (Ed.), *Suicide: An Unnecessary Death* (pp. 27–38). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780198717393.003.0003>
- Webber, N. (2020). Discourses of departure in massively multiplayer online roleplaying games (MMORPGs). In A. L. Brackin & N. Guyot (Eds.), *Cultural perspectives of Video games: from designer to player* (pp. 55–68). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848881617_007
- Wells, G., Romhanyi, A., Reitman, J. G., Gardner, R., Squire, K., & Steinkuehler C. (2024). Right-wing extremism in mainstream games: A review of the literature. *Games and Culture*, 19(4), 469–492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231167214>
- WHO. (n.d.). *Gaming disorder*. <https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/gaming-disorder>
- Wildman, N. & Woodward, R. (2018). Interactivity, fictionality, and incompleteness. In J. Robson & G. Tavinor (Eds.), *The aesthetics of videogames* (pp. 112–127). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315210377>
- Zhengchuan, X., Turel, O., & Yuan, Y. (2012). Online game addiction among adolescents: motivation and prevention factors. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 21(3), 321–340. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejis.2011.56>