The Pretence Awareness Contexts and Oscillating Nature of Coaching Frames

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ABSTRACT
Drawing on data from three studies, this paper argues that the learning and teaching of player coaching is an important frame of temporary motivation for players during gameplay. Furthermore, play framed temporarily as a coaching experience exhibits what Fine (1983) called the oscillating nature of engrossment and operates under the same kind of pretence awareness context (Glaser & Strauss, 1964) that he described in relation to role-playing games. We argue the teaching of a new game, or parts of a game, is a fleeting yet recurring experience, with participants oscillating between regular mundane everyday play and coaching new players. The coach and other players are often expected to continue play as if they had not seen any strategically important information during their time coaching and learning. This is of course a pretence, the implications of which are explored.

Keywords
Frame Analysis, Multiplayer games, Oscillating Engrossment, Negotiation

INTRODUCTION
Players must learn how to play new games. While sometimes players in a multiplayer game may all be learning the game together, more frequently, levels of expertise are unequal. In order to facilitate quicker learning, players will frequently assume the role of coach, negotiating the interests and knowledge of both players. Drawing on data from three studies, this paper argues that we can see the learning and teaching of player coaching as an important frame of temporary motivation for players during gameplay. Furthermore, play framed temporarily as a coaching experience exhibits what Fine (1983) called the oscillating nature of engrossment and operates under the same kind of pretence awareness context he described in relation to role-playing games. We argue the teaching of a new game or parts of a game is a fleeting yet recurring experience, with participants oscillating between regular mundane everyday play and coaching new players.

In this paper, we explore Erving Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974) as applied to games and the understanding of gameplay by Gary Alan Fine (1983) and other more recent scholars. We conclude by suggesting the possibilities for coaching and learning

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as motivational appeals of digital games, missing from contemporary accounts. A detailed description of Frame Analysis and associated work is thus warranted at this point.

LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND

Fine's (1983) work, which this paper extends, is largely based on Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974). Frame Analysis is concerned with the organisation of experience, how people understand and make sense of social situations and what individuals collectively believe the 'definition of the situation' (the frame) to be at a given time. It is a rough working consensus about 'what is really going on'. As Goffman stated, "definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify." (Goffman, 1974, p.10–11)

Goffman's work is built upon earlier commentary in which can be seen the genesis of *Frame Analysis*. Goffman's use of the word 'frame', for example, was inspired by the work of Gregory Bateson (1955) and his broader work on play. Bateson described a play frame with regard to animals making nips and not bites – the idea of there being unseriousness and seriousness, with frame as a psychological concept. Goffman was also influenced by the work of Glaser & Strauss (1964) on types of awareness contexts, who were concerned with how individuals may or may not be aware of each others' identities. Sometimes all parties in an encounter are fully aware of the identities of others, yet they operate under the pretence that they are not. The bulk of the text of Frame Analysis is concerned with the minutia of when people frame situations incorrectly or inappropriately in some way, or when framing breaks down, getting the wrong definition of the situation or not knowing what the rough group consensus is:

> I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: "What is it that's going on here?" Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion and doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way individuals proceed to get on with the affairs at hand. (Goffman, 1974, p. 8).

Goffman argued that any activity is perceived by its participants in terms of a primary framework of rules, conventions and premises which provide the basis of 'the definition of the situation'. Such frameworks can undergo systematic kinds of transformations known as keyings. A keying can be seen as a new definition of a situation based on a known existing frame (Goffman, 1974, p. 45). For example, a play-fight is a keying of a serious fight to the death. The usual way of playing a first person shooter, in line with the developers' intentions, can be keyed as a childish game of hide and seek; or perhaps keyed as a practice round for new players (both of which we frequently observed in our studies). Such situations are keyings of what members of a community may consider to be the usual way of playing the game – a systematic transformation of what is really going on for all the players. Goffman also argued for another basic kind of transformation, that of fabrications. Fabrications are intentional efforts to manage activity so others are induced into false belief about what is really going on (Goffman, 1974, p. 83–122). Examples include pranks, scams or cons and some forms of jokes. The stooge/s frame the situation as a normal everyday activity, but the prankster/s know what is really going on, until all is revealed, the framing of the situation changes and everyone has a good laugh.

Fine (1983, p.182) saw games as "quintessential" examples for frame analysis because players voluntarily engross themselves with other realms of experience, such

as fantasy role playing. Although Frame Analysis tended to describe direct face-to-face encounters, its tenets can usefully be applied to a digitally-mediated game context. Chayko's (1993) paper demonstrated the applicability of Frame Analysis to non-face to face digitally mediated settings, in this case, the headset virtual reality systems of the 1990s. The paper argued that Frame Analysis, as originally written, did not adequately take into account the very real consequences of synthetic experiences (for example, vomiting in a virtual reality flight simulator). Wanenchak too (2010), argued convincingly that Fine's version of Frame Analysis (among other sociological theories) is applicable to interactions which do not occur in a face–to–face setting such as digital games. However, Wanenchak used the case of an online text–based role playing game and showed that some aspects of Frame Analysis may need to be reconstructed in online contexts and did not go as far as to suggest the applicability of Frame Analysis to other kinds of games and left this argument to future research. Others (Calleja, 2007; Crawford, 2009; Consalvo, 2009; Deterding, 2009a; Deterding, 2009b; Hung, 2011; Linderoth et al. 2012; Pargman & Jakobsson 2008) have applied Frame Analysis to digital games, demonstrating its amenability to this field of study and the potential insights made possible by this approach.

Fine's extensions

In 'Shared Fantasy' (1983), Fine examined the social interaction of tabletop role–playing games such as 'Dungeons and Dragons'. This work is perhaps the most comprehensive and useful extension of Goffman's Frame Analysis for the study of games and is used by many of the authors mentioned above. This section discusses the merits of utilising Fine's (1983) version of Frame Analysis as a sociological underpinning to the study of games and will be relevant to the later discussion of our study results, as we apply these ideas to teaching and coaching.

Fine's work focused on collective fantasies and the artful ability and adeptness of players to swiftly and aptly switch between a social situation, the fantasy world and the frame of game rules. For example, Fine reported on players quickly moving focus between different frames: speaking in–character (in a roleplaying manner: "*Yea merrily, what doth yonder inn...*") and speaking to each other as players, about the rules of the game and how they ought to be interpreted or negotiated, sometimes within a single sentence (e.g., "*…doth yonder inn – where are we? That's right - into thy fair grandeth lodgings…*").

Fine covered one aspect of Frame Analysis to which Goffman did not give enough consideration: the extent of awareness between frames that was socially allowable, in particular when there were framed '*selves*' in operation (Fine, 1983, p 181-229), for example, the operation of a player's character persona of an Orc and the player's personal persona of a carefree individual. Given the large number of possible transformations of experience, Fine chose to attend primarily to three levels of meaning (1983, p. 186-242). Firstly, in line with Goffman was the "primary framework" – an untransformed (keyed or fabricated) understanding of the social world which individuals typically shared to some degree. Secondly, the game context frame is a frame with '*players*' rather than '*people*'. This is where the 'definition of the situation' consists of the understanding of written rules and the structure of the game, as well as norms and other such unspoken rules. Finally, Fine suggested the gaming frame, which could be keyed into fantasy gaming, where there is a distinction between '*player*' and '*character*'. Players control their characters, while at the same time "being" their characters in the sense that they enact them. People tend to engage in role embracement (Goffman, 1961, p. 106), rather than becoming the role, in order to allow distancing oneself from one's role, so that a failure of the character is not taken to mean a failure of the person (*ibid*, p. 112). Pargman & Jakobsson (2008) saw this in Goffman's earlier work in 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' as being

about working with expectations of audiences to be seen as fulfilling certain roles (Goffman, 1959). Pargman & Jakobsson (2008, p. 237–238) used the example of a player easily discussing rules, going to a bathroom and role playing without much confusion between the various frames involved. Using Fine's three frames, Pargman & Jakobsson took cheating (in the manner that Consalvo discussed it (2007)) as an example of this easy frame-switching: the individual switches between all three frames, playing as a character (fantasy frame) and getting frustrated, thinking about finding a walkthrough (the game frame), and opening up a search engine to seek an answer (primary frame or paramount reality). With these multiple identities between frames come important distinctions between what a player knows and what a player's character ought to know.

Awareness Contexts

While explaining the fantasy gaming frame, Fine drew on Glaser & Strauss' (1964) types of awareness contexts, the paper Goffman had originally cited as influential to Frame Analysis (as above). Glaser & Strauss argued individuals in a situation may or may not be aware of each others' identities, may not be aware of how others view their own identities, or may have one awareness but operate under the pretence that they do not hold this awareness (e.g. they pretend not to know that a person works in the deplorable banking sector for the sake of making a dinner party enjoyable, even if this has been made perfectly clear by others beforehand). Fine applied these ideas to what he observed during tabletop fantasy role playing games, finding Glaser and Strauss's analysis incomplete, as they only spoke of the awareness of other individuals and not "the awareness of *selves* and the knowledge of selves in other frames." (Fine, 1983, p. 187). For example, a player may know how to navigate using a modern Global Positioning System (GPS), but a player's ancient wizard character would probably not know, or even be able to hazard a guess as to how to use such a contraption. Conversely, a player does not know the intimate details of how magic works (or fails to work), but a wizard character ought to know, as this is what wizards usually do for a living. Hence, individuals act under pretence awareness between the different *selves* they enact or embrace. The pretence is related then to the physical reality of the situation:

> The character is supposed to operate under the constraints of a closed awareness context with regards to his animator, although this is of course a pretence. Because player, person and character *share a brain*, this separation of knowledge on occasion is ignored. (Fine, 1983, p.188, emphasis added)

Fine identified several kinds of situation in which self awareness contexts could become problematic, mainly those when a closed awareness context for an individual amongst his or her selves was expected to be observed. These included:

1. *Character awareness of personal reality*. For example, a person knows about the mechanics of dice rolls, but the wizard a person enacts ought not to know.

2. *Character awareness of player reality*. For example, a player knows other players are plotting against her character due to her witnessing a discussion about the rules for poison and setting traps amongst the other players. This talk is framed as part of the game frame and hence the player's character ought not to suspect such a plot. See also work done concurrently with this research (Carter, Gibbs & Harrop, 2012) on the conceptual confusion over metagaming.

3. *Player unawareness of character reality*. For example, (as above) a wizard character of the fantasy frame knows how to perform a magical ritual but a player does not.

It is with the social acceptableness of ignoring or partially ignoring the pretence that we find the most debate and negotiation of rules, conventions and their general experience by players as they shift frames. Given this pretence awareness and his extensive fieldwork, Fine argued players up and down key the situation swiftly – bringing events framed as part of the primary framework into the fantasy world and vice versa. Hence, with this swift up and down keying of events occurring even within a single sentence, Fine argued for the *oscillating nature of engrossment*. This is the changing awareness between frames and the attention they are given; in other words the involvement of the individual in a frame, as opposed to their boredom in a frame. Linderoth (2005) applied this 'oscillating' nature of role playing to the meanings ascribed to digital avatars by users, reflecting again the ideas of role embracement rather than role becoming, particularly as children talked about the times "I" died or times the avatar died. Framing moves fluidly and frequently as the social situation unfolds. One moment individuals are focused on utterances framed as talk within a fantasy world, the next they are focused on talk of where the nearest pizza place is located as the people present could 'really do with eating something in the next half hour or so'. These ideas are powerful and have, as we will see, the potential to be applied to non-role playing game situations, such as coaching and learning, just as Fine did with fabrications.

Fabrications

We now return to Goffman's notion of fabrications, the "intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on" (Goffman, 1974, p. 83). Goffman (1974, p. 86–123) classified fabrications based on how the operatives (those fabricating) viewed the final outcome. For example, 'benign fabrications' (*ibid*, p. 87–103) are either perpetrated in the interest of those contained, such as an intervention against a drug addict, or roughly neutral to the interests of the contained parties, such as a prank or joke of some kind to be taken in good humour. Other classifications, such as exploitative fabrications (*ibid,* p. 103–123), are intended to benefit the "private interests" of the operatives. One benign fabrication Goffman considered was 'playful deceit', where people are deceived for fun, in a mostly harmless manner (*ibid*, p. 87–92). For example, puns, riddles, surprise parties and practical jokes. It should be noted that 'playful deceit' in games that is purely strategic is not a fabrication, as bluffing is clearly part of the game of poker (Goffman, 1974, p. 102–103).

These classifications by Goffman echo many concerns and preoccupations of contemporary digital game studies. 'Grief play' is perhaps the most pertinent here. Foo & Koivisto (2004) described the contemporary literature definitions on grief play as "play styles where a player intentionally disrupts the gaming experience of other players" (p. 245-246), yet they also argued for the importance of understanding player intent in any analysis of these behaviours. Authors such as Bakioglu (2009) have examined both playful ('benign fabrications' in Goffman's terms) and destructive ('exploitative fabrications') griefer activities in Second Life. Fine (1983) brought his work back to fabrications by providing the examples of spies, who play as fantasy characters in their own way, and actors/storytellers who play multiple personas at any given time; each swiftly and fluidly moving engrossment or attention to each of the frames involved. Fine extended such extraordinary professional activities to the domain of everyday life (and indeed the presentation of self in that regard), where

"we are all keyers and fabricators" (1983, p. 195) even though the identities in action are less distinct than those of spies.

Many of the authors described above have made the case for utilising Fine's (1983) work on Frame Analysis and for utilising Frame Analysis more generally as a sociological underpinning to the study of games and playful online activities. Fine chose to only attend to three frames in his analysis, while others such as Calleja (2007) and Stenros (2010) expanded and refined the frames, yet drifted away from the framing of different *selves*; a drift this paper seeks to address. Given this gap, we can begin to ask what other frames are frequently in operation during play. How do such frames operate, do they exhibit the same kind of pretence and/or 'oscillating nature of engrossment' or should they be considered in an entirely different manner? Our analysis from three studies led us to seek an answer to these questions in relation to coaching and learning in gameplay as it emerged from our data.

METHODS AND APPROACH

Data was drawn from three studies on how groups of players negotiate the rules and experience of gameplay. The study design involved three case studies which built upon each other. The first was an exploratory study using the case of Defence of the Ancients (DotA) – a game modification that went through many versions and was selected for the known complexities of how players frame their playing experiences and utilise different social rules for play. The second study concerned the negotiation of loot distribution (in-game items) in the massively multiplayer online role playing game World of Warcraft and how this occurred in the context of changes to the game mechanics. The final study focused primarily on fabrication behaviours across different games, while also examining the different keyings players made in order to gain a complete picture of play negotiation. In total, there were 49 participants with interview times averaging an hour. Many participants were interviewed multiple times. The studies used ethnographic data gathering techniques with the primary data collection tool of semi-structured open-ended interviews and group interviews. These primary data gathering techniques were augmented by observation and recording of play sessions as well as the examination of paratexts (Consalvo, 2007) such as forums, Youtube videos, and player created art and fiction. Finally, detailed notes from the researcher's own playing experiences of the games in question (where relevant) were incorporated into the analysis. Data analysis was conducted using an approach informed by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This led us to coaching and learning as interesting aspects of the way players frame their playful activities.

BACKGROUND AND RESULTS

We begin the discussion of our results with a quick description of our first case study, DotA. DotA is a very popular mod (modification) of Blizzard's game Warcraft III that came to be a game in its own right. It has a highly passionate player community and the negotiation of which rules to play by or bend can be very passionate and extended. DotA has gone through many versions since its creation, with the community actively debating which modifications to make and giving feedback concerning previous changes. DotA can be broadly classified as a battle arena tower defence game, played by up to ten people at a time on two opposing teams. The gameplay of DotA is incredibly deep, with around 90-100 playable characters and 120 items which can be purchased in different combinations (depending on the version), but with this depth comes a notoriously high learning curve of complexity for new players:

> At first, of course, I really sucked at it, like everyone else does when you start playing DotA. *Bernie*

With such high learning curves comes the need to teach and coach new players.

Coaching the New Player

In DotA, we observed loose conventions around "going easy" on new and learning players in some situations. Experienced players reported on how they would frequently deal a large amount of damage to new players but not kill them outright, so that they would have the opportunity to learn from whatever tactical mistake they had made – especially in relation to the 'cat and mouse' manoeuvring that is typical in DotA gameplay. Experienced players wavered when going easy on new players:

> If I see them I will hit them. But if they come close enough I will attack. But if they keep a certain distance from me I'll leave them alone. I give them a fair go. If they are aggressive and playing and come attack me then I'll have no mercy on them. They need to be taught a lesson. They need to have humility <Laughs>. *Virgil*

Those being taught were certainly aware they were being treated differently from experienced players, but often kept quiet. In LAN settings, many new players would have their screens glanced at by experienced players in order to 'keep an eye on them'. Importantly, this frequently occurred regardless of which sides the teacher and pupil were on – with help and explanations concerning items often coming from the opposition. There was often an expectation, from experienced and less experienced players alike, that information gleaned during such glancing was not to be used to the advantage of the senior player, for example, in order to effectively ambush or "gank" a new player. This expectation applied also to information gleaned through overhearing the explanations or instructions given to new players. But such teaching experiences and explanations of the game mechanics were often fleeting. The games were more likely to be played competitively as matches progressed, with jumps back to explanations or the granting of reprieves if or when needed.

Glancing at the screen of a new player was not limited to DotA. At a festive and domestic LAN party we observed a game of Age of Empires (AoE) which also typified the experience. The participants were sprawled around a living room, allowing for "screen cheating". Kirrily, a player new to this edition of AoE needed only to glance up to see Ellie's screen, which was observed to occur three or four times during the festivities. The others noticed her doing this, but did not point it out, because (as was indicated in later interviews) she was still learning the game. The first part of the game they played involved many questions regarding different units and aspects of the game, again requiring a screen to be glanced at and information to be gleaned. Many of these questions came from Kirrily but there were also clarification questions from others, requesting some help from their friends. This led to a strange passage of play where the players constantly demand to be left alone, as Ellie explained, "We spend a lot of time shouting 'Don't attack me yet, I'm not ready' (even if we are kind of ready) <Laughs>". Anika and Kirrily later expressed similar sentiments concerning being ready to fend off an attack, yet requesting to be left alone, despite the knowledge of others that an attack could be fended off. But there was also more going on here, with the constant probing of other players to determine what was socially acceptable and when it was appropriate for the conflict to properly begin.

A regular event in the game was someone "just walking through" or claiming to be "just walking through", while moving their units through another players territory. Often the game arena of forested terrain and waterways needed to be explored or an army needed to be marched past an opponent's base of operations in order to get to a

game-based resource such as gold or lumber. This activity would often be accompanied by an exchange such as this one from the video recording of the session:

> Just walking through. Stop attacking me. *Sarah*
> I can't help it. They [troops] do it automatically if I'm not looking. *Anika*

There was a lot of healthy distrust and suspicion in these interactions. It is true that the units would automatically attack, however, some of the players were expected to be at a level of skill to easily prevent this from occurring. Everyone in the group allowed auto-attacking to occur on a semi-deliberate basis at least once during the match. The game mechanics in this instance were fighting against all the players (particularly the advice of the experienced players) who all wanted to create an experience where they were largely "going easy" on each other, being polite and not taking too many liberties with uneasy truces. Furthermore, there was the sense that those in the role of pupil in the cases described above was also aware and fully understood that the others were going easy on them or that others were acting as they did as part of their tutoring.

It should first be noted that not everything is helpful positivity with the coaching and teaching of new players. This was especially true when it came to DotA, as most matches are played between strangers physically distanced from one another online. One participant (Sean) described how in his first couple of games he was told to "go die in a fire of cancer" simply because he had not yet mastered the game. He did not persist in playing. Similar sentiments were expressed for the other games we studied. However, online play was not all asocial, with the use of remote voice-based communication between friends and strangers also allowing for some detailed coaching, and text communication for more concise lessons from time to time.

Pranking an Otherwise Experienced Player

Engrossment in teaching and gaining competency was not limited to the new or relatively new players. Perhaps unique to digital games are the frequent release of new versions which alter the abilities and statistics of the playable characters (i.e., changes to the game mechanics which altered the 'balance' of the game). Such was the relentless patching of DotA that experienced players would become semi–novices when they ceased playing the game for as little as a few weeks. On returning to the game, they would be flung into competency building situations, as they went about "testing out" new heroes and items for the first time, while the relatively more experienced players were expected to go *somewhat* easy on them. In observation sessions, the engrossment between serious competition and bringing players "up to speed" often shifted. This unique situation allowed for pranking of the experienced players while in their vulnerable and unknowledgeable state, at least for a short time. For example, knowledgeable individuals would purposefully explain the operation or effect of an item or hero incorrectly and use this to in-game advantage by "countering" (choosing a strategy that counters the opponent's strategy) with the purchase of another new item.

In the other games we studied, by far the most common prank-style fabrication was purposefully attacking or otherwise impeding a teammate and then claiming innocence in the matter – more often than not this was done repeatedly and to change or channel the actions of the target. In games like Counter-Strike there are special flash-bang grenades which temporarily blind all those near a small non/low damaging explosion. As one participant explained, "Flash banging your own teammates was something that happened accidentally every so often and then possibly became... less accidental. <Laughs>" *Herman*. Not all fabrications of this kind were as benign when it came to game based consequences. Other kinds of friendly fire incidents were also

common, including simply shooting a teammate repeatedly for no game goal related reason, instead this was often done to get them to take the game less seriously, thus "teaching them a lesson". Errol provided an exemplary example of this, "You can get your friend in a plane and then fly the plane into a wall and eject <Laughs> [...] I do that sometimes. <Laughs>". Errol indicated that there was a slight element of teasing when flying a troop laden plane into a wall, but it was mainly about getting his friends in the game extremely frustrated for a while, something which they also did to him from time to time and not always as direct revenge. Participants frequently indicated they did this kind of activity "Just for a laugh" (Will) in response to a friend or other taking the game "too seriously" by their own standards. This acted as non-explicit encouragement for players to change their behaviour and attitudes.

Billy described a similar example, where purposeful friendly fire incidents occurred in various situations in first person shooters. In particular, he described the repeated killing of a teammate who was taking the game too seriously and continually playing the same ludic role. The teammate's role was to be the sniper, which involved holding a position and using a high–powered long range weapon (which he was very good at), while the other teammates used assault weapons and went off to attack the opposing team's position. When the group lost a round or did poorly the sniper would comment:

> He would say 'what have you guys been doing? I've been sitting here sniping and you guys have been doing nothing' and he would complain and say 'here I am [...] winning for you guys' and that would piss us off. *Billy*

When Billy's team had made it to the opposing team's side of the map, they would turn around and shoot their own sniper:

> The only explanation that we would give him was the whole: 'Sorry, we thought you were the counter terrorist or terrorist' [opposing team] <Pauses> 'Well we didn't know that, sorry about that.' *Billy*

The team would repeatedly do this every five minutes or so in order to playfully provoke their friend, giving the same deadpan response each time. Billy emphasised that this was nothing personal against the person, just a way of having fun and an attempt to coach a "less serious" attitude out of him. This occurred despite such games often actively encouraging sniping due to the balance of the game mechanics of different guns.

Finally, across these games and cases, there are of course, various emic terms which hint at teaching and coaching of new players ('noobs') or otherwise experienced players (pros) encountering a new version of the game for the first time (still referred to as noobs by their peers, but with a dab of irony). Variants and equivalents of such terms should be well known to readers and we will not cover them in detail. There were additional game-specific terms such as feeder in DotA (those who die frequently and feed the levelling of the opposition) which also influenced our thinking on how players framed their experiences.

DISCUSSION

That coaching, teaching, training and learning is a mode or even frame of gameplay is nothing new (Hung, 2011) and many have described the kind of situations we have explored in some detail, usually in relation to some variant of serious games or educational games. What is novel is our consideration of the operation of pretence awareness contexts, with regards to coaching gameplay.

The Pretence of Coaching Frames

We argue that pretence awareness contexts between enacted selves, as described by Fine, can be applied to play framed temporarily as coaching experiences. Those switching between the role of coach and competitive player often are expected to operate under a pretence awareness context between individuals (in the manner described by Glaser & Strauss, 1964) and between their enacted selves (coach and competitor). When playing competitively, we saw how those coaching new players are frequently expected to act as if they had not gained the information acquired during the coaching, such as when players pretend not to have seen the location of a learning player's units while giving them advice on appropriate strategies. Such pretence awareness contexts are similar to those described by Fine with respect to role playing. The roles of coach and competitor can be considered as different enacted selves and meant to operate somewhat separately, despite 'sharing a brain' - just as a player and a player acting as a wizard in Fine's role playing games also 'shared a brain' (p. 188).

When players temporarily framed a game as a coaching and learning experience there were coaching roles and student roles for players to embrace and these were seen in different games with different emic terms ('noob', 'pro', etc). Learning and coaching frames also tend to have their own rules and conventions around behaviours like "taking back" a careless move in the game of Chess or playing an "open hand" round in a game of cards – where experienced players can see the cards of new players and offer friendly advice. In the digital games we explored, this was seen in giving new players "a fair chance" to varying extents.

The Oscillating Nature of Coaching Frames

Fine concluded players get "caught up" in fantasy gaming, meaning their level of engrossment in the activity changes from moment to moment:

> Despite the possibilities for *engrossment* in fantasy gaming, frame shifting occurs frequently — both up–keying (adding laminations to the game world) and down–keying (returning to the players' primary frameworks or to a discussion of the gaming rules). These keyings may be stable, changing the frame for a considerable period of time, but often are *evanescent*. The implications of this are consistent with seeing interactants negotiating reality with each other — a reality that is continually in dynamic tension, subject to shifts in interpersonal definitions. Fine (1983, p. 200, emphasis added)

The frequency of frame switching is linked to the engrossment of participants (Goffman, 1974, p. 345). We can apply these ideas of *evanescence* to coaching and teaching. Consider a simple game of cards when several practice rounds occur. While in the role of teacher, an individual is able to see the open hand of their student in order to advise and explain the rules of the game. As the learning continues, the game is more likely to be keyed to the status of regular mundane play (whatever form that may take for a given community of players), where teachers become regular players and cease coaching. Even after such 'practice rounds' or times are complete, the situations can suddenly be keyed to a learning experience again, when the learner needs to ask a clarifying question such as "*Is this a full house? Is that good?"* much to the irritation of others. Despite such fleeting clarifications, the competent player is still frequently expected by others to jump back to acting and playing as if they do not know the hand of the learning poker player and "go easy" on them. As the rules and expectations become clearer to a new player they get less caught up in learning and coaching and such events tend to become more *evanescent*. This applies equally to our more complicated but analogous digitally mediated examples explained in the

results section, with new players having their screens glanced at ("screen cheating") by their tutors being a somewhat 'flickering' experience.

Having identified an oscillating component of coaching frames and accompanying pretence awareness contexts, what can we take from Fine's work to provide further insight? In other words, so what? Where does such a claim get us other than adding to an existing theory? Our second major contribution comes when we consider what Fine found when the separation of knowledge between enacted selves is partially or sometimes completely ignored. Accidentally or even purposefully operating outside of pretence awareness contexts between selves does not ruin a role-playing game, as Fine explained:

> Slippages of awareness indicate the fragility of the role–playing enterprise–it can easily be subverted. I emphasize, however, that although this subversion damages the nature of the role–playing, it does not destroy the game. This extra information gives the characters an advantage that they would not have if the fantasy situation were the primary framework for their characters–it tarnishes the illusion of the "real fantasy" world, but it doesn't make the game less of a game. (Fine, 1983, p. 192)

Such slippages in both Fine's and our fieldwork often resulted in the most memorable and hilarious moments, such as the pranking of new players when coaching is mixed with a competitive spirit, or when a wizard avoided a poison plot by "hearing" what a player rather than player character had to say about the rules for poisoning. Fine provided the following example from his fieldwork, which serves to highlight how the fluidity and complexity of framing can result in memorable and comical incidents:

> Jerry said that "I" [my character] had gone over to the King's capital city, and on the docks "I" [my character] had met "Barry" [Barry's character]. "Barry" [the person] shakes my hand [my real hand] and says, "Nice to meet you [my character]." "I" [in character] say "Nice to meet you [Barry's character]" to him. Jerry seems surprised and asks: "Don't the two of you know each other?" Barry comments "Not in this game" [Field notes]. (Fine, 1983, p. 201)

As we have seen, this kind of shifting engrossment in learning was not limited to completely new players. With the relentless release of new versions of digital games, experienced players would sometimes not have played for a few versions, thus encountering new playable characters and being in the role of student while their juniors were in the role of teachers. Such a situation is largely unique to digital games. Players may be experiencing a change in the game (perhaps a new version) for the first few times. Board games are learning experiences when players who are new to the game first encounter them (and for a while thereafter), while digital games can be learning experiences each and every time a developer releases a patch. This unique situation for digital games also allows for pranking of the experienced players while in their vulnerable and unknowledgeable state.

Fabrications and Containment

In our research concerning fabrications, the operation of pretence awareness was crucial to understanding the pranking of a new player. In exploring the different organisation and nature of the targets of playful deceit, Goffman (p. 90) considered "corrective hoaxing" – a fun way of making a moral point by some elaborate public hoax, such as the fake announcement of a new kind of miracle cure to expose a lack of fact-checking amongst some journalists. This kind of corrective hoaxing of society has the potential to be applied to the corrective hoaxing of an individual, where other

players are trying to bring them around to a particular way of framing play, as in our repeated 'flash banging' examples. In order to understand the negotiation of rules, we must understand "corrective hoaxing" as a way of pulling individuals around to a socially acceptable way of framing games. The results contained examples on what Goffman called "benign fabrications" and in particular "playful deceit", where people are deceived for fun in a mostly harmless manner (Goffman, 1974, p. 87–92). Those subject to such fabrications are often expected to not take the playful deceit "too seriously" (Goffman, 1974), which was evident in the pranking arising from players who misgauged how casual or hard core a game was to be taken, yet players sometimes revelled in the rage of those contained. Despite the partial goal of correcting or channelling the behaviour of individuals to be in line with what the group expected, the pranking was still *evanescent* in the manner in which Fine described the oscillating nature of engrossment.

Shouting Over the 'Voice' of Absent Designers

Finally, we saw from our studies that sometimes players had to fight against the constant nagging of the game mechanics in order to frame their experience in line with group expectations. Lantz-Andersson & Linderoth (2011) spoke of users seeking the 'voice' of absent designers in order to work out how they were 'expected' to frame questions. In their study on digitally mediated maths education, students tried to determine the intentions of the designers, and allowed this to inform how they answered and framed individual questions. Lantz-Andersson & Linderoth provided an example similar to the following (simplified) task: A question informed students that a runner runs 100 metres in 20 seconds and asks the students how many minutes it would take for the runner to travel 50 kilometres. Students took into account the perceived questioner's intentions for them to simply calculate the numbers as a mathematical problem, rather than taking into account the common sense restraints that a sprinter runs at a different pace than a marathon runner, or that runners become fatigued over time. Lantz-Andersson & Linderoth pointed out this kind of example is sometimes referred to as the "suspension of sense–making" and saw the process of inferring designer intentions as clearing the frame (Goffman, 1974, p. 338). For clarity, frame clearing could more accurately be described as frame clearing–up, as participants in a situation are 'clearing–up' ambiguities as to exactly what is going. Seeking the 'voice' then of absent designers is essentially what those coaching sometimes fought against, bringing in their gaming communities common sense understanding up against game mechanics that pushed players towards constant conflict and away from giving new players a fair chance or allowing players to 'just pass through'.

In summary, our analysis has shown groups often temporarily frame events as coaching experiences, such as with 'practice' rounds of poker. Engagement with teaching and coaching is often *evanescent* and operates under a pretence awareness context similar to that which Fine described. When the pretence breaks down or is partially ignored, there is the potential for pranking new players and, unique to digital games, pranking of otherwise experienced players. With such an enjoyable and compelling aspect of play, it is interesting to note that equivalents of coaching and learning are largely missing from Yee's motivation work (Yee, 2006; Yee, Ducheneaut & Nelson, 2012; Yee et al. 2012). Perhaps it is because of the temporary oscillating nature of learning and coaching that such ideas have been lacking in the motivations and player types research.

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