



Department of Informatics and Media

Master's Programme in Social Sciences,
Digital Media and Society specialization

Two-year Master's Thesis

**‘You cannot mute that someone walks under a
turret and dies’:**

Exploring League of Legends-players' perception,
definitions of toxicity and their effect on everyday life

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of toxicity in the multiplayer online battle arena game, League of Legends, from a player point of view. It also explores how time and space is experienced through gaming related actions to better understand the contextual factors. Along with that this study also aims at understanding how toxicity is perceived by players and how toxicity affects their everyday life in regards to time and space.

A mixed phenomenological framework is applied to explore taken-for-granted experiences and most importantly, to understand how toxicity is perceived by the players. Along with this framework the concepts of time and space are used to analyse the practices of everyday life, gaming practices and routines as well as to gain a better understanding of how toxic behaviours in League of Legends affect everyday life.

This study utilises in-depth semi-structured interviews with 13 participants to gather data in the form of lived experience to better understand how toxicity is perceived by regular players of the game. Results from this study indicate that players perform preparatory routine actions which helps establish a gaming space which alters how space and time is perceived. Within this space other actions are made to make space ‘feel right’. Other findings indicate that toxicity is perceived to be of different grades of seriousness, where the lowest grade consists of behaviours that are deemed as normalised and part of the game and the highest grade invokes feelings of hopelessness and frustration. This study claims that toxic behaviour in League of Legends does not affect everyday life activities but instead can lead to intense frustration and destruction in the constructed gaming space. Finally, this thesis suggests that, due to the complexity of games, toxicity is studied along with corresponding contextual factors to be successfully explored.

Keywords: phenomenology, gaming, League of Legends, toxicity, toxic behaviour, everyday life.

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1. Background

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of how toxicity affects League of Legends players' everyday life. This will be accomplished by conducting interviews with 14 active players (which will from here on out be known as 'participants') which were recruited from a Swedish League of Legends server. The interviews will, among other themes, cover time and space and use the participants' point of view as the vantage point for gathering data. The participants were recruited from the Swedish Facebook group 'League of Legends Sverige' and their Discord channel, these are online communities and the members share a passion for the game. Throughout this thesis 'toxicity' and 'toxic behaviour' will be used interchangeably.

In this chapter I will provide a short introduction about the relevancy of studying gaming and specifically toxicity. Furthermore, I will introduce the game League of Legends and finally present the research questions.

Being a more prominent culture than ever, gaming has gathered the attention of researchers who have done studies about various different games and phenomena within these games such as emotion regulation (Kou & Gui 2020), toxicity (Deslauriers et al. 2020; Kou 2020), some researchers has opted for another aspect of the gaming cultures such as capital and participatory culture of gaming communities (Hills 2018; Jenkins 2006).

1.2 What is League of Legends?

The purpose of this chapter is to present the structure of how the game is played and what the goal of the game is. I have played the game before the interviews were conducted and way before I even considered applying for a university. Because of my experience with the game I know a lot about the actions which can be done in the game, abbreviations and 'Swenglish' words created to describe certain things within the game. I decided to present LoL in this chapter to make the analysis easier to comprehend. I want to keep this chapter

rather short so I will refrain from going in-depth into what is essentially a complex game with many different parameters, instead I will stick to the basics and also explain terminology which will be brought up in the analysis.

I will refer to Riot Games' own 'Learn the basics' (Riot Games 2021b) guide when presenting the game, along with some of my own descriptions.

LoL is a team-based strategy game where two teams of five champions face off to destroy the other players' base, known as a nexus. As of writing this there are currently 155 champions to choose from. The playing field, the map, is made up of three lanes and a jungle which fills the space between the lanes (*see image 1*). Furthermore the map is symmetrical and split down the middle by a body of water. In the bottom left and top right corners of the map are where you, your teammates and enemies spawn. You spawn here at the beginning of the game and everytime you die you respawn in either the bottom left or top right (depending on what team you belong to). Each lane consists of defense structures called turrets and inhibitors, these must be destroyed in order to make the enemy base vulnerable. Minions, small non-playable characters, spawn from each nexus and walk out to their designated lane and fight each other, these can be killed for gold which can then be used to purchase items. The action of killing minions is called *farming*.

Between the lanes is the jungle, in the jungle neutral monsters and plants reside. In the river two powerful monsters reign, Baron Nashor and the Drake, these neutral monsters grant you and your allies enhanced strength for a short period which can be used to topple the enemy team.

There are five positions that make up the recommended team composition for the game. Each lane lends itself to certain kinds of champions and roles. The positions are:

Top lane: Champions in top lane are tough solo fighters, they protect their lane and focus on the most powerful enemy champion.

Jungle: Junglers hunt in the jungle, they can go to any one of the lanes and help their teammates by killing the enemy laner(s) putting their team ahead.

Mid lane: Mid laners deal incredible amounts of damage, they thrive for combat and are always looking for an opportunity to outwit their opponent with their skills.

Bot lane: Bot laners are also known as ADC (Attack damage carry), because they ‘carry’ the game on their shoulders, they are high offensive low defensive champions which need to be protected.

Support: The ‘supports’ are the guardians, they protect their team and almost always play together with the bot laner, making the bot lane a two versus two lane. As the game progresses everyone will earn experience points from killing the enemy players, neutral monsters and or minions. This will result in you raising your level, unlocking new abilities and growing stronger.



Image 1. A screenshot of the minimap which shows the layout of the map.

LoL offers a chat system, you can communicate with players in the game and before the game starts in the first phase which is called ‘champion select’. The chat functions as a regular group chat but with added messages of events that are happening in-game. Inside the game you can utilise ‘pings’ which are a sort of audio and visual notification which has different meanings depending on how it is used and what kind of ‘ping’ is used (*see image 2*). For example, there is a question mark ‘ping’ which indicates that an enemy is missing in action (*see image 2*).



Image 2. A screenshot of a player getting ‘pinged’ in a custom made match.

Another similar audio and visual notification exists which is known as an ‘emote’ (see image 3), they are usually colourful images that appear above your champion's head but it does not offer any strategic usage as the previous ‘ping’ does.



Image 3. A screenshot of three players using an emote. Note: Similar to emojis the emotes usually represent a feeling or expression.

After a match is completed players can choose to honour a certain teammate (*see image 4*) and if anyone has been especially rude they can choose to report them (*see image 5*). The system offers seven different ‘report categories’ which are; Negative attitude; verbal abuse; leaving the game/afk; intentional feeding; hate speech; cheating and finally offensive or inappropriate name. You are also asked to give additional context to what happened and are able to do so by typing in a small box.

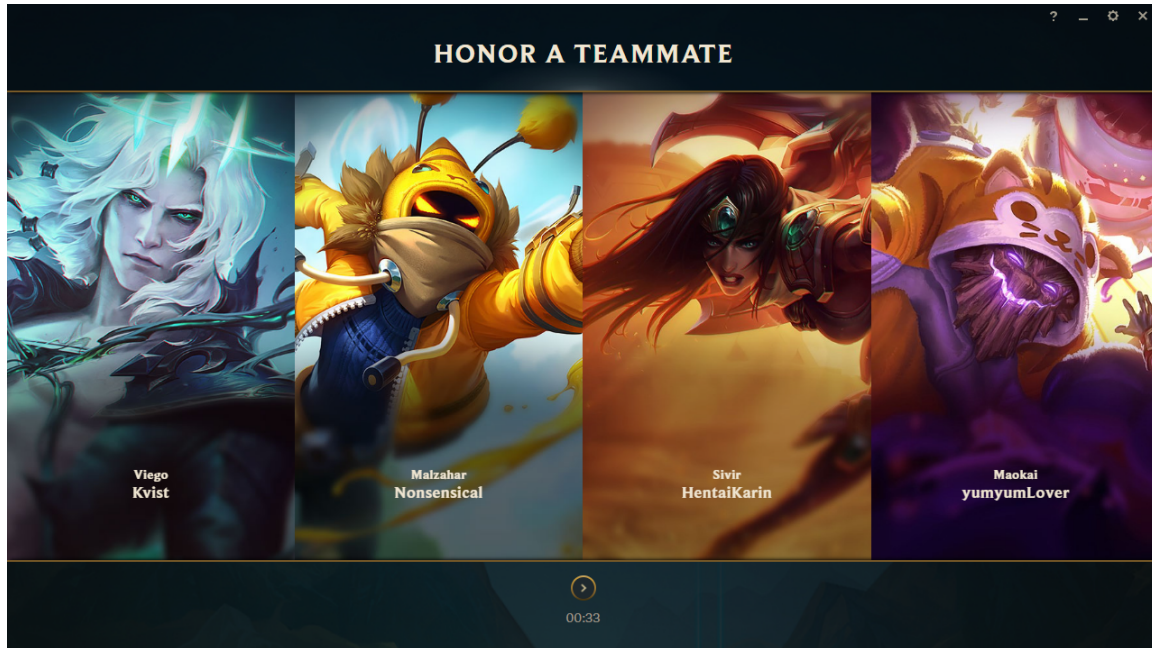


Image 4. At the end of the match a screen like this appears and pressing one of the portraits is the same as commending the player for his or her performance.

REPORT A PLAYER
Ztssqx

As accurately as you can, please tell us what happened with this player. Choose up to three reporting categories if you need to.

- ☐ **NEGATIVE ATTITUDE**
Griefing, Giving Up
- ☐ **VERBAL ABUSE**
Harassment, Offensive Language
- ☐ **LEAVING THE GAME / AFK**
- ☐ **INTENTIONAL FEEDING**
Feeding is griefing, not just having a bad game
- ☐ **HATE SPEECH**
Racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.
- ☐ **CHEATING**
Unapproved Third Party Programs
- ☐ **OFFENSIVE OR INAPPROPRIATE NAME**

Give any additional context on what happened

REPORT

Image 5. Screenshot of how it looks like when reporting a player for one, or more, of the behaviours listed in the picture.

LoL is currently one of the most popular MOBA games and eSports (electronic sports) in the contemporary eSports scene. According to the website leaguefeed (2021) LoL has about 115 million monthly players, this is a tenfold increase of players from the release of the game in 2011. Also, the LoL tournament of 2020 was the most watched eSport tournament of that year with a total of 3.8 million views whereas the second most watched tournament landed on 1 million views (theloadout 2020).

1.3 Importance and contribution of the study

Gaming is no longer an activity geared towards children or young adults. Gaming is being seen in and used in different ways to spread information, it has also been used as a way for activists to spread awareness (Fredling 2020; Uncensoredlibrary 2020; BBC 2020). It is an industry which has grown immensely the last couple of years. Using the amount of monthly players in League of Legends as an example we can see that over the last decade the amount of players have exceeded 100 million; this is a tenfold increase over a decade.

Gaming has become increasingly relevant throughout the years, and perhaps it is more relevant now than ever. It is a lucrative industry which has surpassed the movie industry in terms of value (Witkowski 2021, Richter 2020, Reuters 2018). The ongoing corona pandemic might have affected the popularity of the industries, for example FIFA is said to have made more money on game licenses than actual football year 2020 (Techstory 2021) but nevertheless gaming is incredibly popular and a large part of our contemporary society.

Large communities have been built around ‘gaming personalities’, some of which have become very successful. These personalities create content in various forms, some of them make highly sophisticated and informative guides; others might opt for a more entertaining approach, what all these personalities have in common is that they use a streaming platform such as Twitch and or Youtube. Furthermore, there are professional players who compete in teams for large amounts of money, fame and glory. My point is that there is a huge engagement from the people who are part of these communities. They in turn might create art, take part in discussions which does not inherently grant them anything, it is done purely out of passion for the game or community they are part of; gaming. Whether it is actually playing or watching someone else play can be a hugely important interest in a person's life. Thus there is no wonder that there exists studies about games, the effect it has on social life, participatory culture, game design and so forth, gaming has, arguably, become a substantial part of society.

Even though a lot of good comes from gaming it also has its problems, for example, competitive multiplayer games often suffer from toxic behaviour, which is commonly defined as comments communicated with the goal to harass other people (Kou 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020; Türkay et al. 2020; Salminen et al. 2019; Beres et al. 2021).

This toxicity can take various forms, like sexism, racism, homophobia and plain insults. There are other events which have triggered controversy and discussion regarding working conditions and sexual harassment and a debate regarding loot boxes (Rand 2019; Davies 2021; Todd 2015). Recently Riot Games announced an update in their privacy notice and terms of service which will allow them to record the voice chat in their game Valorant to better counter toxic behaviour (Riot Games 2021a). In other words, toxicity and gaming is definitely relevant to study and therefore I argue that this thesis is also timely.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how the terms ‘toxicity’ and ‘toxic behaviour’ are perceived by players of the MOBA game, League of Legends, through a phenomenological approach. The thesis will also deal with toxicity in an everyday life context together with theories of time and space to understand how gaming practices affect the dimensions of time and space and what role, if any, toxicity plays in the participants’ everyday life. Everyday life is more important and complex than we think (Van Manen 2016: 42-43) and because this thesis will use concepts like ‘*natural attitude*’ which is deeply connected to everyday taken-for-granted experiences (Weiss 2016; Husserl 1910-1911) the everyday life context will add another aspect to toxicity as a phenomenon. As stated earlier, the topics of gaming and toxicity are timely and relevant for this day and age. Also, which will be covered later, toxicity is a complex concept and this thesis will hopefully function as a base for future research to come which will help us understand as much as possible about toxicity. Afterall, gaming being such a prominent and relatively new culture and taking up so much time, one cannot help being intrigued to learn about the societal effect toxic behaviour in video games have.

RQ1: How is time and space experienced by the participants through gaming practices?

RQ2: How is toxicity defined by the participants?

RQ3: Does toxicity affect the participants’ everyday life through time and space, if yes then how?

2. Existing research

In this chapter I will present existing research within toxicity and gaming which has a great relevance to my research topic. Not only does this chapter function as a short presentation of what has been done but it will also help me identify research gaps and methods which have or have not been proven useful for researching toxicity in gaming.

Existing literature within toxicity and toxic behaviour in gaming has brought up a plethora of interesting and intriguing results, furthermore some studies have created a bridge to other disciplines, for example utilising sport psychology and computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW) research. However, the existing body of literature within this area mainly consists of data gathered in an online documented form instead of conducting interviews which in turn make it difficult to explore more elusive topics and reasons for toxic behaviour; gathering data only using online documents would mean that people who are not commenting or posting on online forums are completely lacking in existing research. Furthermore, current research focuses on understanding and defining toxicity but not necessarily how it affects players, furthermore the current body of research seems to lack a perspective of the players' everyday life in conjunction with toxicity.

2.1 Toxic taxonomies

Toxicity has been defined earlier through different taxonomies which splits the concepts into different categories of toxic behaviour (Kou 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020). Kou (2020) especially looked at creating a taxonomy and through a thematic analysis he discovered five primary themes and five contextual factors. The primary themes consist of *flaming*, *cheating*, *hostage holding*, *mediocritizing* and *sabotaging*.

Flaming is a sort of communicative aggression which Kou (2020: 5) defines as the act of sending insulting messages. It is important to keep in mind that *flaming* is a broad term which consist of many different types of messages, such as messages being of racist, sexist and or homophobic nature. Deslauriers et al. (2020) defined *flaming* as harassment and verbal abuse.

Cheating is having an unfair advantage (Kou: 2020; Deslaurier et al. 2020) and it can be in the form of , in LoL, *scripting* and *smurfing*, the former implies that the game has been rigged so you can perform very difficult actions, your character is partly controlled by an A.I. The latter is when, for example, veteran players create new accounts to be matched up with new players, this results in games which are more or less impossible to win for the new players.

Hostage holding is when you are ‘forced’ to play an unpleasant game (Kou: 2020). I use citation marks to indicate that you are, obviously, not forced in the traditional meaning but leaving a game will usually end up in punishment in the form of a ban or some sort of restriction. If you do not want to be punished you have to finish the game even though it is unpleasant. An unpleasant game might be a game which is considered unwinnable, and instead of surrendering some players wish to remain in the game and waste time. It is important to mention that a scenario of *hostage holding* is very subjective as one player might consider his or her team to be toxic for wanting to surrender whereas the others might consider the player who does not want to surrender toxic and deem it as *hostage holding* (Kou 2020: 6).

Mediocrizing is defined as performing actions which lowers the win rate but is not done purposefully to lose the game. For example, in the competitive mode of LoL a player might pick a champion they have not played before which, statistically, results in lower winrates but the player does not necessarily want to lose. Either way, it is a type of toxic behaviour (ibid.).

Sabotaging is the final term which was coded by Kou and is split up in two different types, blatant and surreptitious. The former refers to behaviours such as going AFK, leaving the game and dying purposefully to increase the enemy team’s power. The latter is more difficult to discover as people tend to play it off as being bad at the game when they might be purposely playing bad to lose (Kou 2020: 7-8).

Deslauriers et al. (2020) who looked at the game ‘Dead by Daylight’ use other categories although drawing from other sources and definitions and use the following:

1. Flaming or harassment (verbal abuse)
2. Griefing (power imposition)
3. Cheating (unfair advantage)

4. Scamming (for money or goods)
5. Cyberbullying (repetitive verbal abuse)

The categories used by Deslauriers et al. are not far away from Kou's taxonomy. What is noteworthy is the meaning of the aforementioned terminology. Cheating is seen as having an unfair advantage and that is true in both games, however as games have different goals and different things which can be accomplished in them it implies that games offer different ways and different enablers of toxicity.

On that note, Deslauriers et al. (2020) discovered key factors which should be seen as enablers of toxicity (role identification; ambiguity in objective setting; individual gaming experience; task repetition; rigidity of norms). Kou (2020) did something similar, stating that the majority of the discovered contextual factors (competitiveness; in-team conflict; perceived loss; powerlessness Kou 2020: 2-3) were not inherently toxic but played the role as enablers of toxicity. This implies that toxicity is enabled through different factors depending on the game. This strengthens Kou's (2020: 2) statement that toxicity as a term is ambiguous, firstly the term's meaning is disagreed upon and secondly there are many other related terms which overlap with toxicity.

2.2 Making sense of toxicity

Toxicity is an elusive concept in the sense that it is difficult to place it inside a box, to determine what is and what is not toxic is not a simple task. The above section dealt with taxonomies, basically creating categories of different toxic behaviours, toxicity can then be seen as the umbrella term of all these things. It is important to keep in mind that as soon as we move away from the context of gaming, or even LoL, it might mean something else; my point is that Kou's taxonomy is merely one angle to look at it from.

Salminen et al. (2019) studied toxicity in LoL, focusing on the culture and racial based toxicity and hate speech and how it is affected by game design. The researchers opted for a 'dictionary-based' method but reached the conclusion that it was ineffective as toxicity is a too complex phenomenon. Furthermore, players may experience the same comment very differently depending on cultural misconceptions and trolling (Salminen et al. 2019: 8). Similarly to Salminen et al (2019), Kou starts out by using toxicity as an umbrella term; any sort of comment made at the expense of others is considered toxic

behaviour. However after seeing the results he changes its definition, now defining toxicity as situated, dynamic and mediated through player perception and interpretation (Kou 2020; 9).

Elmezeny et al. (2018) looked closer at how trolling differs within online gaming imageboards and offers a different angle of toxicity. It should be noted that trolling is its own concept which may also function as an umbrella term, but it is not necessarily not toxic behaviour as we will discover further on. Drawing from their material on online forums, they split up trolling into different types of strategies, this could be poking fun at someone's grammar and feigning ignorance on certain topics. They also found that in some instances people would get ridiculed due to their lack of knowledge regarding game content and consoles, this would be done in either a comedic or aggressive manner. Cook et al. (2018) explored trolling from trolls' perspective, the motivations behind trolling and how the community in question reacts to trolling as perceived by the trolls. Three key motivations to trolling were discovered, they were personal enjoyment, revenge and thrill-seeking. Furthermore, trolling was deemed to be a self-perpetuating phenomenon which was enabled by the online community. Similarly to toxicity, trolling is in a complex situation as there does not consist an academic consensus of what constitutes trolling (Cook et al. 2018: 3324). Finally, the authors suggest that the online community plays a big role in perpetuating trolling behaviour. When the members of the online community were trolled they usually responded by trolling, thus entrenching the trolling culture in the community (Cook et al. 2018: 3333).

This implies that trolling could also be an enabler of toxicity, and to truly understand what toxicity entails would be to understand everything that is related to toxicity. Because of that we once again return to what Kou noted; toxicity is an ambiguous term which overlaps with many other similar concepts. Kou (2020: 2-3) changed his definition of toxicity, from being every comment that is made at the expense of others to a more subjective and perspective view. Furthermore it becomes interesting to compare my results with trolling as a phenomenon, how is it similar and will my results be able to say something about trolling or vice versa. Also, because of Cook et al. (2018) and Elmezeny et al. (2018) it becomes necessary to look at the participants' reactions to be able to say something about toxicity in the LoL Europe West community.

Türkay et al. (2020) studied how players experience and define toxicity in a competitive gaming environment. Using interviews they learned that players perceive toxicity from ‘not taking the game seriously’ to ‘discrimination’ and everything in between (Türkay et al. 2020: 2). Some players said that any kind of negative behaviour is considered toxic. This is, what I believe, makes toxicity into an umbrella term, when it is understood as anything negative it does include trolling and everything trolling implies if trolling is indeed always negative.

The researchers concluded that the interviewed players focused on how toxicity affected gameplay rather than the victims or the community. They also state that normalisation plays an important role as players would sometimes justify toxic behaviour directed at others and even themselves (Türkay et al. 2020: 10).

So far I have looked at toxicity and toxic behaviour with my ‘gaming goggles’, it is imperative to know that toxicity cannot only be understood from an in-game gaming context through online documents, taxonomies and interviews but also from the context of capital and other separate theories.

Hills (2018: 105) looks at toxicity in relation to fan practices and fandom. Fandom, after all, has been studied rigorously by scholars and many aspects of fandom has been theorised, such as hierarchies of fan culture capital (Hills 2002 as cited in Hills 2018: 106) and notions of ‘good’ or ‘true’ fandom. For example, what makes a fan a ‘true’ fan of a given thing and how is that status obtained and perceived. This sort of authenticity has been theorised using Bourdieu’s framework of capital, in which fans can be seen as agents or players who participate in this Bourdieusian field in order to accumulate capital and simultaneously share a habituated feel for the game (Hills 2018: 106). This competitiveness of a field for capital breeds a doxa, an unquestioned sense of how capital can be amassed or lost (ibid.). Atkinson (2016: 28 as cited in Hills 2018: 106) presents an example of how doxa can be viewed differently depending on what field the people in question belong to. Borrowed from Atkinson, a journalist in the media field and an academic in the intellectual field positioned in the same situation, an interview will perceive people, each other and symbols differently.

Hills (2018: 108) mentions that ‘toxic geek masculinity’ is starting to dominate the research of toxic fan practices due to previously researched topics such as

Ghostbusters and the Last Jedi. Toxicity can be found in a large collection of cultural fields. However, he continues, using a boundary approach to look into how toxicity relates to authentic fandom requires a Bourdieusian approach.

A recent study about gaming is Romo Flores' (2020) recently published master dissertation which deals with toxic behaviour in video games and the relation between players and the field using a Bourdieusian approach. Seeing toxicity through a Bourdieusian approach is certainly different from how the previous literature I have reviewed operated. Toxicity is, according to Hills (2018), seen as an aspect of fandom but also as a sort of capital. Using the Gamergate event as an example we get a new understanding of toxicity which differs from that of earlier definitions (see Deslauriers et al 2020; Kou 2020; Elmezeny et al. 2018; Kou & Gui 2020), for example the power struggle of female gamers and the exchange of capital between participants in different Bourdieusian fields. There is more to Hills' (2018) work, my point was to show that toxicity does not have one meaning and it varies largely depending on what discipline you adhere from.

Beres et al. (2021) looked closer at the normalisation of toxic behaviours and how and why toxicity persists although both the players and the game developers want to prevent harmful toxic play. The researchers raise two potential reasons for the persistence of toxic behaviours in MOBA games, the first being that players that are exposed to toxic behaviours tend to perpetuate it. The second reason being that there is a general acceptance of toxic behaviour in games because a 'gamers will be gamers'-attitude, this, they mean, justifies that toxicity is part of the gaming culture and has thus become normalised. Beres et al. (2021) along with other scholars (Kou 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020) have considered toxicity to be an umbrella concept. Furthermore, Beres et al. highlight that completely defining toxic behaviour is difficult due to various differences across a plethora of online games.

2.3 Emotion and game regulations

Toxic behaviour, in the form of verbal harassment and other activities which fall within the borders of toxicity can affect emotions and feelings of a person negatively. Kou and Gui (2020) looked closer at how people regulate their emotions and their teammates' emotions in an electronic sports environment. Through a thematic analysis they discovered four major emotive factors which may cause fierce emotional reactions they were; achievement; teammate; game design and social identity (Kou & Gui 2020: 3).

‘Achievement’ in this context is to be understood as reaching a goal, such as winning a match, making a good mechanical play or reaching a desired rank (Kou & Gui 2020: 9-10). If a player were to underperform or not reach personal expectations it could lead to negative emotions.

‘Teammate’ implies the players’ own team, for example poor performance from the teammates can cause negative emotions. For instance, if a teammate does not help you out when you want help it can lead to frustration, but it is not limited to poor performance and should also be classified as in-game behaviour.

‘Game design’ is about how the game functions and in most cases it seems to involve attempts at balancing the game and new champion releases which cause frustration. The balancing updates come in the form of patches which might buff or nerf a champion, directly or indirectly. Nerfing in this context means to reduce the power of a champion or an item and buffing is the opposite (ibid.).

‘Social identity’ refers to the membership, relation or disassociation a player has towards the community, it could result in positive emotions if one identified with being a LoL player. A good example is the 10-year anniversary on October 15, 2019 when Riot Games announced new games and an anime, the players expressed excitement and pride to be part of the community (Kou & Gui 2020: 11).

The players regulated these emotions, their own and their teammates’, through certain actions. Starting with the personal emotions, the researchers found that players have many different ways of affecting their emotions. Sometimes it is done proactively, if a player is getting frustrated with the game they would take a break from the game entirely. At other instances it would be done in-game, if the teammates or enemies were being rude the affected players would mute the chat, put on some soothing music or wrap

themselves in a warm blanket. In a losing situation some would change the goal of the game, instead of trying to win they would focus on performing better in a certain area of the game, be it farming or ambushing an enemy (Kou & Gui 2020: 13)

The players do not restrict the regulation of emotions to themselves but would try to better the mood of their teammates as well. One player would positively reinforce his or her teammates when they did something good, another wrote that he or she started every game with a friendly and encouraging message to the team.

Finally, the players did not only try to better the mood and regulate their and their teammates' emotions positively but also to inflict the enemies with negative emotions. This was mainly done in spamming emotes when they would score a kill or take an objective from the enemy team, but it could also be done in the form of repeatedly killing the same enemy to make them upset; this would mostly be done with the help from a teammate (Kou & Gui 2020: 16).

Kou and Nardi (2013) also explored how anti-social behaviour could be regulated on the internet, using League of Legends as an example. They also explored flaming, which is part of Kou's (2020) taxonomy of toxicity. In their research they discussed the most common modalities for regulating online behaviour, namely norms and codes. Codes (as in software and hardware) regulate behaviour by allowing and restricting certain actions, for example by coding one can limit someone's access to cyberspace (ibid.). In their research they looked closer at 'The Tribunal' which is a system developed by Riot Games which allows LoL-players to judge whether or not another player was flaming or being toxic in a game by looking at the chat logs from that game. This system is terminated as of 2014 (leagueoflegends 2021) and should be considered an attempt at combining human judgement and code regulation.

Other scholars have made use of The Tribunal system (Kwak & Blackburn 2014a; Kwak & Blackburn 2014b; Kwak et al. 2015) which have done extensive work on toxicity, when it occurs, to warn about toxic players, and generally exploring toxic behaviours. Kwak et al. (2015) stated that the amount of players who report toxic behaviours are rather low which might be because of how the report system is designed. Thus they discovered that relying on voluntary reports proved to be difficult for the players who had been affected by toxic behaviour. Because of this it would be interesting

to look closer at how the participants in my thesis reacts to toxic behaviours which are not directed at them as Kwak et al. (2015) did explore how effective the community were at reporting toxic behaviour and made comparisons with the bystander effect.

2.4 Gaming and mediatization

Jeffrey Wimmer (2012) approached games with the theory of mediatization and established games as a medium along with messages of mass media which constitutes one of the most prominent components of contemporary society's mediatization process. Furthermore he suggests, together with (Malaby 2007 as cited in Wimmer 2012: 2) that games should not be understood as something outside life but as meaning-generating spaces within life.

Wimmer suggests that we should look at the interactions between the game and the gamer in order to grasp the meaning of game culture (ibid.). Arguably gaming is very intertwined with everyday life and plays a big role in contemporary society. Mäyrä (2008a as cited in Wimmer 2012: 3) describes certain characteristics of digital game cultures as 'rituals', examples of this are community building at LAN parties, and in this way gaming becomes part of everyday life or rather it manifests itself, in a sense, in the real world rather than being a game outside or separate from the everyday life.

He states that current research, current as of 2012, about game culture neglects the so-called silent majority of casual gamers and their gaming experience even though they account for the majority of gamers in our society (Wimmer 2012: 3-4).

Wimmer (2012: 5) further points out that digital games and their cultures can only be understood completely and in their full complexity if they are studied in the context of change. More concretely, digital games would be understood better in a context of the procedures of mediatization, individualisation, globalisation and commercialisation that they are currently affecting and finally in the context of everyday life.

2.5 Female gamers

McLean and Griffiths (2019) explore an, arguably, under-researched area, namely female experience in regard to online harassment in video games. They state that female gamers tend to experience harassment and negative interactions during gaming sessions. The authors use the concept of 'Social support' and connect it to female gamers and their perception. Social support is a multidimensional concept which is directly related to the characteristics and functions of social relationships (McLean & Griffiths 2019; 972-973). The results of their study suggest that female gamers tend to play alone, anonymously and move from group to group regularly. Furthermore, the gamers reported that they experienced anxiety and loneliness due to the lack of social support outside of gaming.

Different types of interactions between players are common in online games and Pendry and Salvatore (2015: 217) argued that online interactions can develop and support individual well-being rather than hinder it.

Soderman (2017) writes about the gaming culture and toxic environment in a way which has not yet been introduced in this chapter. Soderman presents a discussion between 'hardcore' and 'casual' play, and that the former, according to video game critic Rowan Kaiser (Soderman 2017: 41), is masculine and the latter feminine. Furthermore, Soderman shows examples of a toxic environment in the form of, arguably, sexist game design such as in the game *Borderlands 2*. In this example there is a skill tree called 'Best Friends Forever' which was supposedly referred to as 'girlfriend mode'. In this tree there are various skills which implies a gendered rhetoric with skill names such as 'Fancy Mathematics'; 'Cooking Up Trouble' and 'Potent as a Pony'.

Fredman (2018) explored how sexual toxicity in gaming (STIG) affected women by carrying out three different studies. Fredman also writes that STIG and virtual sexual harassment can have serious impacts on victims, such as depression, fear and PTSD symptoms. STIG is separate from 'general toxicity', and STIG can cause behaviours which general toxicity cannot trigger, such as PTSD symptoms (Fredman 2018: 4-5). Sexual toxicity is also stated to be more detrimental for women due to the fear of sexual harassment in their daily lives.

2.6 Summary

Toxicity is an ambiguous term (Kou 2020: 2) but also flexible in the way it is used. It is not restricted to one game or one field of study. Toxicity has been explored through the perspective of many different lenses, like how female gamers experience online harassment in video games (McLean & Griffiths 2019; Fredman 2018) and how game design can be sexist (Soderman 2017).

Plenty of research has been done which has been trying to define toxicity (Kou 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020; Salminen et al. 2019; Türkay et al. 2020) and in many cases it has been considered an umbrella term which overlaps and contains many other acts of devious online behaviour.

Furthermore, it has been used together with a Bourdesian approach by Hills (2018) and Romo Flores (2020) who explored, among other things, toxicity in conjunction with gaming capital and the fandom culture.

Naturally there has been a lot of research regarding gaming and toxicity but, arguably, not enough. Gaming as an activity and toxicity as a phenomenon have been further explored by many different means, for example how people respond to toxic behaviour (Kwak & Blackburn 2014a; Kwak & Blackburn 2014b; Kwak et al. 2015; Kou & Gui 2020). Wimmer (2012) points at the importance of gaming in everyday life and that the actions between the game and the gamer are imperative to grasp the meaning of game culture.

Considering the summary above it should be stated that toxicity and gaming culture are a vast and widespread field. I intend to make the field wider by offering an in-depth exploration of how toxicity is experienced in everyday life by League of Legends players and hopefully add to an interesting discussion.

3. Theory

3.1 Toxicity

Firstly it is important to state that I do not try to create a new definition or taxonomy of toxicity, the purpose of the proposed research question (RQ2) is to grasp the participants' point of view, their understanding and perception of the phenomenon.

As is seen in the literature review chapter the concept 'toxicity' has different definitions and meanings depending on who you ask and also in what context the concept is being used. Kou (2020), Deslauriers et al. (2020) and Türkay et al. (2020) use it as an umbrella term which branches out to loads of other different ambiguous terms such as 'griefing' and 'flaming'. Hills (2018: 1) on the other hand uses toxicity differently, namely in a context of fan boundaries and borders. He is not within the same discipline as the other researchers and he uses a Bourdieusian approach and looks at how different types of capital are amassed and accumulated. In other words, 'toxicity' has many definitions and it is imperative that I give an account for how I define 'toxicity' in my thesis and how I will use it.

Kou (2020: 9) changes his definition from being an umbrella term to seeing toxicity as situated, dynamic and mediated through player perception and interpretation. He did this due to his results, he found that most of the contextual factors which he discovered were not actually inherently toxic but should instead be understood as enablers of toxicity (ibid.). This definition is quite open and relies on interpretation and perception which makes it into a definition I can use throughout my thesis as it is compatible with the phenomenological approach which I will be using.

There are a couple of other reasons why I consider this sort of definition to be valuable in my thesis. It has great compatibility with my other theories. I will be using phenomenology and *bracket* my presumptions about toxicity aside so I can understand toxicity from the players' perspective. It is imperative to state that I am not deciding upon a definition of toxicity, toxicity will be understood in the way which the participants present it. Toxicity is ambiguous for this reason, consider for example, the concept

‘trolling’, it has many meanings of its own and the participants may not consider ‘trolling’ to be toxic but just a part of the game. In short, I do not want to put ‘toxicity’ in a box as it would be counterintuitive. Instead I will leave the concept open, and have Kou’s (2020: 9) later definition, and the other research about toxicity, serve as analytical tools and use them to compare the results I will end up with at the end of this thesis.

3.2 Phenomenology

In order to achieve the aim of this thesis I am using a player-grounded understanding meaning that I am using the players definition and experiences of toxicity. I therefore apply a phenomenological framework in this thesis to answer the research questions I have decided upon. This section will deal with the type of phenomenology I have opted for as well as clearing up phenomenological terms which will be central in my analysis later on.

Modern phenomenology in all of its forms are indebted to Edmund Husserl, the primordial father of phenomenology. For Husserl, phenomenology was not a science of consciousness or subjectivity from the individual’s standpoint, it was a science of objective subjectivity (Moran 2005: 3-4). Husserl coined and used terms such as *essences* and *objectivity* and used the slogan ‘Back to the things themselves’. These ‘things’, he meant, were not only the perceived objects through experience but in fact ‘*objectivities*’ (Moran 2005: 5). An idea of this phenomenology is thus to explore the consciousness and the *essences* of conscious acts and with a clear focus on the subjective perception.

There are much more to be said about Husserl, however as his work focuses on these concepts, *essences* and *objectivity*, I have strayed away from this origin of phenomenology and instead, I will be using other types of phenomenology which have been used in a media centric environments which are more applicable for my thesis. It is not to say that Husserl’s work will not be used at all as other central concepts such as the *natural attitude* and *bracketing* will play a big role in the analysis to come.

The *natural attitude* is one of the tenets of phenomenology, a central concept to the theory. According to Husserl, the *natural attitude* is a place in which we all live and

where experience and knowledge can occur (Husserl 1910-1911: 37; Christensen et al. 2017: 115). Husserl rejected the *natural attitude* which is the taken-for-granted belief that objects exist independent of our consciousness of them (Tomasulo 1990: 1). Husserl meant that we cannot be sure about the existence of things but we can be certain about how they appear to us in consciousness and through experience (ibid.). Christensen et al. (2017: 115) compares the *natural attitude* to Plato's allegory of the cave. Plato's cave dwellers have been imprisoned since childhood and can only look at a wall. Behind them is a fire, between the fire and prisoners is a road. Some men walk along this road and they carry different objects which cast a shadow on the wall. The noise created by the men along the road is understood as, by the prisoners, to be created by the shadows. In other words, the prisoners live their everyday lives based on a lot of different assumptions that are formed from their knowledge and experience of objects in the world (ibid.). One could say that the prisoners cannot be certain whether what they see is real or not, but they are definitely experiencing these sounds and visions no matter the shadows' existence.

Another example of the *natural attitude* is the action of looking at your phone or watch, you simply pick your phone up and look at it, there is no conscious reflective thought to the action. To clarify, Husserl proposed that objects and how they are perceived and directed by us are conceived in the *natural attitude*. The *natural attitude* is characterized by a belief that objects exist distinct from the subjective perception and exhibit properties which we can see emanating from them. This 'taken for grantedness' is referred to, by Husserl, as 'The General Thesis of the Natural Attitude' which is, simply put, to be understood as the 'world exist' or that the 'world is'; the general thesis assumes the existence of the world (Christensen et al. 2017: 116; Luft 2002: 114; Moran 2005: 8). Husserl also suggested that when we are within the *natural attitude* we never approach an experience neutrally or objectively. We are always directed towards it and everything within it from a certain perspective (Weiss 2016: 4).

Weiss (2016) presents the *natural attitude* in a new lighting. Throughout this thesis I will be leaning towards her interpretation of the *natural attitude* and because of this I will shortly explain the differences and motivate why I am using her interpretation.

Weiss (2016: 3-4) means that the *natural attitude* is a 'lens' or a 'default perspective' which we use to approach the world. Furthermore, the *natural attitude* is subjective and ever-changing as it is affected by new experiences. According to Husserl, one can change the standpoint in the *natural attitude* by shifting one's gaze, moving from one location to another and so forth (Weiss 2016: 4). This implies that two people cannot occupy the same standpoint as the *natural attitude*, according to Weiss, is a complex and dynamic construction which evolves and transforms over time, across space and also in response to social, cultural and political encounters.

We cannot, according to Husserl (Weiss 2016: 10), be separated from the *natural attitude* as it always follows us in the background. However, we do not need to be actively involved in the *natural attitude* at all times and can instead focus on another attitude and can pick up or engage with components that are appropriate to that world (ibid.). Because of this reason the *natural attitude* becomes an important analytical tool which will be used to uncover the taken-for-granted experiences and their perception of time and space in order to understand how they differ from 'our' *natural attitude*. This will be helpful to answer the third research question as if space and time is experienced differently when the participants play LoL then it might deepen our knowledge of how toxicity affects everyday life.

Considering the discussion above, I will be leaning more towards Weiss' (2016) interpretation of the *natural attitude*, that individuals experience and perceive objects and what constitutes those objects differently. Also, that the *natural attitude* changes and that two individuals cannot occupy the exact same standpoint, thus their perspective will always differ at least slightly (ibid.). To clarify, I do not believe that I will find only one true *essence* which constitutes toxicity for every LoL-player but instead that there will be many different aspects that are unique to each player's perception and these aspects will be in need of a thorough analysis.

In order to answer the second research question I need to understand how toxicity is defined by the participants. In order to do so I make use of *bracketing* which I have modified so it fits my purpose. Shortly, *bracketing* in my thesis is used to put my pre-established notions, my experiences, as well as other scholars' definitions of toxicity in brackets. Concretely this means that I will not rely on anyone but the participants'

definitions of toxicity and use their definitions of toxicity to answer my research questions. What will follow is a short description of Husserl's *bracketing* and an explanation for why I have modified it.

To introduce *bracketing* I will shortly present Kant's noumena and phenomena as they are deeply connected to Husserl's *bracketing*. Kant (2003) stressed a division between 'noumena', objects in themselves, and 'phenomena', our experience of the objects. In simple terms one can say that Kant argued that we experience reality through our minds rather than how it is in itself. It is important to state that this does not imply that we are not experiencing the 'true' reality, we simply experience 'our' reality. The reason why we cannot experience things in themselves is because we have to experience them through spatial and temporal forms of intuition (Adams 1997: 807); these kinds of experiences are 'phenomena'. 'Noumena' are things in themselves, they exist regardless of human experience (phenomena). It goes without saying that there is a lot more to Kant than this, but for the sake of making *bracketing* easier to grasp this introduction is helpful.

Husserl developed *bracketing* as a way to put the existence of 'noumena' in *brackets*, thus putting aside the metaphysical reality of the thing in itself and instead he focused on the true 'phenomena', the experience (Moran 2005: 7). Simultaneously he rejected the *natural attitude* (Tomasulo: 1990). In other words, Husserl is not interested in the metaphysical reality of, for example, a tree's existence. *Bracketing* can therefore be understood as a way to suspend our judgement about its reality, to explore the objects and contents of our experience as simple phenomena (Christensen et al. 2017: 117; Moran 2005: 7).

To summarise what Husserl meant by *bracketing*, one can say that what is being *bracketed* is the general thesis of the natural attitude which assumes that the world exists. This is done so that the researcher can focus on how the experience of the tree presents itself to the consciousness (Christensen et al. 2017: 117); simplified one can say that the subjective experience, the phenomena, is the main focus of analysis. Seeing a tree is an act of experience whether or not it exists. By *bracketing* the *natural attitude* Husserl went 'to the things themselves' and transcended the subjective experience in order to observe and describe the phenomenon in question objectively (ibid.). Finally, *bracketing* can be used as a way to unpack a phenomenon. For example, by removing different

characteristics of a tree one can find out what characteristics are necessary for the tree to be considered a tree. Imagine removing layers of an onion until only the *essence* remains.

As I am not interested in the pure *essences* or the objectivity of toxicity I will modify the use of *bracketing* similar to how Bengtsson and Johansson (2020: 8) did with the goal in mind to approach toxicity in a new way to understand the phenomenon in its cultural context as defined by the residents in that world. Traudt et al. (1987:2) had a similar goal in mind although they stayed more ‘true’ to transcendental phenomenology, they use *bracketing* to understand what role media plays in the consumers everyday life.

As ‘Everyday life’ is a central component in my thesis, and especially in the collected data and the result chapter, I will elaborate on what importance that term has as well as explain how these different concepts relate to each other.

‘Everyday life’ is a term which is important in this thesis and for a post and media phenomenology. Tudor (2018: 38-39) suggests that media habits are sometimes better understood through the dimensions of space and time, the daily routines we carry out in relation to our media habits. Media phenomenology is about understanding our, or the studied peoples’, media habits. Van Manen (2016: 42-43) stresses the importance of ‘everydayness’ of daily life, it is more complex and important than we think. It is important to keep in mind that the *natural attitude* is centered around taken-for-granted experiences which is what the coming example will illustrate. Shaun Moores used an example borrowed from Seamon (1979: 55-6 as cited in Moores 2006) to highlight the importance of their everyday routine and the *natural attitude*.

Waking at 7.30, making the bed, bathing, dressing, walking out of the house at eight – so one group member described a morning routine that he followed every day but Sunday. From home he walked to a nearby café, picked up a newspaper (which had to be the New York Times), ordered his usual fare (one scrambled egg and coffee), and stayed there until nine when he walked to his office. ... ‘I like this routine and I’ve noticed how I’m bothered a bit when a part of it is upset – if the Times is sold out, or if the booths are taken and I have to sit at a counter.’

In this example the man takes his morning routine for granted, nothing he does is taken into the sphere of conscious awareness. This is not a new idea, other scholars have theorised this concept of how the actor goes through the day without paying attention to routine activities. Giddens (1984: xxiii as cited in Moores 2006) wrote that this routine depends on ‘practical consciousness’, that the things we know about we do instinctively without being consciously aware of what we are doing, or rather, we take it for granted.

Therefore everyday life in conjunction with gaming routines will play a vital role in my analysis to come and thus be part of my phenomenological framework. To clarify, everyday life activities will be connected to the spatial and temporal dimensions as suggested by Tudor (2018: 38-39) to understand the participants' gaming habits and also their practices related to a gaming context. In conjunction with everyday life I will be using the concept of *lived experience* in the analysis and whilst perusing the data. *Lived experience* has a methodological significance, it implies that I will be exploring the dimensions of human existence; life as perceived by the participants (Van Manen 2016: 39). *Lived experience*, everyday life and the *natural attitude* all overlap, everyday life should be understood as actions, events and taken-for-granted experiences which unfold throughout the day in an almost ritual fashion, not at all unsimilar to the conventional understanding of everyday life. *Lived experiences* is the methodological and theoretical concept which aims to provide concrete insights into the qualitative meanings of phenomena in people's lives (Van Manen 2016: 40). The *natural attitude* is the playing field where these phenomena, concepts and experiences take place.

In this thesis I suggest a post/media phenomenological approach utilising modified central tenets to phenomenology in order to understand how toxicity is defined drawing from presented phenomenology in media practices and the role technology plays in everyday life (Tudor 2018; Bengtsson & Johansson 2020; Ihde: 2009) and Van Manen's (2016) phenomenology of practice as well as Couldry & Hepp's (2017: 17) materialist phenomenology in order to repel the critique of the lack of a critical perspective.

3.3 Mediatization

As this thesis will deal with gaming as a sort of medium I deemed it a suitable approach to account for mediatization to get a sense of how gaming, LoL specifically, affects the participants' everyday routine actions in a gaming context. Furthermore the temporal and spatial dimensions pair well with the concepts of mediatization and everyday life. Finally, as I will deal with actions revolving around gaming I did not want to ignore the fact that gaming might affect the participants' everyday life therefore mediatization will incorporate that aspect of the relation between the participants and LoL.

Media is no longer a 'thing' which exists around our society and culture, it permeates society and is not separate from cultural or social institutions and is very much part of our daily lives (Hjarvard 2008: 1; Bolin et al. 2016: 157; Couldry & Hepp 2017: 51).

Mediatization can in short be summarised as the term which describes the effect and influence media has on a variety of phenomena (Hjarvard 2008: 2). It was firstly used to describe media's influence on political communication but has since then been used in other contexts. Couldry and Hepp (2013: 197; 2017: 49) defines mediatization as a way to analyse the interrelation between changes in media and communications, culture and society. Couldry and Hepp (2017: 52-66) writes about 'waves' or 'surges' of change in media technology and imply that we are in the fourth wave of deep mediatization, what they refer to as the wave of datafication.

Mediatization can be seen as the effect that media has, this effect can extend to changes in human communication both in contexts of time and space. Schulz (2004 as cited in Hjarvard 2008: 5) identifies four changes of human communication and interaction. First, time and space has been expanded, as a result human communication has as well, second, different media has substituted social activities, gaming is a good example. Third, media has become a part of everyday life through an amalgamation of face-to-face communication and mediated communication. Fourth, human behaviour has adapted to fit or more better make use of these effects and capabilities which media offer.

Considering the discussion above, mediatization will be used in this thesis as an analytic concept when looking into what behaviours and routines the participants have which are directly connected to gaming and LoL. Therefore mediatization in my analysis

should not be understood as the broad general concept which analyses cultural and societal changes but instead as a micro-level analysis tool. It will add another dimension to the analysis as, instead of only taking the effect toxicity has on the participants' everyday lives in account, LoL as a medium will be considered to affect the participants' actions due to the rules of the game. For example, LoL cannot be paused, therefore if a player leaves an ongoing match they will receive a penalty, the participants may therefore adapt their actions to fit the medium. If this is the case, it becomes interesting to incorporate into my study as it might imply that other aspects of a game should be taken into account when studying toxicity.

3.4 Space

In order to capture the participants' everyday gaming routine, their gaming practices and if toxicity is somehow mediatized into their everyday life I suggest using the spatial and temporal dimensions as analytic concepts. In this section I will describe how I will use space and how it should be understood in my thesis as well as the relevancy it has in conjunction with phenomenology.

Space is a dimension which has changed and expanded due to the digitalisation and the 'rise of the internet' (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 99). With this digitalisation, especially now, during the COVID pandemic, physical face-to-face interaction is no longer *the* way of direct contact but rather one of many ways of direct contact (Zhao 2006 as cited in Couldry & Hepp 2017: 100). The internet along with phones, computers, and various kinds of software can in a sense construct new space, thus expanding our horizons and understanding of space. Therefore you are able to be in multiple spaces at the same time, you are no longer simply in the space where your physical body is located, you can be inside a video game, in a Discord server and so on (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 107).

Space has been used in order to look at everyday practices, routines and rhythms. (Bengtsson & Johansson 2020; Tudor 2018; Moores 2006; Lefebvre 2004) and in some instances in conjunction with a phenomenological framework. A prominent component of media phenomenology is the focus on how different media are used to make us 'feel right' or to make the space we are in 'feel right' (Tudor 2018: 39). How the participants

make space feel right is a crucial part of my analysis as it will clearly show how the participants adapt their everyday life to a gaming session and, or, vice versa. Tudor states that media is a central component of creating a 'sensory aesthetic of home' (Tudor 2018: 39-40). An example of this is having the TV on in the background when doing the dishes. Therefore to answer the research question about the visibility of time and space in their gaming practices these analytic tools are needed in order to capture both how the participants create a 'feeling right'-atmosphere before the session in their physical space but also how these routines would change when encountered with toxicity.

The domestic household has been changed from being a self-enclosed space into an open place, open in the sense that the digitalisation of the home enables communication at a distance. The media causes a psychic effect which can be described as the 'domestication of elsewhere', it provides us with a sense of globality, connecting us to the world even though we have never been there (Morley 2010: 3). Thus a medium, in this case a game, can be seen as not only creating new social space, but allowing us to be part of already existing spaces. In regards to gaming routines which will be one of the topics during the analysis Morley (2010: 10) writes that technology is not *only* about making space or the home 'feel right' but also how these technologies change routines and societal practices. This implies that within the spatial dimension there is more to look at than only how space is manipulated by the participants in order to 'feel right', in addition to that understanding how LoL, and gaming in general, affects their practices is also necessary, for example if it has substituted hanging out physically it all of a sudden serves an important social function.

Henri Lefebvre focused on the participants' senses, rhythms and the construction of (social) space (Lefebvre: 2004) in other words, space is not to be analysed but rather the participants' actions within space. Humans thus create space through actions and can thus be understood not as a priori concept but as an aspect which permeates social practice. Similar to an *attitude*, in the phenomenological sense, space and time are not universal, they are socially constructed and can only be understood in the context of the society (Schmid 2008: 29), or subculture in which they were constructed. The focus on the participants will be imperative to, not only understand toxicity, but also the meaning

space serves. Thus space should not be understood as a universal thing which is defined by me but rather it should be understood, as toxicity, from the participants' point of view.

The experience of space, and time, has been changed due to digital media and thus to understand how it is perceived (Bengtsson & Johansson 2020: 7) I must ground myself in their everyday life gaming practices. Moreover Bengtsson and Johansson (ibid.) suggest that time and space must be understood in relation to the bodily consciousness. According to Peters (2012 as cited in Bengtsson & Johansson 2020: 7) how journalism is experienced is dependent on space and that experience shapes the social spaces, thus space has a certain phenomenological value. I will therefore apply space and use it in, instead of a news consumption context, a gaming context as I believe gaming serves a similar meaning in constructing and shaping the social spaces.

3.5 Time

Similar to the above section about space this section will deal with the temporal dimension in a similar fashion. Very rarely, if ever, is one dimension solely used in order to analyse everyday life practices, especially in a phenomenological context. When doing a postphenomenological or media phenomenological study space as well as time are being used to understand the meaning the participants create in their everyday life (Bengtsson & Johansson 2020; Tudor 2018; Couldry & Hepp 2017). Furthermore, time and space cannot be separated as they are closely interconnected concepts which we experience and live 'through' (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 118).

Time is connected to the *natural attitude*, as aforementioned the *natural attitude* changes and alters through the passing of time as long as we encounter new experiences (Weiss 2016: 3-4). Furthermore, as one can change *attitudes* by, for example, entering a new space then time might change meaning. This is one reason why the temporal dimension must be understood through the participants perspective; what role does time play in the space of League of Legends?

Time also plays into the role of everyday life as a sort of deficit, Couldry and Hepp (2017: 128) states that there is a continuous growing experience of not having

enough time to accomplish what one wants to. In this sense it becomes interesting to see what role LoL plays in regards to time in their everyday life, for example, the participants might structure their daily chores around LoL or vice versa. Either way their everyday life becomes directly affected by LoL in a temporal context.

Moore (2006) highlights the importance of space and time in daily routines, (see the example in the phenomenology section), these routines are examples of taken-for-granted experiences, the only thing which made these daily routines possible to discuss were when the routines were disrupted. The routines were seen as actions which were not planned, they were events which simply unfolded throughout the passing of the day (ibid.). Thus in my analysis it will become important to discover these everyday gaming routines and find out what disrupts them and how they are affected by toxicity. Toxicity would then be seen as a disruptor of everyday gaming routines and thus have a direct effect on the unfolding of these events.

In their post-phenomenological approach to news consumption Bengtsson and Johansson (2020: 7) highlights the importance of time as well as space. They state that the vantage point should be from the human perspective and how they create meaning in their everyday lives in relation to the temporal and spatial dimension. As stated earlier, digital media has affected how we experience space, however, time also plays an important role in digital media. Rather, one could say that media reinforces our understanding of time in our *natural attitude*. For example, the TV and radio reminds their listeners and viewers of the time by making them aware of the time a certain programme or guest is coming on (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 119-120). This stresses the importance that I should use the participants as my vantage point when doing my analysis and interviews. Also, since LoL does not reinforce or remind the players about the time (there is not a clock in the HUD) it might change the participants' experience and perception of time. This becomes imperative to find out in order to answer my research question and fully understand the context which the participants are in.

Time is intertwined with space and thus it also plays a part in making space 'feel right' as was discussed in the previous section. Moreover, the TV as a medium has the power to create a 'good time' (Tudor 2018: 39). To be more specific, the same way our actions, routines and media can make space feel right, the TV can also alter what time it

is or rather how time is experienced. Thus the TV, depending if it is turned on or off, indicates if it is working time or leisure time (ibid.). Utilising this approach, time gets another aspect which needs to be looked closer at, not only may time have a different meaning in the participants' gaming *attitude* but the game itself may indicate a certain importance and 'genre' of time in their everyday life.

3.6 Operationalization of theory

This chapter serves as a broader conclusion of the previous theory chapter. Because the sections were all split up in the previous chapter I will try to combine all of the concepts in order to explain how they will work and relate to each other which will hopefully make it easier to understand why these theories and concepts were chosen.

In order to grasp the everyday life, taken-for-granted experiences I use the phenomenological concept of the *natural attitude* in conjunction with *time* and *space*. The *natural attitude* should be understood as the 'world' in which we live (Husserl 1910-1911: 37) and as centered around your experiences. To put it into context, the world that you are in is the natural world and your perception of it is always changing as you live through more experiences (Weiss 2016). Most likely you understand *time* and *space* in the modernised conventional way, time passes and space is where you are. This implies that if you were to 'change worlds' and get a new perspective, thus engaging with new components of that 'world' (ibid.), *time* and *space* might be perceived as something else. Imagine that you are standing upon a hill and you look out and see the ocean, if you change locations and look behind in another direction you might see a forest or a desert. This is how I have interpreted Weiss' (ibid.) when she writes that the individual can change her perspective by shifting her gaze or moving to another space. However, your experiences and perceptions and interpretations of these events which you have encountered are your own, no one else can join you on that hilltop you stand upon, thus everyone's perception of a phenomenon will be different. *Time* and *space* will be used as analytical concepts, they have in previous research been used to look at everyday practices and routines and will make it easier to gain a better understanding of how *time* and *space* are perceived but also how *toxicity* and the everyday practices will alter and

affect the temporal and spatial dimension. Applying this to my thesis would mean that *time* and *space* might be perceived differently when the participants move from their everyday life filled with taken-for-granted experiences into their ‘gaming space’. Within this space the participants might experience and perceive *time*, *space*, and *toxicity* to be something other than what is previously established and it is those perceptions and interpretations I want to analyse. Therefore I will be *bracketing* my pre established notions of *toxicity*.

4. Methodology

4.1 Method

With this thesis I set out to explore toxicity, gaming routines and practices using players perspective as the vantage point. In order to collect the data it made sense to apply a qualitative methodology, using in-depth semi-structured interviews. In my theory section I have stressed the importance of everyday life, lived experience, time, space and other concepts which will be used throughout the analysis. As I am dealing with these dimensions and topics that are inherently qualitative I decided to use a thematic coding strategy when I was perusing the collected raw data.

Phenomenologists ground themselves in an actor point of view in order to understand, describe and explain how a phenomenon is perceived in a certain subculture or field (Yüksel & Yildirim 2015: 3). In media studies scholars have used the phenomenological framework for similar things such as Bengtsson and Johansson (2020) who researched how news were perceived; Tudor (2018: 39) gives an account for how various type of media affect our everyday lives; Couldry and Hepp (2017) uses a materialist phenomenology to grasp the mediatization of everyday life caused by various different media. Considering that games are a medium, using a phenomenological and qualitative approach in this thesis is therefore a way to delineate myself within the media and

communication field. The literature in the literature review chapter all used a qualitative methodology in order to grasp and understand toxicity, all except one. Salminen et al. (2019) used a quantitative methodology but it was deemed too inefficient in order to capture the complex phenomenon that is toxicity.

Before the descriptions of concepts which will be given in this section it is important to keep in mind that the concepts are not definitive or ultimate, for example, interpretivism and qualitative research are not terms which are not completely agreed upon as in its meaning (Williams 2000: 209-210). Qualitative research is based on interpretivism and constructivism (Deshpande 1983; Sale et al. 2002 as cited in Slevitch 2011: 76). Interpretivism deals with subjectivism and understanding a person's subjective meaning is essential to an interpretive approach (Goldkuhl 2012: 4). This interpretive approach was a central tenet to the 'Verstehen' (understanding) tradition (Goldkuhl 2012: 4; Schwandt 1998: 223) which deals with the understanding of the meaning of a social phenomenon (Schwandt 1998: 223). Furthermore according to Schutz (1970 as cited in Goldkuhl 2012: 4) scientific knowledge about social life was of second-order character and therefore it must be based on meaning and knowledge of the studied actors. Considering the discussion above, interpretivism can be understood as, although there are many different definitions and types of interpretivism, the interpretation of subjective experience gathered from studied actors.

Similar to interpretivism constructivism also deals with lived experience from actors, thus the studied actors become, sort of, the vantage point. Constructivists do not understand the world as being filled with facts waiting to be discovered but rather that facts are created and that the facts are the result of our perspective. In other words, knowledge is created, not discovered (Schwandt 1998: 236). An example of this would be the toxicity phenomenon, human actors have impressions of a variety of experiences which are then formed into concepts (Schwandt 1998: 237). This implies that toxicity is a phenomenon which is constructed by actors based on impressions and experience rather than as an already existing fact to be found.

Idealism is an ontological view which emphasizes that there is not one 'true' reality but instead that realities are created through one's *interpretation* and *construction* of one's own reality. In that way idealism applies both interpretivism and constructivism

in its own ontology. Thus, applying these two concepts it implies that idealists also understand the world or reality as part of human perception and interpretation. Utilising this approach I will therefore set out to describe how toxicity is perceived and interpreted as in this thesis I consider the world to be produced and reinforced by humans through action and interaction (Goldkuhl 2012: 5).

Generalisability is not pursued as it is simply not considered to be possible to be achieved from neither an epistemological nor an ontological standpoint (Slevitch 2011: 78). Interpretivists also tend to deny generalisation, as opposed to 'generic' qualitative researchers (Williams 2000: 210). Instead of a generalisation a 'transferability' can be given instead (ibid.), which relies on the vividness and depth of the descriptions of a phenomenon which can then be transferred to their, the readers, setting (Slevitch 2011: 78).

As I am using theories which match the qualitative methodology simultaneously it plays into the aforementioned interpretivism, constructivism and idealism which I have given an account for. I consider using in-depth semi-structured interviews with players who are actively playing LoL as a logical and suitable approach.

Qualitative research is not simply 'not quantitative research', a qualitative approach looks to explore the world 'out there' by understanding, describing and explaining phenomena through different means. These means to that end could be by analysing experiences, everyday life, practices and stories to name a few (Kvale 2003: x). One could say that a qualitative approach is to understand how people construct the world around them and what they are doing and what is affecting them in such a context are meaningful and insightful data. For example, drawing from Tudor's (2018: 40) section about making space feel right, my thesis would not want to know how many people make space feel right but instead how and why. These everyday practices thus become rich and insightful data that Kvale (2003: x) mentioned.

My research questions are of an interpretive and explorative nature, I want to understand how toxicity is perceived by the participants and then I want to interpret that data. Because of this *lived experience* and interactions from the natural context (LoL) becomes important data for my analysis. Therefore I make use of phenomenology and in-depth interviews. Naturally there are other qualitative methods namely hermeneutics,

ethnography, participatory activities and observations to name a few (Slevitch 2011: 78), all of these deal with a sort of sense-making and understanding of, for example, why a person acted in a certain way in a certain scenario. However, due to the current covid pandemic it would be unwise to conduct observations to gather data.

Toxicity is dependent on context and a lot of previously defined in-game actions does not need to be inherently toxic but can instead enable toxicity (Kou 2020). This implies that different game mechanics can enable toxicity, there is also game-specific jargon which means that it would be appropriate of me to involve myself with the game and the community practically to be able to understand certain events which the participants may tell me about.

As Elmezeny's et al. (2018) discovered, people would get ridiculed due to their lack of game-knowledge, this implies that a complexity within games which are knowledge-related which incentivises me to have a deep understanding of League of Legends to understand certain contextual situations in order to be able to analyse any of the interviews at all.

4.2 In-depth semi-structured interviews

Previous game studies have dealt with an analysis of data in an online documented form, in other words chat logs, Reddit posts and comments (Kou 2020; Kou & Gui 2020; Elmezeny et al. 2018; Salminen et al. 2019; Deslauriers et al 2018). These studies are not by any means ineffective or poorly made but they are not as explorative as a phenomenological study which relies on interpretation through interviews. Because of this, and the fact that my research questions are of an explorative and descriptive nature, conducting interviews seems to be a viable strategy to uncover new data and simultaneously be a good method to use which will complement my theories.

The in-depth interviews are my method of choice for data collection in this thesis, it is commonly used in qualitative research and other scholars have stressed the importance of talking to people to understand their point of view Legard et al. (2003: 138).

Furthermore, a conversation is lucrative, in terms of gathering data, as language is a

powerful tool used to illustrate meaning (Legard et al. 2003: 138). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 126, as cited in Legard et al.) describe the power of language in the following way:

[T]he expressive power of language provides the most important resource for accounts. A crucial feature of language is its capacity to present descriptions, explanations, and evaluations of almost infinite variety about any aspect of the world, including itself.

In-depth interviews, and obviously language, will be used to understand how toxicity is defined and perceived by the interviewees which seamlessly fits together with the aforementioned citation; I want explanations, descriptions and personal experience from the participants. Furthermore I would say it goes hand-in-hand together with Van Manen's (2016: 26-27) three key points of phenomenology. Firstly, it is a wonder and a pathos which drives me to grasp this phenomenon in question. Secondly, we want to approach this phenomenon in this 'home', and in this case the home address is the participants as their stories are what will define toxicity. Thirdly, *bracketing*, which is a method in itself in conjunction with in-depth interviews as it gives me an incentive to listen and follow along with the participants rather than using pre-established knowledge.

An in-depth interview is compared to a conversation with a purpose (Webb & Webb 1932: 130 as cited in Legard et al. 2003: 138) as it produces knowledge of how the social world is constructed. The construction of this social world, what makes up the world around the participant and how it affects them are interesting from a qualitative point of view (Kvale 2003: xi). Legard et al. (2003: 139) presents two approaches to in-depth interviews, one is the miner metaphor and the other is the traveler metaphor, both approaches are put forward by Kvale (2007: 19-21). I have opted for a traveler approach in this thesis as this approach enables a production of knowledge instead of a collection of knowledge which the counterpart offers. Recall that the qualitative approach I am taking is dependent on interpreting and exploring everyday life experiences and practices thus it would be more suitable if I entered a journey as a traveler to then take the data back home and analyse it.

Kvale (ibid.) describes the traveler metaphor as the role the interviewer takes on, the interviewer becomes the traveler and journey together with the denizens of another world, they tell the interviewer stories of their lived world. The meanings of their stories are then unravelled through the interviewer's interpretation and then presented to the audience. The traveler metaphor thus becomes a suitable approach when conducting interviews, it fits well with the construction of the knowledge theme which I am after rather than collecting knowledge thus it plays into the overall methodological approach I have opted for. Furthermore, key concepts which are used within the traveler metaphor, such as *lived experience*, interpretation, interactions and so forth (Kvale 2007: 20) are closely connected to the phenomenological framework I have presented.

An in-depth interview is flexible in the sense it can vary in terms of structure, but no matter how unstructured an interview is it still covers the necessary topics that the researcher set out to explore (Legard et al 2003: 141). Therefore a sort of interview schedule or guide can be made beforehand covering specific questions or, more loosely, broad themes. In-depth interviews also require methods and techniques of probing to achieve a depth in answers, an initial response is usually on the surface level therefore the interviewer will have to use follow-up questions to gain a better and fuller understanding of the interviewees answer. Furthermore, this format allows the interviewer to explore all the underlying factors for the participants' answers, reasons, feelings and so forth. This is an important part of a qualitative study which needs to be covered (ibid.). Similarly to Van Manen (2016: 26-27) who wrote that a phenomenological study begins with a sense of wonder, Legard et al. (2003: 142) highlights the importance of curiosity as an essential component of the interviewer.

Content mining and content mapping are two ways in which a researcher can achieve depth and breadth in answers. Content mapping are questions which open up new areas to be discussed whereas content mining are questions which are used to explore the opened areas in detail (Legard et al. 2003: 148). These types both require further probing, especially content mining but visual and non-verbal cues are also effective such as a gesture, silence or a facial expression which implies that it is important that I use a web camera whilst conducting the interviews.

In conclusion, in-depth interviews are a data gathering method which is a suitable approach to use in this thesis as a main data collection tool. The interviews were also quite easy to plan and conduct over the internet. Drawing from Legard et al. (2003) and Kvale (2003) in-depth interviews also fit what I am trying to achieve, and the methods and techniques offered were seamlessly transitioned into my own interview manuscript. Furthermore, when dealing with themes such as time and space in everyday life, gaming and toxicity it was helpful making use of the probing strategies and content mining and mapping questions to break new ground and evade only surface-level answers.

4.3 Interview guide and thematic coding

In this section I will present how the interviews were conducted, this includes certain actions I took, planning and methods of probing. I will also explain where the participants were recruited from and which softwares was used. An account for how the thematic coding was conducted will also be given towards the end of this subsection.

The interviews were all conducted over Discord, a communication software which was popular among the participants. A total of 14 people were interviewed and the interview lasted for about 60 minutes. All the interviews were recorded using OBS (Open Broadcaster Software).

An important factor for a good in-depth interview is establishing a well-working relationship with the interviewees. The participants should feel at ease and reside in a climate of trust, this is partly interlinked with the previous points such as being genuinely interested in the participants and their experiences. However, as an interviewer I also need to portray a professional attitude, that I have a job to do and that I know what I am doing (Legard et al. 2003: 143; Malterud et al. 2016: 1755). Therefore, the interviews started out with some small-talk about gaming, if they had any fortune in previous games and their opinions about the current state and patches of LoL. This was also done to show interest and show that I too sit on knowledge about LoL, furthermore the first moment of an interview are the most important as the participants would want to know more about the interviewer, what kind of person I am in order to open up to me about their feelings

and experiences (Kvale 2007: 55). After the small-talk the study was presented, why it was being recorded and any questions that arose before the interview started was dealt with.

Similar to Bengtsson and Johansson (2020: 11-12) I started out with a broad question about their relation to gaming and what meaning and importance it had for them in their lives. This was done in order to open up their lifeworld in a gaming context.

A semi-structured interview manuscript was created, it did not consist of any questions but rather broad themes which needed to be discussed in order to answer the research questions. These themes were based on the theoretical framework presented earlier in this thesis. Interviews will generally be based on topics which will give the interview a certain flexibility, the topics can be covered in the way the participant finds most suitable and comfortable (Legard et al. 2003: 141). Furthermore using topics and themes instead of specific questions makes the interview 'flow', playing into the key concepts of the traveler metaphor. Finally this approach has a flexible enough structure which allows for probing responses which the participant can raise spontaneously about issues related to the topics (ibid.).

The themes used in the coding process were the following: time; space; everyday life; toxicity (definition) and toxicity (perception); these themes were made by using the research questions as a base. One of the greatest challenges of qualitative research is to decide what is worth analysing, these themes along with codes make it easier to process the large amount of data (Vaughn & Turner 2016: 50). The excerpts were first placed into the corresponding theme, for example if the participant said that 'Toxic behaviour is when you ruin other players' gaming experiences' (Participant 6) it was put in the toxicity (definition) as it was interpreted as a definition. This process was made easier as each theme was, usually, presented with a question such as 'how would you define toxicity?' thus making it simple to place each excerpt in the correct theme. The excerpts were then given a code, this process was done inductively. The codes and excerpts were then worked through until they were deemed to be satisfactory. During this process some of the codes were re-worked, re-named or completely removed. The analysis will be presented based on this coding procedure, the theme will be connected to the research questions whereas the codes are what was discussed within the corresponding theme.

The content analysis (Rose 2001) was considered to be a good match as my data is of a qualitative and interpretive nature and content analysis can include qualitative interpretation (Rose 2001: 55). Even though it has been used for quantification other scholars emphasise that content analysis provides an understanding of symbolic qualities of text, in other words, certain aspects of a text refers back to the wider cultural context it belongs to. Furthermore other scholars have suggested that content analysis can provide empirical results that might be overshadowed by the sheer amount of material under analysis (ibid.).

It should be noted that Rose's (2001) work deals with imagery which I am not using, thus I have modified the content analysis to function with my material which is excerpts of interviews. This did not prove to be a problem as the method of analysing images was originally developed to interpret written and spoken text (Rose 2001: 54).

Following Rose's guideline, the excerpts were given a theme which was then coded. This was an important stage as the analysis relies on the coding process, the codes should describe what the excerpt is really about (Rose 2001: 59). Similar to Lutz and Collins (1993 as cited in Rose 2001: 59) I used the theoretical framework I have presented to construct the codes, this makes the codes more obviously interpretative. The codes were considered carefully, according to Rose (2001: 60) they must be exhaustive; exclusive and enlightening, in other words each aspect of the excerpt must be covered by a code, the codes may not overlap and the codes should produce a breakdown of the excerpts which will be analytically interesting and coherent.

After the coding process was completed the excerpts were interpreted using the codes and the theoretical concepts of space, time, toxicity as well as applying the phenomenological framework presented earlier in order to answer the research questions.

4.4 Participants and ethical discussion

The participants were chosen by using a network sampling strategy, utilising the Facebook group 'League of Legends Sverige' and a Discord server dedicated specifically

for Swedish League of Legends players. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 27 of 14 participants 12 were men and the two others were women. The participants all played on the Europe West server. Because the server does not restrict who can access them it implies that first, it is difficult to sample a representative group of all the players on that server as citizens of China, South Korea, Russia, or Brazil could decide to play on that server. Second, this also implies that the servers could have different cultures and norms of what, for example, constitute toxicity. Thus the participants, who were all Swedish, were recruited by using network sampling strategy as well as a purposeful sampling strategy they were therefore chosen because of their abilities to provide useful and rich information rather than being a representative for a large group (Hellström 2008; Walsh 2003 as cited in Slevitch 2011: 78). These sampling strategies were also used because of the purpose of this thesis, this study does not aim at generalising the results for the entire LoL community. Therefore it would be better to have a sample which would provide the thesis with useful information to better understand the phenomenon (Marshall 1996: 523). Even so, it unfortunately proved to be difficult to gather a sample with great variation in age and gender specifically. Furthermore, sampling from Facebook groups and Discord servers also restricts which people are sampled, for example, 'lurkers', people who do not engage in commenting are missed out on. Because of a time deficit it was not deemed feasible to cover the entire Europe West servers demographics, it does however open up for future research which will be covered in the final chapter. Even though the aim with this sample was not to be representative for a large group, it is still an imbalanced sample size and thus the conclusions drawn from the results were deduced with caution.

Before I published a post in the groups I received permission from the administrators of the groups. Everyone who showed interest by commenting on my post were contacted by me using the private messages function to recruit them or answer any questions they had. Some contacted me directly through the private message function and were recruited that way. The participants were made aware that this was a completely voluntary study and no rewards would be given out for participating. The participants were also made aware of the recording of the interview and accepted that condition. Furthermore they were told that they could at any time contact me if they changed their mind so I could remove their answers from the analysis. The requirements which was

asked of the participants were:

1. Being at least 18 years old.
2. Having played League of Legends for at least a year.
3. Actively playing League of Legends today on a regular basis.

Since toxicity is considered a complex, situational and contextual phenomenon I decided to focus on one game. League of Legends also has a reputation of having a toxic community, furthermore as will be covered in the analysis certain game mechanics can enable toxicity and be inherently toxic; thus analysing more games in this thesis might lead to me not reaching the depth I want to obtain.

In the analysis as well as my coding documents the participants are made anonymous, thus they will be referred to as 'participant x' where 'x' represents their number which has also been randomised.

6. Data analysis

This chapter will present the analysis and result of the empirical data gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Kvale 2007; Legard et al. 2003). The analysis will be presented in such a way which will answer the research questions. Relevant themes to each research question will be brought up and then codes which fall within that theme will be further analysed. Due to the interviews all being in Swedish they have been translated but not altered in regard to language, thus swears and other potentially harmful words will be kept in. This is to gain an understanding of what kind of words are used when someone is being toxic, thus making toxicity more tangible as a concept.

As the excerpts contain some terms and expressions which require context and explanation an explanation in brackets will be given under the corresponding excerpt.

Furthermore, all champions names and item names will be marked in cursive to indicate that it is a name rather than a term which needs to be understood.

6.1 RQ1: How is time and space experienced by the participants through gaming practices?

In order to answer this first question the dimensions of time and space were looked at more closely in conjunction with the gaming routines and practices. These seemingly banal everyday practices and routines are more complex and important than they seem (Van Manen 2016: 42-43). These everyday activities have been a necessary component in this analysis and have helped me to provide concrete insights into the qualitative meanings of, firstly the participants' everyday life (ibid.) but also toxicity.

Starting from the spatial dimension it became clear that space matters, specifically the feeling of the space. Space was made to feel right (Tudor 2018: 40) through various preparatory tasks, such as turning the lights on or off and preparing a beverage but also more significant chores such as completing a study session and going to the shops. Because of this it was deemed important to not solely look at the direct change of space but also at everyday life activities as some participants mentioned how they wanted to finish other tasks so they could focus on gaming. These everyday tasks might at first seem insignificant but, as will be further argued later in this chapter, these everyday actions were looked at in conjunction with their gaming sessions. In other words these actions are significant by the participants as they directly affect the space around them to make the space comfortable and 'feel right' (ibid.) before a gaming session.

Other than playing into the meaningfulness of space as the place their body is in (Couldry & Hepp 2017) it always adhered to the temporal dimension or time as a general modernised way of understanding it.

The participants' perception of space changed and their *natural attitude* were not actively engaged anymore, instead they started to utilise and engage in components which were needed to function in the 'gaming world' (Weiss 2016: 4). The participants seemed

to experience that space was ‘inside’ the computer, in the game rather than the physical location they were sitting in (Husserl 1910-1911: 41-42).

When answering this question I will be focusing on the themes, time and space as these themes were the most prominent themes during the coding process. Belonging to these themes are relevant codes which will be brought up, explained and analysed. The participants' replies showed a pattern, there was a clear distinction between tasks and activities which unfolded or were actively completed prior to a gaming session and activities which were done during a gaming session. Comments relating to the former description were coded as '*Preparatory gaming related actions*' whereas the latter were coded as '*Gaming actions*'.

6.1.1 Preparatory gaming related actions

This code was used when the participants explained actions they did in order to prepare for a gaming session. This is mainly related to the spatial dimension but as time and space are difficult to separate (Couldry & Hepp 2017) the temporal aspect will also be present. The aim of this code, and the next one '*Gaming actions*' is to more clearly illustrate how, and if, there are any changes of the *natural attitude* and how the temporal and spatial dimensions are experienced in conjunction with gaming. Surprisingly enough when asked to explain about routine activities and what they did prior to a gaming session they discussed the same things, music, beverages, lighting, layout of gaming equipment and so on. These actions were not simply randomly executed actions, they were specific routines which were carried out, more or less, every time prior to a gaming session to make the experience as comfortable as possible (Tudor 2018: 40).

I sweat like hell, especially when I play League for some reason, so I usually open a window before I enter a game. (Participant 7).

The excerpt from participant 7 is a direct change of space through opening a window and affecting the temperature and thus quite literally the ‘feel’ of the room (Tudor 2018:

39-40). Furthermore this was an action the participant made mostly before a gaming session was about to begin.

If I come straight home from school and I am mentally tired I do not want to sit down at the computer straight away because then I will not leave, I want to complete a couple of things before I start playing. I always keep water next to the computer, tobacco should be close, if I need caffeine I drink coffee or Nocco, I make sure the chair feels right. (Participant 8).

The other excerpt gives us insight into everyday life and the other aspect of indirectly making space feel right or perhaps making the body feel right through completing one thing in order to move on to the next. The participants want to complete other activities and put them aside in order to fully immerse themselves in a longer gaming session later (Participant 4, 8, 12). This implies that there are two ways of affecting space, firstly it is the direct way of making space feel right (Tudor 2018) by opening a window. Secondly, there is the other way which is making sure the mood is right through completing other necessary activities like washing the dishes (Participant 4). All of the everyday actions that are analysed in this thesis are of significance for this study as they are connected to gaming, either directly or indirectly. Therefore these actions, like washing the dishes, might seem simple and banal at first but they need to be understood in a gaming context. Space especially has been used to look at everyday practices to understand the importance of media in everyday life (Moore 2006; Bengtsson & Johansson 2020; Tudor 2018). Participant 8 also offers insight to the spatial dimension and the importance of things being in the right place and routine gaming activities such as keeping water next to the computer, having tobacco nearby, consuming caffeine if feeling drowsy and making sure that the chair feels right as well as the mind.

In conclusion, the direct change of space in order to enter a gaming mode and making space feel right were pretty straightforward. Temperature, lighting, food, snacks, beverages, and more were things which were done prior to a gaming session. The lighting was the one element of all of these preparatory actions which I found most interesting as

lighting does not affect gaming all that much because the monitor lights up. Thus lighting was only ever changed on or off to establish a sort of gaming mode. What is also interesting to state is that the participants' actions are backwards to what Tudor (2018) suggests. Rather than using media to make space feel right the participants are using everyday tasks to make the 'media space' feel right. Furthermore, this behaviour can also be connected to mediatization as the participants' behaviour changes as soon as their actions become connected to gaming (Schulz 2004 as cited in Hjarvard 2008: 5).

Because gaming sessions rarely occurred without any sort of preparatory actions being completed, it implies that these preparatory everyday routine actions are of huge significance when trying to understand routines in conjunction with space (Lefebvre 2004) and media (Moore 2006). In some cases these preparatory gaming actions could be specifically meticulous and span over the course of 30 minutes to an hour. The process of preparation consisted of hyping themselves up before they started playing and completing several small routine tasks related to gaming.

If I am playing solo I turn on the client but I do not start a game for about an hour. To hype up I lay down in my bed and watch videos about LoL, highlights, I might not be that excited to play but when I see someone playing my main I get into the zone. (Participant 2).
(Main refers to their favourite/most played champion)

The excerpts from participant 2 is an example of hyping oneself up to get into the mood of gaming through videos and highlight reels of different LoL-related videos. Going back to Lefebvre (2004) the actions within and relating to the space are of interest rather than the space itself; this also implies that everyday actions in general become of great importance when dealing with the findings. The actions of getting oneself into the mood through consuming game related fan made content becomes a preparatory gaming action, arguably, as the participants mood changed afterwards, the feeling of space also changed (Tudor 2018). This sort of action is also an effect of media becoming an integral part of everyday life (Hjarvard 2008: 1; Bolin et al. 2016: 157). Participant 2 also brings up the

fact that the client is already turned on so the person can see the game related things such as patch notes, new skins, champions and so forth but the participant is not actively playing the game. This is also a sort of manipulation of space but the space is now no longer only the physical location in which our bodies are located but it has expanded into the computer (Couldry & Hepp 2017), a subsection further down will deal with these instances in more detail.

Usually I am in the launcher, I look at my match history, my friends match history to see when they played. I think a lot about the game before I start a match. If I am trying out new champions I might go through a list and think about which one to pick. Sometimes when I start the launcher I am reminded of, for example, the dishes and then I minimize the launcher so I cannot see it and take care of what I need to take care of. (Participant 4).

The other excerpt goes into greater detail of routine actions, a sort of planning and scheming commencing when the launcher has started which is not uncommon (participant 13) as there currently exists 155 different playable champions. What is interesting in this excerpt from participant 4 is the ‘intrusion’ of everyday life. The construction of the gaming space (Lefebvre 2004) is affected by, as well as the entire everyday life, technology. Not only are the participants preparing and creating new spaces (Lefebvre 2004; Couldry & Hepp 2017) through technology, they are using modern technology to make these spaces feel right (Tudor 2018) but simultaneously the technology and in this case LoL is affecting their daily routines and social practices (Morley 2010: 10).

The majority of the participants actively modified the space they were in to create a good feeling to play in, those who did not and simply stated that 'I do not do something in particular, it just happens that I sit down and start playing a little' (participant 5), even so they would add that they made sure to not have any other tasks that needed attention, like going shopping for instance. It is also worth noting that there were those who did not do any *preparatory gaming related actions* but instead mentioned that they simply started up the game and began playing as soon as they felt like it. The majority of these

participants played fewer hours a week than those who did have a more set routine before gaming. Some participants had rather specific routines which unfolded naturally:

I fix the chair, the armrests, everything is in its place, in conjunction with that I fix the keyboard since I use different hotkeys, I move the keyboard a lot to the left because it feels good for the hand. I also have a glass of water, a big one, like a beer stein and I make sure that it is away from the computer but with the handle turned towards me so I can easily pick it up. (Participant 4).

The above excerpt is an example of how space has changed, through actions related to gaming, to become a space of gaming (Lefebvre 2004; Schmid 2008: 29). It also gives us an insight into how important actions relating to the space, which the body is located in, is to create a comfortable gaming environment.

It is the *preparatory gaming related actions*, be it preparing a drink, going to the bathroom or shopping, that are important in order to make the space and gaming session successfully pleasant rather than the space in itself. Furthermore, these actions help the participants to establish a space and in a sense makes room for gaming in their everyday life. It is important to look at the actions which are done in order to get oneself into the mood, for example by watching a video on Youtube related to LoL. These actions are mainly caused by technology and therefore become meaningful to look at (Morley 2010: 10) because they highlight the effect of media; mediatization. Actions such as changing the layout of the equipment, putting the keyboard in the 'right' place and consuming game-related content to hype yourself up is only possible through the means of technology. It is important to, once again, highlight that these actions are significant to the participants' gaming practices as they are directly related to their gaming sessions.

As a final remark, the physical space around us is modified through means of *preparatory gaming related actions* to create a socially constructed gaming space where certain things must be in a certain way depending on the individual. These things could be lighting, temperature, the place in which the gaming gear is in and so forth. The bodily

mood must be right as well, therefore some tasks which are not related to gaming are carried out so the session would not be interrupted later, these tasks were going shopping, cleaning dishes, watching videos and so forth.

6.1.2 Gaming actions

Gaming actions refer to the actions which were done while the participants were playing the game in connection to time and space. These actions are therefore not preparatory as LoL does not grant you the time to go and wash the dishes. Instead these actions were therefore directly affected by LoL and could take place within the game and the physical space in which their bodies were located. Furthermore time and space will be looked at in terms of how they are perceived to be able to present an understanding of how their perception and their standpoint (Weiss: 2016) change. This is done in order to submerge myself in and get a better understanding of the gaming context. Unlike the previous section which dealt with the preparation before a match, this section looks closer at the actions the participants took while being in a game and how they relate to the temporal and spatial dimensions.

It was made obvious that the attitude towards time in-game had little if any connection to what the participants referred to as 'in real life time' or IRL time for short. Due to what can be called an immersion of the game, the participants all mentioned that they had a lot of focus on the game and only, if ever, did other activities when there was downtime.

When I am playing I am using it (the telephone) to answer messages
but I am not surfing at the same time, I do use it more when I have
one of those games where the screen is mostly grey. (Participant 2).
(Screen being mostly grey refers to the player being dead).

This excerpt was the most common type of answer, usually the participants would look at their phone when they were dead or do other tasks within the 20-50 second downtime, such as going to the bathroom or refilling a water bottle. From this, and other examples

from the participants, I understand that playing LoL requires a lot of focus and thus time to tend to other tasks not related to the match you are playing simply does not exist. This might also be a reason why there are such distinct routines before a gaming session. Furthermore LoL thus affects how tasks are carried out (Morley 2010: 10; Hjarvard 2008: 5) by limiting the amount of time you are 'free' to do something which is not related to the match.

I consume tobacco, usually one portion between every match but depending on how it goes, if it does not go well I can easily have four portions during a match. When I die I take the portion out and shove in a new one. (Participant 1)

This excerpt provides another example of what could be done during the downtime and how LoL affects time and actions (Morley 2010: 10; Hjarvard 2008: 1). In most cases the participants stated that they are very invested in what is going on in the match, so much that for some it could be difficult to 'get back' into the real world. 'I am inside the game, I have difficulties holding a conversation when I am in-game' (Participant 13). This gives an insight to why there are so many different and specific preparatory actions, whilst you are playing a game of LoL there is a lot of focus on the game so in order to not be disturbed the preparatory gaming actions are being done beforehand to reduce the time deficit (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 128). It was made obvious that the participants were all invested in the game and only interacted with the real world when they were either dead, waiting to be respawned or when they were running back from the base to their lane. For example, 'I have my mobile with me and reply when I have time to spare, if I am dead or running to the lane' (Participant 11). This 'juggling' between the phone and other media and the game is a good indicator and example to show how the participants are constantly connected to more spaces when they are playing (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 107) as well as expanding and creating more spaces (Lefebvre 2004; Schmid 2008: 29).

The most prominent aspect of time and the most interesting find was how it was almost completely separated from the so-called 'in-real life' (IRL) time. Weiss (2016: 4) does make a point about how the *natural attitude* cannot be the exact same, which in the

participants' replies are true, they do not possess the same standpoint but there are similarities in how they relate to time in LoL. What is important to keep in mind is that LoL does not have a 'real life' clock in the HUD but a timer which starts from 00:00 and counts the seconds and minutes of the game.

The in-game time is for keeping track of all the spawn times, Baron and drakes, stuff you have to keep track on. It also depends on what team you have, do they scale or not, like, after 30 minutes we will lose every teamfight. It becomes frustrating when you close in on 40 minutes, you want to finish the game before 25 or 30 minutes.

(Participant 2).

(Scaling refers to how progressively stronger a champion becomes).

This excerpt implies that the in-game time is for managing the in-game events such as when certain monsters spawn. This was a common reply, at certain times you need to be at a certain spot and the in-game time keeps track of that. However it also has a strategic purpose, participant 2 mentioned that it depends on the team. Certain champions perform better the further the game progresses, thus time can be seen as a sort of resource.

I play a lot of AP *Twitch* and his core item is *Nashor's tooth* and then

I think I need it before 12-13 minutes otherwise I am garbage.

(Participant 5)

(AP is an abbreviation of ability power, a sort of damage type in the game).

Participant 5 used the time as checkpoints, after a certain amount of minutes he needed to have progressed 'this' far.

I never connect the in-game time to the real world time, I only use it for in-game stuff. Like there is early game, mid game, late game, and you need to keep track of how many items my ADC needs to

become strong, do we have scaling champions? I keep track of where the jungler is, how long it takes to clear. (Participant 8).
(Clear in this context refers to how quickly the jungler kills neutral monsters).

Participant 8, the last excerpt, similarly to participant 2 also used the time strategically for in-game tactics. For example keeping track of the different stages of the game, how well your teammates are progressing and where the enemy jungler is. This adds another layer of depth to both time and the game.

These are some examples of how the participants put their *natural attitude* in the background (Weiss 2016: 10; Husserl 1910-1911) and pick up new components necessary to understand their newly created (Lefebvre 2004; Schmid 2008: 29) world. If we do experience the world through our reality, minds (Kant 2003) and the *natural attitude* (Weiss 2016: 4; Husserl 1910-1911: 37) then one can say that the *natural attitude* gets put in the background and new components are used to understand the newly created world. Therefore time and space are experienced differently from 'our' *natural attitude*. Time is not thought of as to be passing in the real world but instead it takes on a completely different meaning once you enter a game and the timer starts.

As the examples above show how time is used as a sort of revealer of information (participant 8, 5) and a guideline of how you should be performing. A certain time gives the participants an idea of how many items they should have or perhaps that the Baron is spawning and the players start making their way over to be a part of that event. Time also adds pressure, depending on the enemies and their own team they know that after a certain point it will be difficult to achieve victory as the enemies are scaling better.

There were times when the participants mentioned a connection between the in-game duration and the real life time, this was when they had something to take care of after the game. 'As a rule of thumb I check the time between every game as I have a dog I need to walk' (Participant 1). But in most cases the participants did not see a connection between the in-game time and IRL time, further incentivising that their *natural attitude* exists in the background during a gaming session (Weiss 2016: 10).

Even though the participants' *natural attitude* remains in the background (ibid.), the idea of using checkpoints in everyday life is not completely uncommon. For example, you most likely know when you get off work, when you have to prepare dinner and so forth. Similar time management strategies are employed but the perception of time, as stated before, in the gaming space differs from the conventional perception and understanding of time.

Music and sound in general played a much bigger role than I first anticipated, music is being used by the players to either focus, hype themselves up or just to be there as a sound in the background. What was also surprising was the role of other media like Twitch and Youtube which was turned on in the background but the sound was muted so as not to disturb them.

I usually only have music on but also a stream, but it is muted because it is very difficult to focus with it on in the background.

When I get out of a game I turn the volume up. In terms of music I usually listen to Iron Maiden on max volume, a lot of heavy rock, I have noticed though that when I play LoL classical music is great for focus. Beethoven and stuff like that. For example Rossini's William Tell Overture is good, it is dynamic and stuff, good for hype.

(Participant 2).

This excerpt is especially interesting, participant 2 mentions that a stream is on in the background but it is muted, thus it does not serve a purpose during the game. In regards to the spatial dimension it becomes clear that the created 'gaming space', to give it a temporary name, is constructed (Lefebvre 2004; Schmid 2008: 29) in the computer and is also part of the 'making space feel right' phenomenon (Tudor 2018: 40). Furthermore the participant also said that he/she listens to classical music when playing LoL to increase focus. It is clear that this is a change caused by technology, LoL specifically, and the change should not be restricted to this activity as a simple change of routine but also as an effect of mediatization (Morley 2010: 10; Hjarvard 2008: 2).

I listen to a lot of different genres but it is mostly house that I hype up to and try my best to win, that is why I listen to it. Sometimes when I am not motivated to win I put some music on to get into the mood. (Participant 5).

The excerpt from participant 5 provides an example of how music can be put on to increase the gaming mood, this is similar to what has been discussed before (Tudor 2018: 39) but what is interesting in this regard is that the music is turned on whilst playing rather than earlier as a preparatory measure.

If I am playing seriously I usually listen to Sabaton if I want to win, I hype up a little but during the match I am too focused to hear the music. (Participant 6).

Finally the excerpt from participant 6 shows how music is of importance due to hype and that it causes, according to the participants, a more positive outlook. It also highlights another aspect, the 'feeling' (Tudor 2018: 39) of the created space. Similar to how the temperature and physical things around the computer are modified to create the gaming space and make it feel right, the created gaming space also goes through similar procedures.

Music plays a big role for setting the mood or making the space feel right, even though a lot of the participants stated that they do not actually hear the music, due to being focused on the game, it serves a purpose. 'I listen to the music the first few minutes then I am sucked into the game and I do not hear it anymore' (Participant 13). In some rare occurrences participants said that they did not have anything else on in the background, these players said that it was due to their previous experience of other games which require you to hear where the enemy is coming from.

Music is versatile, it was being used as a sort of way to hype the players and to enhance their focus, a surprising amount of the participants noted that they listen to ASMR videos because 'It is so calming when you yourself are riled up, especially if you get angry and toxic'. (Participant 12).

6.1.3 Conclusive remarks

In this section I summarise the results and analysis above to answer the research question. It is important to state that there are nuances, the data is complex and interpretative and this is how I have interpreted it.

Through *preparatory gaming related actions* the participants affect the space directly, this was mostly described as events which were simply being ‘unfolded’ in everyday life. For example, switching the lights on or off, grabbing something to drink or moving around the gaming equipment was usually done as a routine and not thought of as much. However, these *preparatory gaming related actions* are more than a simple routine which unfolds, they are part of an intricate procedure which creates a new space (Lefebvre 2004; Schmid 2008: 29). These actions also prepare the space and make it comfortable (Tudor 2018: 39) by moving around equipment and finishing other tasks so they will not come back and interrupt their session later. In many cases gaming was done during the evening and the night thus indicating that it is one of the last things the participants do before going to bed.

Space was no longer where they were located physically (Couldry & Hepp 2017: 107) or rather, it was not limited to the place around them but it expanded into the game because of their actions. So, even though not every single one of the participants carried out *preparatory gaming related actions* they still experienced space differently when they were playing. When the participants had finished their *preparatory gaming related actions* they put the *natural attitude* in the background and engaged in a new world with other components, thus experiencing and perceiving time and space differently from before (Weiss 2016: 10).

This newly created gaming space was also altered through *gaming actions*. Interestingly enough the gaming space was modified through similar means as the physical space was modified, for example opening a window and putting on a stream to have in the background or turning some music on or an ASMR video. These *gaming*

actions were all determined to be caused and enabled by technology (Morley 2010: 10) as they were done 'in' the computer and focused on modifying the newly created space whereas the *preparatory gaming related actions* are good examples of how technology has affected the participants routines and actions to fit the medium and also how it has changed the unfolding of their everyday life activities (Hjarvard 2008: 2; Couldry & Hepp 2013: 197; 2017: 49).

In order to fully understand the change of space we must give an account of how time is experienced as time and space are closely connected. Time was perceived to be something entirely different when they were playing LoL. The participants' perception of time changed when they started their gaming session and entered the gaming space and by doing so they utilised new components necessary for that space (Weiss 2016: 10; Husserl 1910-1911).

As for the meaning of time it is rather similar to that of our modernised understanding of time. The participants would use time as a way to plan checkpoints and goals they wanted to achieve before a certain time. As mentioned earlier this is not all too different from our modernised way of experiencing time, we have deadlines, set times we get off work, wake up, go to bed and so on. However, even though the time management strategies are similar to our conventional understanding, it is imperative to state that their perception and subjective experience of time were different from how we, outside of the gaming space, understand and perceive it (Weiss 2016: 3-4).

Furthermore, time was also seen as a way to plan the day and 'one game' was seen as a time denominator, for example some participants would know that they could play two more games before they had to leave and do something else. Time together with space also affected their actions, only when there was downtime they would connect to other spaces, grab something to drink; while they were in-game. This implies that, first, time is also experienced as a resource, you do not have time to run and get some water because you are currently in a game, which connects back to the preparatory phase and it does shed some light on why that phase exists. Second, using 'one game' as a time denominator is a direct effect of LoL as a medium (Hjarvard 2008: 5) and it reinforces what many scholars has stated before, that media affects our, as members of society,

everyday lives on a micro level (Hjarvard 2008: 1; Bolin et al. 2016: 157; Couldry & Hepp 2017: 51; Moores 2006).

According to the interpretation of the participants' replies, time and space should be considered to be experienced differently as a result of complex and intricate daily routines which creates a new space which changes their perception of space and time (Weiss 2016: 10; Husserl 1910-1911). Through tasks directly, and indirectly, related to gaming they create an environment (Lefebvre 2004; Schmid 2008: 29) in which gaming, LoL specifically, takes focus. LoL also affects (Morley 2010) how some actions are carried out and the participants adapt accordingly (Schulz 2004 as cited in Hjarvard 2008: 5) to be able to carry out actions in terms of time and space within the gaming environment.

Not only has this been insightful in means of understanding how the participants' gaming routines are constructed but establishing the gaming routines and everyday life activities will assist in answering the third and final research question as some effects are not noticed until it disrupts the everyday life routine (Moores 2006).

6.2 RQ2: How is toxicity defined by the participants?

In order to understand toxicity from the participants' point of view the concept needed to be defined using their descriptions. This is also a necessary step, similar to the previous research question, in order to answer the final question of this thesis. The two most prominent codes when discussing toxicity were '*Defining toxicity*' and '*Perceived toxicity*' which will be further explained as they are brought up.

6.2.1 Defining toxicity

Since the participants were all LoL-players toxicity was discussed from that context instead of a general definition of toxicity. Everything which was a direct definition of toxicity was coded as such. It proved difficult to establish a definition as there were

behaviours which were deemed to be toxic by some and a 'part of the game' by others. Therefore it opened up an interesting discussion of normalisation of toxic behaviour which I will go into in more detail further down. As the sample was imbalanced in terms of gender I will not make any definite definitions of toxicity regarding sexism specifically but rather elaborate on the findings in regards to the previous research (McLean & Griffiths 2019; Pendry and Salvatore 2015; Soderman 2017; Fredman 2018) in the discussion chapter.

Even though it was difficult for me to interpret and compile the replies of how toxicity was defined it did not prove difficult for the participants to talk about and give reason and explanation for their definition of toxicity. The general consensus, as I have interpreted it using the participants as a vantage point, is that toxicity, in LoL, is anything that is done on purpose to negatively affect the game experience for other people (Kou 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020; Türkay et al. 2020).

Toxicity is when you insult or do stuff to other players, whether it be enemies or teammates, that are negative, from writing things to running it down mid and intentionally lose the game. It is childish and egocentric. (Participant 3).

This is an example of the general definition of toxicity, a negative attack in the form of a text message. Insults could range from being called 'bad' to personal attacks. Overall the text messages were not thought of to be that bad, although every participant agreed that it is an unnecessary childish behaviour which affects the community and the game negatively. What is interesting is the actions that are done in-game which are considered toxic. 'Running it down mid' is a term used in LoL when a player gives up and runs straight down the middle lane and dies over and over again in order to lose faster. Similar actions are intentionally feeding and trolling which are actions committed by players in-game, which puts their team at a disadvantage. These were considered to be acts of toxic behaviour and were considered to be, by far, the most toxic thing one could do in LoL. This will be further discussed under the code *perceived toxicity*.

I would describe toxicity as calling someone bad, that they suck and everything from beyond that point, without giving any constructive criticism, if that is the case I do not consider it toxic. Toxicity is something that negatively affects the game. (Participant 5).

This excerpt shows another common view on toxic behaviour and that is that it lacks constructive criticism. Other participants also thought of toxicity as being toxic because it lacked that constructive element (Participant 6, 10). However, these replies were usually on the surface level and did not quite fit with how complex Kou (2020) and Deslauriers et al. (2018) had previously described toxicity. However when asked to give an example of how toxic behaviour could look like in-game and why they were considered toxic by the participant it started to become more complex.

Toxicity is always being used as an umbrella term by the participants, toxicity is not one certain general action, it means a lot of things some of which are tied to the context, some participants mentioned how LoL has more ways of being toxic than other games.

'There are more ways to be toxic in LoL, in Counter Strike (another competitive multiplayer game) you can shoot your teammates but in LoL you can use pings for negative things even though they are made to make it easier to communicate with each other, like spam pinging someone with the perfectly made question mark. There are different ways to be toxic'. (Participant 3).

This implies that toxicity is not a phenomenon which should be considered as a general term to describe all toxicity but as a situated concept which has different meanings depending on what game it is.

He played *Anivia* support and stuff, trolled me with his wall so they could kill me. (Participant 2).

(The wall refers to an ability which the champion Anivia can use).

These excerpts are examples of what is mentioned above, because LoL allows for certain actions to be executed which are not found in other games; it becomes a specific case of toxicity in LoL which simply does not exist in other games. Regarding the definition of toxicity, the excerpt (Participant 2) implies that toxicity is not only writing mean stuff in the chat or losing the game on purpose through 'running it down midlane' and dying purposefully but also connected to specific actions enabled by certain playable champions.

It can be toxic pinging 40 question marks, but if someone steals your penta or your buff it is not toxic, it is simply how the game works.
(Participant 7).

(Penta refers to striking the killing blow on all the enemies within a time limit, a rare feat).

The latter excerpt (Participant 7) is similar to the aforementioned case, certain game mechanics, in this case the ping system, enables toxicity through spamming someone with pings. The excerpt also brings up a point which will be covered in greater detail in the next subsection, namely the normalisation of toxic behaviour in-game and the role the perception plays in understanding this phenomenon.

The most obvious form of toxicity came in the form of flaming and calling people out on their mistakes. One participant noted that he understood it as finding a sort of scapegoat which would be used to blame the entire game on rather than accepting that the team in general had performed poorly. (Participant 4). The ping system was frequently brought up as being 'perfect' to use as an indicator of frustration and irritation but it was rarely thought of as being toxic, but instead something that was a given if you made a mistake. This leads into actions which would be considered to be inherently rude and fit in into the toxicity umbrella but is not due to it being normalised within the game. This will be covered more thoroughly in the next section.

Certain aspects of game-design could also be considered 'tilting' and toxic due to the champion's abilities. It is unclear whether the champions are toxic because of their

abilities or that they enable toxicity through their abilities or both. Finally other in-game actions which always got the toxicity stamp, for reference 'But when you are inting you are always toxic, because you are per definition doing it to ruin the game'. (Participant 6). These were things such as inting (Inting is short for intentionally feeding which is to be understood as dying purposefully to increase the enemy's strength) and running down midlane, thus disrupting the unwritten codes of LoL. To my surprise cheating, scripting and other in-game related practices were rarely brought up by the participants. Toxicity seems to be anchored in the game and related only to in-game actions whereas cheating seems to belong to another concept as it was not brought up in conjunction with toxicity.

To summarise, the definition of toxicity in LoL is generally thought of as:
A verbal or non-verbal action which is carried out on purpose with the aim to negatively affect one or more players gaming experience.

This definition definitely works as a surface level answer, but the excerpts used in this subsection implies that there is another layer of toxicity which is ruled by the perception of every player (Kou 2020). Thus the next subsection will deal with explaining the most interesting finds in regards to how toxicity is perceived and then a final answer to the research question will be given.

6.2.2 Perceived toxicity

Toxicity was generally thought of, as previously established, an action which was made purposefully to negatively affect a players gaming experience. But that is very much the general definition of toxicity in LoL. Therefore, when probing, it was discovered that there are many more nuances which are not revealed when asking the initial question of how toxicity is defined. *Perceived toxicity* was the code which was given to excerpts which touched upon the complexity and perception of different aspects of toxicity. This could, for example, be when the participants portrayed a different understanding of the game from their teammates. Because of this complexity I suggest this format, firstly a general definition of toxicity in LoL and secondly, now, a more in-depth analysis of emotions, perception and understanding of toxicity and toxic behaviours in LoL.

There are different levels of toxicity, but in general it is anything which does not benefit the match, stuff you do consciously is toxic. Like running top when the dragon is spawning because you do not care about it. (Participant 13).

This excerpt reinforces the already existing definition of toxicity but the participant adds another layer to it. First of all there are more levels of toxicity, this is interpreted as there are actions which are considered more toxic than others. The latter part shows firstly, an action which could be considered toxic and secondly, it highlights the importance of subjective understanding and the context which the toxic action is being committed in. To clarify, LoL is a complex game and there is not one way to play it, furthermore there are a plethora of different strategies and complex mechanics a player can utilise. Therefore, the section of the excerpt in question becomes insightful in regards to how a participant, or a player in general, might consider an action toxic due to it not aligning with that person's beliefs of how the game should be played.

The participants were asked to explain how they reacted when other people were being toxic towards them and when someone was being toxic towards someone else. Interestingly enough the majority of the participants were not focused on how they or someone else were feeling but the focus was still on the match and what seemed to be important is the performance of oneself and others. Rather, the feelings and emotions experienced were not of sadness because someone was writing mean comments but it was connected to how they and others performed.

I am not affected by the chat, if someone writes something but I get pissed-off when they troll me, they go and die under tower, walk into my lane and stuff like that. (Participant 2).
(Go and die under tower/turret is a form of intentional feeding, meaning dying on purpose to favor the enemy team).

The chat often seemed like something which was not really that important as there existed a mute function which made you unable to see what anyone wrote. In this case the participant simply did not seem to be bothered by the chat but rather by in-game actions which were done to ruin the game. Once again this reinforces the idea that there exists a level of different toxic behaviours, or a grade of some sort where one action is considered to be worse than another.

I react differently depending on how I perform in the game. If I am playing well I reduce the person's tantrums as a three-year olds crying because they are not allowed ice-cream. Sometimes I can reply with 'sure' but usually I just ignore it. (Participant 4).

This excerpt brings up something which was mentioned a lot by the participants in general and that is the focus on the game. Participant 4, in this case, uses his/her own performance as a sort of guideline to find out whether or not the other person is right. This was commonly brought up, that performance matters, even though toxicity was understood, according to the participants, as being perpetuated by the community (Beres et al. 2021; Cook et al. 2018) and that toxicity has become normalised to a certain extent (Beres et al. 2021; Türkay et al. 2020) it was somewhat accepted as everyone wanted to win.

People do not like being called stupid they will accept it as they are winning the game because of that player (Participant 2).

The focus seemed to be on the match that was being played, if someone started flaming and being toxic in a verbal format the most common solution was to mute them, which results in you not being able to see their messages. This was done, not necessarily because the receivers got sad but because they would perform worse thus opting for a non-verbal communication strategy, relying on pings. Even though the large majority focused on the performance there was one exception which commented on mental

health.'I do not like when someone is performing poorly and everyone jumps that person, I think a lot about mental health, so I would tell them to lay off and focus on the game instead'. (Participant 13). This is to say that there are definitely people who consider toxicity to be hurtful and think about the consequences it can have for the receiver but as this was rarely brought up the overall impression I got was that the participants did not take that badly to being affected by verbal toxicity in relation to their own well-being, they were more concerned about how it affected the outcome of the game.

Throughout this analysis the levels of toxicity has been brought up, that some behaviours are considered worse than others. This was one of the more interesting finds as it gives an insight into what makes toxicity toxic in the LoL-community. I also saw the coming section as a way to interpret what the participants prioritised which further provides me with more results which can be used to really understand this phenomenon from the participants point of view.

When asked about what was considered to be the absolute worst about toxic behaviour most participants replied that in-game actions such as trolling, intentionally feeding etc, was the worst form toxicity could take.

If they troll, like for a while ago I had a Jhin who walked into mid, in my lane, and started farming, then he is trolling me, his support, basically his whole team and then I have to go botlane even though I do not want to. This is also a type of toxicity, if you do that you are ruining the game, it is different from writing because you can mute that. You cannot mute that someone walks under a turret and dies. (Participant 2).

(Walking into another lane than the one you have chosen is usually perceived as a form of trolling).

This excerpt provides a good initial understanding of the depth of toxicity or rather the levels and what regulates those different levels of toxic behaviour. The actions the participant is describing are in-game actions which are done within a game of LoL, furthermore it is not any sort of spam pinging or name-calling in the chat; it is strictly

limited to moving around in the game and committing acts which are considered to be toxic. The reason why it is considered toxic is firstly due to the fact that it negatively affects the game experience of one or more players, secondly the actions made by Jhin, a playable champion in the game, does not align with how the game should be played according to the majority of the players (Deslauriers et al. 2020). Finally it is not mutable. This is what I have interpreted to be the key to the different levels of toxicity, in LoL you cannot not stop a teammate from ruining the game if they want to ruin the game. Whereas if someone is playing in order to win but is being toxic in the chat that can simply be ignored. Therefore this sort of behaviour was considered to be the worst level of toxicity.

When someone is inting, that is the most frustrating, without a doubt. It is ten times worse than if someone was flaming and being toxic. You want to write something but you know that it does not matter. I played a game last week where my mid laner died two times solo, he wrote 'jungle diff' and then started to int. But he did it discreetly, and that is even worse, he tried to make it look like he tried to play in order to not get banned or something. If you are toxic you can just mute that person, that is the biggest problem in LoL, there are so many people who feed and ruin the game. (Participant 5).

(‘Int’ and ‘inting’ is intentionally feeding made into a verb, thus it refers to the action of purposefully dying to favor the enemy team).

This excerpt is very similar to the above one and touches upon the same thing. There seems to be a sort of hopelessness and powerlessness which affects the participants in this scenario (Participants 8,9,12). These actions of in-game toxicity are connected to the previous section which was about how the focus is on the game rather than the people. In this way it makes sense that the participants would consider actions which directly and obviously affect a match’s end result rather than verbal communication which can be muted at any time.

The *natural attitude* can affect what is considered normal behaviour in a space. For instance, the *natural attitude* is part of the taken-for-granted experience of everyday life, it is acquired by individuals and refined over the course of the individual's life (Weiss 2016: 3). This leads me into another way in which toxicity could be perceived, a code I decided to call 'normalisation'. This code was given to statements which saw toxicity as being part of the game, that it was a sort of normal behaviour which people had to accept. In a way this is similar to the previous account given about time, it is not considered to be connected to real life time, instead it receives a new meaning in LoL and is simply how it is.

You can BM, act a little cocky but it is part of the game and most people probably agree with me. It is done to tilt the other team so you get an advantage and they perform worse. But no, it is not toxic in the same way, it is no attack on anyone, it is just a fun thing.

(Participant 5).

(BM= Bad manners).

This excerpt implies that there is a certain attitude in LoL which promotes bad manners. These actions were, for example, frequent use of emotes and 'trash-talking', this is understood to not be any personal attacks but it can be cocky behaviour. This was also brought up by other participants and especially the excessive use of pings were considered by most participants to be part of the game, in this way toxicity becomes perpetuated in the LoL Europe West server community (Beres et al. 2021; Cook et al. 2018; Turkey et al. 2020). It does however contradict with some participants who stated that any sort of negative comment should be considered toxic.

People expect a toxic community, I am going to play LoL now so then it is toxic. If I get flamed because I'm performing poorly then sure, it is justified, but when I have played well and they blame me I see it as they are blaming me just because they are bad. (Participant 6).

This excerpt provides insight into the expectations some players may have, they expect a toxic community. Not only does this become a clear depiction of how a participant enters a different space but it also implies that there are certain actions and behaviours which have become normalised. The participant also confirms that if he/she receives insults and flame because he/she is performing poorly that is justified. This is another example of a normalisation of behaviours and expectations of toxicity in LoL and more concretely it is an example of how toxicity becomes justified and perpetuated.

In the beginning I got a little sad, they who flame do it about very personal stuff, and that can make me annoyed or sad, but after a while you just stop caring. (Participant 7).

Participant 7 implies that toxicity occurs enough times you make you stop caring and being affected by personal attacks. I interpreted this as a sort of normalisation as well, it is similar to the earlier excerpt in the sense that toxicity is expected and it is something which the participants learn to brush off or deal with. Either through muting the chat or by simply not caring about it.

Interestingly enough Riot added a 'did you know?' feature which gave the players tips and information in the loading screen, one of them was the following: 'Competitive B Sing is fine. Hate speech, not so much.' (Reddit 2017). An example of this was 'If you outplay someone you can type a cheeky '?' in the chat'. (Participant 5).

Normalisation was more prominent than I thought, some participants also stated that some sincere compliments were perceived as being toxic or trolling because when you enter a game you expect toxicity.

I believe many enter a game and expect toxicity, they are so used to it that they look at each other cynically and in that context, in LoL, it is easier to perceive toxicity than encouragement, like if someone types 'well done' people will most likely perceive it as being ironic. (Participant 4).

Once again it is an example of normalisation but it adds another layer of depth, namely that toxicity occurs often enough to affect the perception of regular banter. It also adds another layer of complexity, because compliments are looked upon cynically it will be incredibly challenging to sort toxicity from regular day-to-day banter. Furthermore this implies that the context in which toxicity occurs must be understood in order to grasp the finer nuances.

Some have opted for the approach to simply turn their chat off all together, thus not being able to see what anyone writes in-game (Participant 8). For those who have their chat turned on however seem to be used to toxic behaviours so much that it does not longer affect them and furthermore it is being deemed part of the game as people go into a game prepared for a toxic community.

The community is incredibly toxic and salty and it is probably because of how everyone has already been harrassed before.
(Participant 10).

This excerpt implies that toxic behaviour commonly occurs within the game and one is to expect to be harrassed at some point. Considering the discussion above toxicity can then also be understood to be perpetuated throughout the LoL community, toxicity then leads to more toxicity.

As toxicity was discussed in the context of LoL and not another game the participants were asked about that specifically, if they consider toxicity to be a generally understood and occurring phenomenon or if it had a different definition depending on what game you played. This was asked to get an understanding of the phenomenon in the context it takes place. The participants brought up behaviours and actions which could cause toxicity, similar to what Kou (2020) called ‘enablers’.

I think I am annoyed because they do not think the way I do, like why did you not do what I did in that situation? (Participant 11).

This excerpt brings up what has been briefly mentioned earlier in this analysis, namely the idea of how the game should be played (Deslauriers et al. 2020). The action is not inherently toxic as this implies that since participant 11 thought his/her actions were correct his/her teammates probably thought they were right. Therefore it might not be a general consensus that one action in a scenario is the right one to do. My point is that toxicity and emotions such as irritation can be brought up because of non-inherent toxic actions (Kou 2020).

In many cases it seems like you are supposed to convince your teammates why your understanding of the game is the best one and why you are supposed to play the game like that person. That usually sparks a debate. (Participant 8).

This excerpt gives an insight into exactly how a toxic situation can occur, furthermore it highlights the importance of performing well which might be why toxicity is thought mostly in context to how it affects performance and the outcome of the game.

The participants touched upon what Hills (2018) did regarding fandom cultures and capital and being a true fan. It is not exactly the same thing, but it relates to the theory of acquiring gaming capital and knowledge. Similar to Elmezeny et al. (2018) discovery of how Brazilian and Russian trolls trolled. Either way, it seems to be important to be better than your teammates. The participants have mentioned that they get irritated and even toxic when their teammates do not want to listen to their commands. Which implies that when two or more different players' views on how the game should be played and what actions to take clash it can trigger toxicity.

Furthermore, anonymity and addiction were also perceived as enablers of toxicity. One participant stated that: 'It is probably easier (being toxic) because it does not affect their real lives, no one is going to come to your house and punch you because of what you wrote in a game' (Participant 7). Ranked mode seems to be raising the stakes for the players, it is no longer a regular 5 on 5 match, in ranked mode you get rewarded with League Points (LP) if you win and you lose LP if you lose a match. This, some participants said, can trigger a kind of hardcore gaming attitude and a volatile

atmosphere. In conclusion the most prominent of the enablers is in fact the attitude, the clash of different approaches to the match can trigger toxic behaviours, be it verbal or non-verbal.

6.2.3 Conclusive remarks

The participants had no difficulties in giving a surface level idea of general toxicity in LoL; it was considered an act, written or non-written, which was purposefully done in order to impact the gaming experience of another player negatively. Although it was an answer many participants agreed with, it was considered, by me, to be general as it lacked any specifics of what these written and especially non-written acts could look like. It should be stated that the participants' surface level definition of toxicity do confirm other scholars' observation of the phenomenon (Kou 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020; Türkay et al. 2020). However, it proved to be a difficult task to put certain acts into a 'box of toxicity' as certain things were thought of as a part of the game and therefore it was not toxic.

Toxicity from the participants' point of view and my interpretation of it should be considered as a phenomenon which requires the contextual factors to understand what is unfolding during a potentially toxic situation (Kou 2020; Kwak & Blackburn 2014). Furthermore a substantial amount of game knowledge is required to understand the norms and culture of LoL to understand what behaviours are generally toxic and not. How an act is perceived is one of the greatest factors which defines toxicity in the moment as it usually causes a debate among the players about how the game should be played. All in all there are many nuances to toxicity in LoL and it should be considered complex because of how it depends on various subjective aspects such as game knowledge, perception and experience. What I consider to be the most interesting discovery in the search for a definition was how, even though it relies on personal subjectivity, game knowledge and perception, it still exists in acts that are by all means toxic. And furthermore, a hierarchy of those behaviours also exist. Through this analysis I have managed to understand that there are three levels of toxicity, the lowest form, which were at most times considered part of the game or as normalised behaviour, were actions like

spam pinging, banning someone's champion, it can also be seen as behaviours which were not bannable. The other level of toxicity is when swears and any sort of comment made based on ill-intent was made in the chat. This was considered toxic, even by those who did not care and was not affected by it. The reason why it was not considered to be all that bad is most likely due to normalisation but also because of the fact that the chat is mutable. The final level of toxicity were actions which were done in-game by the use of your playable champion. This impacted the whole game negatively and could not be stopped by anyone and resulted in a feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness.

Considering the conclusion above, toxicity is defined initially as a negative action which affects the game experience negatively. Toxicity is also thought of as an umbrella term in the sense that there is not simply one action which is toxic, toxicity is the impression of many different actions. Toxicity is a contextual and situational phenomenon which is connected to a specific game. What I mean is that due to games being different and offering different ways in which one can be toxic, depending on how the playerbase defines toxicity, toxicity is not a concept which can be used on a typical action in any game. Other concepts such as flaming, tilting, being salty and so on might also have different meanings in different contexts. Therefore it is not possible to say that toxicity in LoL and another game is the same thing even though they look and play similar, even so it opens up for comparative studies which might lead to even more knowledge about toxicity.

6.3 RQ3: Does toxicity affect the participants' everyday life through time and space, if yes then how?

In order to answer the third research question the participants were asked how they reacted physically and also what emotions they experienced when being the victim of toxicity. This was done to catch any visible changes which were directly caused by toxicity. The two former research questions will also be part of this analysis as the different spaces, the gaming space and the *natural attitude* are prominent components in

these actions. The definition of toxicity was required to understand what caused these changes in behaviour and emotions and direct actions.

The majority mentioned that they knew it was a game they played and did not let it affect their everyday life in the obvious sense, for example they did not take it out on a family member or partner. However a surprising amount stated that they carry out small tasks when they are still in the match due to frustration caused by toxicity and performing in a way which does not live up to their expectations. In this section I will present the analysis I have done regarding toxicity and the effect it has on the person's everyday life.

If I stop playing after one hell of a bad game I go and snuggle with my dog. If I take a break because of toxicity I might also play something else, like TFT because you can play it half-asleep anyway. (Participant 1).

(TFT= Teamfight tactics, a game mode in LoL)

This excerpt implied that the participant decided to play something which was not as serious as LoL and did not require the same awareness. Toxicity, according to this participant, made him/her stop taking a break from LoL thus affecting the gaming session but it should not be considered to have a long lasting effect on the participant.

If I take a break for a couple of hours then it is usually because I am irritated or that I am not irritated but I do not feel like playing because people have been toxic in-game. But I do not walk around and behave badly towards other people. I do not take it out on other people, but I can be moody directly after a game but not for long. But I might not play anymore during that evening. (Participant 2).

This was usually the effect toxicity had on the participant, it could make them very irritated and frustrated which would result in them taking a break from LoL for an hour or a few days, but they always returned to the game. Regarding the everyday life it is not

affecting the participant to the extent that other people are affected around him/her. However it can and it does change the mood of the participant but it does not last for long. This was also quite common, that the break from LoL was longer than the duration the participant was feeling moody or irritated. Usually the frustration caused by toxicity only lasted a few minutes whereas the break could last for hours.

If I did not feel like playing anymore I would log out and change accounts, that would sometimes result in a ban and then you do not feel like playing on it. I could go and brew some coffee, take something to eat, cook food or take the dog out (in the middle of a game). I could tab out and watch Youtube instead (Participant 3).

This excerpt provides insight into another sort of reaction towards toxicity or irritation and frustration. The participant would leave in the middle of the game, which was very rare, and resume the everyday life activities outside of the gaming space. It was common that the participants wanted to move away and distance themselves from the created gaming space (Lefebvre 2004; Schmid 2008: 29). Sometimes they modified the space by simply changing the game, thus engaging with new components necessary for that 'world' (Weiss 2016: 10). At other times the participants would return to the *natural attitude* and completely remove themselves physically from the gaming space.

I feel irritated as long as the connection to that match is still there, after a match in the score screen I can stay and write some, but then I let go of it very quickly, as soon as the people are gone. But if it is someone I know I want to bring it up again and explain how I was thinking. (Participant 4).

This excerpt reinforces what was recently stated about how the participants wanted to distance themselves from the toxicity, at times by physically distancing themselves and at other times it was done by playing another game thus the perception of time and space (Weiss 2016: 10; Husserl 1910-1911) changed.

Space is visible through these excerpts and gives an insight in how the participants perceive and react to toxicity as well as what aspects of the game affects toxicity. The common strategy of distancing oneself from toxicity by moving away from the space physically or modifying space by turning the game off implies that a sort of 'what happens in LoL stays in LoL' attitude exists.

The most prominent action the participants mentioned was to take a break, it should however not be confused with a break that is taken due to exhaustion but because of the frustration caused by in-game toxicity. A break might not seem that impactful on the participants' everyday life but considering the analysis of the first question, gaming and LoL in general means a lot to the participants thus an involuntary break should not be considered a minor matter. However, in regards to frustration, it usually did not last very long, in some cases there were breaks for a couple of hours, rest of the night or a couple of days but no one was feeling irritated throughout this entire duration. Some participants stated that they only get affected for a couple of minutes and when they enter the next game they go in with a new mindset.

The participants' spatial location matters, usually they try to get away from the computer through other activities, even if it is during a game, for example: 'If it is late into a game and you have a 50 second death time I tend to fetch some water or stand up and walk around for a bit' (Participant 13). The participants' actions and responses to toxicity are directly tied to the gaming space and LoL (Hjarvard 2008: 5; Morley 2010: 10), being part of the gaming space they are aware of the components which makes up this space and act accordingly (Weiss 2016: 10; Husserl 1910-1911), for example by performing an action to calm themselves down within 50 seconds.

Along with toxicity comes emotions like frustration, irritation, sadness and anger. After a game most participants would take a break by moving away from the computer, go on a walk and so on. However, toxicity also seems to bring out anger, a surprising amount of the participants had destroyed gaming equipment and furniture because of what happened in-game. The cause of these outbursts of rage were mainly of the third

level of toxicity, being in-game actions such as intentionally feeding and other actions which could not be stopped. To my surprise the physical outbursts were more common than I had anticipated.

If it goes too far you need to vent your anger, I have a hole in the wall which was very unfortunate. But it is nothing that happens instantaneously, it starts with me gently touching the wall then it gets harder and harder and then it is a hole in the wall. (Participant 8).

Venting anger through destruction of the surrounding space was common behaviour in the sense that it had occurred to a substantial amount of other participants. However, in terms of frequency the outbursts should be considered a rare occurrence.

Usually I do not act on the irritation from the computer and the game, but sometimes you get really pissed off and then I have punched the door frame, but that has only happened a few times. Then I leave the computer in the middle of the game and take a few deep breaths and then the aggression lets go. (Participant 12).

Anger manifested in this way is a direct cause by toxicity in-game but the feelings which caused the participants to break the furniture was not something that lingered for a long period of time. Furthermore it is not a common behaviour, they are not breaking a new table every other day. It should however be considered as a result of toxicity, these actions, the outbursts and the irritation included affects the gaming space and the physical space around them. Furthermore the longer breaks does affect their everyday life routines but not in a way which should be considered to be all that significant.

If I had a really bad match and then head to bed I can then find myself thinking about the match a lot, like what kind of mistakes I made. But if I am going to workout afterwards I might feel a bit irritated when I

am taking my shoes on but as soon as I leave the apartment I let go of it, now I am in a different place. (Participant 13).

This excerpt shows the different sides of toxicity in everyday life as well as the importance of the effects of everyday life actions on toxicity (Van Manen 2016: 42-43). Firstly it can affect everyday life directly after a gaming session if it was a memorable match, but it also shows that it does not last for very long. These findings seem simple, but they provide a very clear insight into how toxicity follows the participants throughout the day. It seems like whenever the participants disconnect from the gaming space through either physical distancing, modification of the space or through destruction of space they bring forth the *natural attitude* which has been in the background while they were in the gaming space (Weiss 2016: 10). These everyday actions, such as working out after a rough game, is a great example of how the participants are resuming everyday life and thus the effects of toxicity washes away. It is, arguably, like the 'real life world' is put on hold until the participants resume it with actions which are not linked to the gaming space.

For the sake of nuance it should be stated that the aforementioned outbursts were not explicitly caused by toxicity but it could also be connected to the participants not performing as well as they had expected. However, toxicity affects the players real life but to a minimum, small 'bonus' actions are added into the daily routine such as damaging various furniture and walking around to calm oneself and make a trip to fetch something to drink or go to the bathroom in the downtime. The negative emotions does not linger or have any long lasting effects, an example is:

The frustration after a match can be everything between half an hour and a whole day. Sometimes I have gotten so angry that I have not played for two days. You have lost a lot of matches in a row too. You think that you will never play this game ever again and then, after a day or two you sit there again, but I do not know. It is a meme that you play because you are addicted. (Participant 5).

As covered earlier, taking a break for a couple of days from a game which plays a huge part in your everyday life in regard to social activity and entertainment and passion is not a minor thing. Important to note is that during this break the participants are not angry or moody, the emotions arise just after the game is over and then they do not feel like playing. In a sense the effect of toxicity has perished after a couple of hours but in general it does not follow them through other activities if at all.

6.3.1 Conclusive remarks

I set out with the goal in mind to discover if, and in that case how, toxicity affects the participants' everyday life. Toxicity does affect their everyday life but to an absolute minimum, their routines throughout the day does not change, their behaviour does not change and their attitude towards others are not affected by toxicity either. Surely it is possible to argue, which I have done, that in those cases where LoL plays a big role in the participants' everyday life an involuntary break from that gaming activity should be considered to have a big impact on the everyday life. It was not uncommon for the participants to play about 4-8 hours a day, therefore a break frees up a lot of time and in that sense it does affect the unfolding of everyday life. However, toxicity was not considered a problem in terms of the participants' everyday life or their activities, an involuntary break because of toxicity rarely occurred and when it did it was not considered a problem.

Toxicity does not affect the unfolding of everyday life that much but interestingly enough, what was discovered was that toxicity plays a huge role within the gaming space. Toxicity is not long-lived in the sense that it does not affect the participants a couple of hours after a match or in some cases a couple of minutes is enough to relieve the tension brought about by toxicity. What toxicity does is affect the space which it is in, namely the gaming space which the participants have created. When toxicity affects the participants it usually results in the participants connecting to the space around them, be it through physically distancing themselves from the computer or by literally connecting with the

space around them through breaking or punching the table or other furniture. This gives an insight into why the participants might be taking a break, the break distances themselves from the gaming space and thus the effect of the toxicity gradually falls off. In this sense the gaming space and the actions within the gaming space is disrupted by toxicity. Thus toxicity should be considered to have a big impact on gaming routines and the gaming space rather than their everyday life as a whole.

7. Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter I will present the results and answers to each research question in relation to the concepts and theory chosen, the aim of the research and finally in relation to the previous research. The findings should be restricted to the Europe West server, the limitations and future research regarding the choice of server will be covered in the following subsections. The chapter will be concluded with a subsection of the limitations of the study.

In this thesis I set out to explore toxicity in the League of Legends environment, using a couple of players' vantage points to define and understand toxicity, what it means and how it can unfold in everyday life. In order to reach my goal and answer my research questions I constructed a theoretical framework of phenomenology (Moran 2005; Husserl 1910-1911; Weiss 2016; Tomasulo 1990; Bengtsson & Johansson 2020; Traudt et al. 1987; Tudor 2018; Van Manen 2016; Moores 2006). This framework and the concepts within it such as *bracketing* and the *natural attitude* allowed me to distance my own pre-established definitions of toxicity and to discover how the participants put their *natural attitude* in the background (Weiss 2016) and engaged with new components in the gaming space which changed their perception of time and space. Phenomenology has set the stage, and the stage consists of *lived experience* and everyday life routines, especially revolving around gaming, which has been looked at with care in this thesis using the aforementioned concepts.

Time and space were used in conjunction with the phenomenological framework to look at the dimensions of time and space. This was done in order to understand what meaning those dimensions had for the participants and how they changed when a gaming session ensued. The participants actions were looked at together with space in focus (Lefebvre 2004) and furthermore the actions which changed space in order to make it feel right (Tudor 2018) was also a prominent feature in regards to the use of space. Time was mainly used to look at how the participants' standpoint in the *natural attitude* changed (Weiss 2016), or rather, the change of the meaning of time made it easier to see a change of the participants' perspective. Time (and space) naturally played an important role in the analysis of their everyday life and thus the effect of toxicity in their everyday life. If phenomenology, time and space were playing the leading role in this thesis then mediatization has been an extra. The mediatization of LoL and everyday life has been looked at in the sense that LoL affects the participants'

perception of time and space. Furthermore since gaming, as a medium, were considered to play a substantial role in constructing the participants' everyday life routine it is fair to say that the participants have developed actions and routines which are directly tied to the videogame.

Looking at (*RQ1*) how time and space was experienced by the participants through gaming practices proved to be more rewarding than I initially had thought. Instead of functioning as a foundation for the third research question it yielded interesting results and insights into the roles time and space plays, this is what I have gathered:

Most of the participants made time for gaming and they did so through clearing up distractions and other tasks which were considered to take higher priority such as going to the shops and studying. Closer into the gaming session, an hour to just before the participant would sit down a series of *preparatory gaming related actions* commenced. These actions were mainly connected to the spatial dimension and revolved around directly altering space through adding components such as a glass of water, a plate of food or snacks. A huge part of the participants' preparation had to do with making space comfortable (Tudor 2018).

Therefore the tasks before a gaming session becomes important to look closer as, similarly to what Wimmer (2012) suggests, that the interactions between the game and gamer becomes imperative to grasp the meaning of the game culture. Furthermore, these routine actions and rituals are closely interlinked with what Wimmer (2012) points out when he describes how LAN parties are constructed and how gaming becomes part of everyday life. However, my findings suggest that, contrary to Wimmer's, there is a gaming space that is being constructed (Lefebvre 2004) in which the perception of time and space change. Therefore I would argue that even though gaming is a part of everyday life it should be understood as a different space as when it is engaged with the *natural attitude* moves to the background (Weiss 2016: 10). Elements such as light and heat were adjusted to a degree which the participant found suitable, finally physical needs like going to the bathroom were also done before a session started. All of these actions were connected to gaming as the participants new that they might not have the time to run to the bathroom in the middle of a match, thus reinforces the effects of mediatization (Hjarvard 2008: 2) and how LoL, in this case, affects practices on a micro-level (Morley 2010: 10).

Within this space *gaming actions* were executed to make the newly created space feel nice, this was done mainly through adding noise of some kind in the background. Considering these results it is possible to at least argue for the importance of gaming in

everyday life and the meaningfulness it has for the people who play games which entices us to know more about everything revolving around this phenomenon.

Regarding (*RQ2*), I stated earlier that I did not want to create a new definition of toxicity, but the results gathered from the participants are still meaningful in terms of understanding toxicity and it may serve as an addition to the previously established taxonomies. Toxicity was defined easily by the participants as a sort of action which was committed in-game to cause a negative effect on someone else's gaming experience, similar to what previous scholars have pointed out (Kou 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020; Türkay et al. 2020; Salminen et al. 2019). This definition does go well together with earlier taxonomies (Kou 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020) however, my findings suggest that toxicity is way more complex than such a surface level definition and contextual, perceptual and situational factors all need to be taken into account. Other than those factors the actual game becomes an important focus as the comparison between Deslauriers et al. (2020) and Kou (2020) in chapter 2 shows. Different games have different designs and the players are therefore restricted to certain actions by code (Kou & Nardi 2013; Kou & Gui 2020).

Even though toxicity is difficult to completely grasp as it relies on subjective perception and contextual factors as previously stated there were some actions which were considered to be more toxic and some to be considered less toxic. The less toxic actions were actions which could be ignored like muting the chat or certain people in-game whereas more toxic actions were actions which the participants could not control. Another interesting discovery within this question is that the focus on the outcome of the game was interpreted as more important than the participants' own, their teammates' and enemies' feelings. Therefore I argue that when looking at toxicity in LoL there should be a focus on game elements such as the actions which can be done in game and actions which cannot be controlled by the participants rather than observing written insults and 'textual behaviour' as the whole chat can be disabled by the press of a button (Kou & Nardi 2013; Salminen et al. 2019; Kwak & Blackburn 2014a).

The participants in my thesis did bring up the culture of toxicity in the LoL community more often than I had anticipated. Especially the normalisation of toxicity was brought up, or rather that toxicity in LoL is part of the culture and thus should be considered a self-perpetuating phenomenon as other scholars have suggested (Cook et al. 2018: 3333; Beres et al. 2021). Because this study did not explore fandom culture or gaming culture the same way as Hills (2018) and Romo Flores (2020), it is difficult to make a direct comparison.

However, because of the discussion above, I suggest that toxicity should be understood through players' perception and contextual factors.

Finally it is important to state that a large amount of the player base are women and as Wimmer (2012) argues, contemporary studies neglects the silent majority of casual gamers and their experiences. In my thesis the sample has been imbalanced and the different affects gender has in regards to toxicity has not been explored in this thesis. However, LoL offers anonymity and communication through voice chat is not relied upon in-game. Therefore I suggest that studies such as McLean and Griffiths' (2019) which states that female gamers tend to play alone must also be tied to a specific game where those elements like social support and voice chat are crucial. LoL is not a game in which people chat regularly about their daily lives, according to the participants the chat can often be disabled so they can focus on the game. Therefore I suggest a different approach, like observing female streamers and public gaming personalities when exploring female experiences in LoL. Finally because my thesis did not explicitly deal with these topics these are not definitive arguments but should be considered suggestions based on the results on this thesis.

All of these results tie back into the effect toxicity has on everyday life (*RQ3*) and also the importance and relevance of this study in contemporary society. First of all regarding the results, toxicity does affect the participants, but in terms of their everyday life routine and relations with friends, family and colleagues at work and so forth, it does not affect them that much. Toxicity, or rather the effect it has, seems to vanish as the participants move away from the constructed gaming space which is the game in the computer. In other words, toxicity is a gaming phenomenon which affects the space of gaming. The most common act was to physically distance themselves from the computer and wreak havoc in their vicinity. Kou and Gui (2020) proposed that the players take a break from LoL in order to regulate their emotions, which is similar to what I have found in my research. One could say, because gaming is such a big part of the participants' everyday lives, toxicity does in fact affect a substantial amount of their everyday life. However, it does make more sense to look at it from space and time which has been done in this thesis as it enables one to see what spaces the toxicity affects and how, if, it expands.

This thesis has looked closer at the phenomenon which is toxicity in the environment of League of Legends, using active players' perception as a vantage point. Today gaming is a booming industry, currently the MSI, Mid-season invitational, tournament is occurring, new game releases are around the corner, there are schools that educate players and coaches, and as previously mentioned, the game industry has surpassed the movie industry in terms of

value. Considering the discussion above it makes sense that understanding as many aspects as possible of an incredibly popular activity is of interest to society.

7.1 Limitations

I believe that I have answered my research questions and completed the goals I set for this study. The understanding and knowledge of how toxicity is perceived by players of the game, League of Legends, has definitely widened and deepened. Furthermore, the interviews, and analytic tools have definitely opened up the participants' stories, experience and perception for interpretation. However, this study has absolutely not covered everything there is to know about toxicity or gaming, therefore it becomes important to understand the limitations of this study. Considering that toxicity can be looked at in different ways, Romo Flores (2020) is an example who uses gaming capital as a central tenet in his thesis, and the fact that different games allow for different toxic actions and interpretations there is a lot to cover if one wishes to understand toxicity completely. The literature review also covered female gamers experiences and as I have stated before, due to my imbalanced sample I was not able to make any definitive results based on female experiences. I have only looked at toxicity in League of Legends, although it serves a purpose in its own right it may also create an inaccurate depiction of the in-game climate and toxicity. Furthermore by simply comparing Deslauriers et al. (2020) taxonomy with Kou's (2020) taxonomy of toxicity we see that they differ, thus what I have discovered about toxicity may not be applicable to other games. Because of the phenomenological approach and *bracketing* I only wanted the participants' points of view and the pre-established knowledge about toxicity and the taxonomies were therefore bracketed. Thus the themes in Kou's (2020) taxonomy were not juxtaposed completely with the results in my thesis and furthermore Kou's themes were not all brought up by the participants in my thesis thus making it difficult to support or debunk those themes. Finally, I relied solely on interviews as my data gathering methods and although effective they could have, if not because of covid, been paired with observations and playing together with the participants to fully capture the context and situation in which toxicity plays out.

7.2 Further research

From the results I have gathered and inspirations that have come over me in waves through this writing process I suggest looking closer at what enables toxicity within gaming and how

to reduce the occurrence of it to create a non-toxic gaming environment for players. What was at time brought up by the participants was the social aspect of gaming and how they felt that gaming helped them deal with their social needs especially during this period of covid and schools being shut down and so forth. Thus the effect toxicity and gaming has on social relations could prove to be interesting. It would be of interest to understand how the game creators are trying to tackle toxicity and what is thought of as a phenomenon, as mentioned earlier in this study, Riot Games (2021a) will start to record the voice chat to detect toxic behaviour. Furthermore this implies a breach in privacy, an intrusion in the gaming space and these new actions will most likely have consequences as well.

Since the participants played on the Europe West server there is a possibility that the cultures and perception of what toxicity is varies a lot from server to server. Therefore I suggest a comparative study which would compare the definitions of toxicity in different servers to further explore gaming culture and toxicity.

The gaming space in itself could be further researched, the definitions and the actions could be studied more intensively if the researcher could be invited into the participants' gaming spaces and perhaps help create them, for what happens at larger LAN-parties with the gaming space and how is it different from the gaming space at home.

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