

The concept of gaming capital is a useful one, opening up the field of game studies to a consideration of power relations. Such a consideration allows the field to move beyond just questions of who makes games or who plays them. To do so, however, requires understanding the full range of capital Bourdieu introduces – social, cultural, and economic – rather than collapsing them into the master category of gaming capital.

As it has been articulated, gaming capital tends to emphasize particular kinds of voices and experience – among them, the hardcore gamer, and the software designer – and ignores and renders those who don't get to play games, those who don't want to play games, and those who don't match up with particular forms of game play as somehow unworthy of consideration as we theorize and explain video games. While it is tempting to imagine the field of game power as one limited to a particular form of cultural capital that is unique to video games – a sort of gamer capital – to do so misses the degree of interconnection and contestation video games face from outside forces. Instead, negotiation over meaning must be seen as a process between groups, institutions, and individuals based on their relative amounts of a variety of capital: economic, social, and cultural to produce both the value and the meaning of a particular cultural good.

Much of the current study of games has foregrounded questions around those with high game capital to the near exclusion of those directly involved with the production of these commodities. Without careful treatment, the concept of gaming capital fails one of the critiques Bourdieu himself offered: a tendency to subsume the value system being examined into the examination, resulting in a system of reification about which products and players are games and game players.. Moving beyond gaming capital to encompass all of the forms Bourdieu offered allows theorists to explain differences in audiences that the industry knows exist but that theorists have struggled to navigate. Perhaps the best example of this is players who identify as “Gamers” rather than casual game players (or players of casual games). For a field that is contested in the way video games are – where they are seen by many as toys with little or no cultural value, or perhaps worse, as items that have a negative impact on culture – the combination of cultural capital and social capital can also explain the example of a relative outsider having profound influence over the question of game meaning and impact. The question of cultural capital also allows a deeper exploration of the invisible voices of production of video games. Such a move pushes the study of video games beyond the study of software to allow for a more fruitful discussion of labor, of the full range of commodities involved with the industry, and of the varied constituencies who impact and are impacted by all that video games represent.

Ultimately, what the addition of the idea of cultural capital does for video game studies is to force the question of how play, appropriation and reappropriation of game meaning, and the construction of meaning might be channeled, obstructed, or marketed by an industrial system. In this formation, every video game becomes not just a site of play, but also a site of struggle over power and profit hidden under the

guise of play. After all, most of us do not create our own video games, and so the rules video games allow us to play and to transgress are always of someone else's devising.