MOBILITY THROUGH GAMES

ASIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND GAMING CULTURES IN MELBOURNE

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INTRODUCTION: PLAY, CO-PRESENCE AND PLACE

> "I play with friends back home. Actually, I also play with friends here—I play with friends in general." (Sandra, female Singaporean-Chinese postgraduate, talking about Facebook games)

Contemporary media practice is dominated by the playful. For play scholar Miguel Sicart and others,[1] playfulness is a key feature of our everyday and habitual activity with media practice. However, it is important to recognize that the playful involves more than just games—it also points to an attitude and mode of engagement. As Sicart states, "Playfulness is a way of engaging with particular contexts and objects that is similar to play but respects the purposes and goals of that object or context."[2] With the rise of apps and algorithms in and around social media, the boundaries between work and leisure blur.[3] Through the lens of playful media, we can gain new insights into how "work" or "home" are negotiated, especially as we move through different places and spaces.

As reflected in Phillip Penix-Tadsen's introductory vignettes for this anthology, games can often play an important role in growing, consolidating and maintaining intimate social connections and family ties. When it comes to international students, games are a significant part of how social interaction is maintained across, and in spite of, geographical distance.

In this chapter we explore how the practices of play within new media environments—specifically, computer games—intersect with our participant international students' experience of sociality and place as they migrate between their geographical homes to the new and unfamiliar location of Melbourne, Australia. The chapter explores the ways in which games and migration interweave, both together and through lived experiences, complicating notions of locality and co-presence. Through such investigation, this chapter considers the broader concerns within the global south, particularly game and media use among migrant populations and transnational communication.

In order to address the role of games as a form of sociality among transnational students, the chapter will engage with a few key areas. Firstly, we review key literature around ideas of play, co-presence and place. We will then shift into an analysis of ethnographic fieldwork concerning Asian international students living in Melbourne—ethnography here is understood as both a set of methods and conceptual lens that seeks to document and interpret nuances and motivations informing practices.[4] The ethnography was conducted over two years and involved detailed

1. Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters* (MIT Press, 2014).
2. Ibid., 21.
3. Melissa Gregg, "Do Your Homework: New Media, Old Problems," *Feminist Media Studies* 11.01 (2011): 73-81; Larissa Hjorth, "Ambient and Soft Play: Play, Labour and the Digital in Everyday Life," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2017).
4. Sarah Pink, Heather Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis and Jo Tacchi, *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (Sage, 2015).

discussions with 19 international students from different parts of Asia. The backgrounds of these students are summarized in Table 3.5.1 below.

In this research we consider "Asian international students" as a heterogeneous category that is in a state of constant flux, contestation and change. Just as the region is complex and disputed, what constitutes "Asian" is diverse and divergent. Throughout this chapter, particular focus will be paid to how participants' experience and enact co-presence and playfulness in social interactions through games and gameplay.

Where we play, *how we play*, *who we play with* and *who we play as* are crucial factors in how play is embedded into our everyday experiences.[5] These contexts of play inform how we navigate and understand our personal lives—from childhood through to adulthood.[6] At the same time, *what we play* has an extensive impact upon our everyday lives through informing our interpretation of social interaction and daily experiences.[7] As more and more of our playful activities have moved into digital spaces and platforms such as personal computers, game consoles and mobile devices, new scenarios and practices are emerging around personal identity; defining who we are and who we want to be through the games we play.[8]

The idea of co-presence plays a major role in weaving together notions of identity and place. Initially defined by Erving Goffman,[9] it was scholars such as Mimi Ito and Christian Licoppe that outlined the significance of co-presence in terms of mobile communication.[10] For Licoppe, when studying the use of the mobile phone for maintaining close social relationships, there are two main modes of usage—what he terms the "conversational" and the "connected."[11] The conversational mode is one where focused attention is paid to one's interlocutor. This type of exchange usually takes a relatively long period of time and the duration and place of the conversation may even follow a standardized ritual. In this conversational mode, the amount of care and intimacy is shown through how much attention and effort is devoted to the conversation, to the exclusion of other distractions.

The connected mode, however, comprises shorter but more frequent communicative messages being exchanged, where the frequency and flow of these messages are what determines the level of intimacy in the relationship. In this connected mode, the act of calling or text messaging is just as important as the actual content of the message itself, and a sense of connectedness or co-presence is established through frequent sharing of emotions or states, rather than the events or news that may be shared in the longer conversational mode. Both of these practices are crucial to international student life in Australia, and can be augmented through various media devices and social networks. Integral to this chapter are such instances of conversational and connected communication modes that occur predominantly through acts of play.

Licoppe's work was published in the mid-2000s, when social media was still in its infancy and

5. Sicart, *Play Matters*; Diane Carr, "Contexts, Gaming Pleasures, and Gendered Preferences," *Simulation & Gaming* 36.4 (2005): 464-482; Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth London, 1978).
6. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*; Doris Bergen, *Play from Birth to Twelve and Beyond: Contexts, Perspectives, and Meanings* (Psychology Press, 1998); Doris Pronen Fromberg and Doris Bergen, *Play from Birth to Twelve: Contexts, Perspectives, and Meanings* (Taylor Francis, 2006).
7. Isabela Granic, Adam Lobel and Rutger CME Engels, "The Benefits of Playing Video Games," *American Psychologist* 69.1 (2014): 66.
8. Nick Yee, "Maps of Digital Desires: Exploring the Topography of Gender and Play in Online Games," in *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming*, eds. Yasmin B. Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner and Jennifer Y. Sun (MIT Press, 2008), 83-96.
9. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.
10. Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe, "Intimate Visual Co-presence," *Proceedings of the 2005 Ubiquitous Computing Conference*, 2005; Christian Licoppe, "'Connected' Presence: The Emergence of a New Repertoire for Managing Social Relationships in a Changing Communication Technoscape," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22.1 (2004): 135-56.
11. Licoppe, "'Connected' Presence."

Name	Sex	Country	Ethnicity	Major
Joseph	M	Malaysia	Malaysian	Commerce
Camille	F	Malaysia	Chinese	Zoology
Steven	M	Indonesia	Chinese	Information Technology
Tamar	F	Brunei	Malay	Foundation Studies
Jane	F	Myanmar	Burmese	Construction
Samuel	M	Singapore	Malay	Physiotherapy
Rebecca	F	Singapore	Chinese	Physiotherapy
Eric	M	Singapore	Chinese	Architecture
Sandra	F	Singapore	Chinese	Speech Pathology
Nanditha	F	Sri Lanka	Sinhalese	Accounting
Peter	M	Sri Lanka	Sinhalese	Accounting
Priya	F	Sri Lanka	Sinhalese	Biomedicine
Kayla	F	India	Indian	Business Administration
Kenny	M	India	Indian	Network Systems
Amanda	F	India	Indian	Information Technology
Mark	M	Mongolia	Mongolian	Finance
Erica	F	Mongolia	Mongolian	Finance
Serene	F	China	Chinese	Arts
Pamela	F	Taiwan (R.O.C)	Chinese	Accounting & Finance
Eugene	M	Hong Kong (R.O.C)	Chinese	Finance
Sally	F	Thailand	Thai	Accounting

Table 3.5.1. Participant Details.

mobile communication was primarily centered around SMS and phone calls.[12] Fast-forward to a decade later, after the explosive proliferation of social media platforms and applications, and we see a more rich and complex picture of networked sociality emerging. In our research, for example, students frequently mentioned that one of the ways they used media for their well-being was to

12. Ibid.

chat with friends through online games or mobile media applications. Examples of these include communicative applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook–based social games like *FarmVille* (Zynga, 2009) and online multiplayer games such as *Dota 2* (Valve, 2013) and *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* (Valve, 2012). More recently, we have witnessed the convergence of social, mobile and game media, whereby sociality is often quite literally "played out" in games and playful media spaces.

Sutton-Smith argues for a rhetoric of play that has the core trait of adaptive variability, derived from human evolutionary history and the way the brain works.[13] This adaptive variability is made manifest by the sheer variety of forms of play and ways of studying it. In applying this model to our research we could argue that when international students engage in play activities, they are simultaneously employing acts of play for several ancillary uses—to feel secure (away from stressors in their lives), to gain the approval of other people in their environment (by building common interests) and in certain play worlds, feeling a sense of mastery and control over their surroundings. Examples of these forms and uses of play will be examined in the later sections of this chapter.

However, even beyond these multiple benefits to acts of play, there is more that play is capable of doing. Sicart suggests that the characteristics of play include creativity and appropriation.[14] When people play, they recognize and accept the rules and structures that govern the world, and perform within those rules to satisfy their needs or desires. Play is a way to creatively engage with the contexts we live in, and appropriate the physical, social or technological settings to enhance feelings of wellbeing. As students aspire to adjust to the new location of Melbourne, they creatively appropriate the resources around them to enable that pursuit.

In the context of this chapter, such resources include the digital technologies and games of our participants. They repurpose existing technologies such as Skype to serve more playful activities such as playing long distance board games of *Scrabble* (Brunot, 1938) or *Trivial Pursuit* (Hasbro, 1979). Similarly, their mobile phones become more than just tools for communication—they are ways to engage in gameplay in unorthodox spaces and unfamiliar locations. Examples of this include using *Pokémon GO* (Niantic, 2016) to help learn the layout of a new city, or *Candy Crush* (King, 2012) to fill in the monotony and loneliness of a long distance commute—aiming to avoid feelings of homesickness when ruminating on distant family.

Sicart also suggests that another key characteristic of play is that it exists in tension between creation and destruction—between the rational order of rules and the wild euphoria of disorder and chaos.[15] Play is deeply related to our real world experiences, rather than being separate or detached from it as previous theorists once thought.[16] Extending this idea of play as a key component of real-world experiences and everyday life, T. L. Taylor argues that the place and form of play and games can be examined to help researchers understand the "extensive range of actors, concepts, practices and relations that make up the play moment."[17] For our analysis, recognition of such an assemblage is an important step towards understanding the diverse experiences of participants across their changing environments.

Taylor argues that a focus upon these moments of playful interaction helps us to appreciate the interrelations between these various actors and worlds.[18] Examples of this include Taylor's

13. Brian Sutton-Smith, *Towards an Anthropology of Play* (Leisure Press, 1977), 222-232; Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Harvard University Press, 2009).
14. Sicart, *Play Matters*.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. T. L. Taylor, "The Assemblage of Play," *Games and Culture* 4.4 (2009): 332.

descriptions of fan "fairs" as social events blurring the boundaries between game and non-game, worlds, identities and "bodies."[19] Such understandings of play across and between worlds can be linked back to Gregory Bateson's concept of the "self between actors and worlds."[20] This concept argues that the notion of the self and human subjectivity is situated within and through the world around it. Both Bateson and Taylor alike place great emphasis upon the "networked and entangled self."[21]

Certainly there is value to such a focus on the complexity of the networked self when examining the migration of international students in Australia. By focusing on the actors, processes and their nuanced interrelations, new and previously invisible phenomena emerge around the use of play to alter and enhance the networks and quotidian life of our participants. Or, as Taylor might put it, such an approach "allows us to get into the nooks where fascinating work occurs."[22]

This idea of co-present play, or perhaps "playfulness," has been the subject of much recent research.[23] Co-presence conceives of presence as "a spectrum of presence of engagement across multiple pathways of connection."[24] Accordingly, co-present play can be understood as acts of play occurring across such pathways, going beyond rudimentary understandings of separate "online" and "offline" play.[25] Returning to Sicart, an exploration of the multiple dimensions of play helps us to frame the act within the place it occurs, and the players presence during the moment.[26] Developing this idea from myriad disciplines including architecture and politics, Sicart maps how play and playfulness migrate across all facets of contemporary life.[27] Here we see that engagement and context can become infused with playfulness, a merger between modes of presence and co-presence entangled with acts of play.

This blending of presence and co-presence in the context of play is the ethnographic focus of this chapter. Within the context of this research, the adaptive and migratory ability of play is paramount. Given the broadness of play as a category that spans cultural practice,[28] the role of play in establishing a sense of "place" and connected co-presence is a key characteristic of contemporary media. This chapter will now turn to discuss this characteristic with regard to the way co-presence and location manifest through play for Asian international students living in Melbourne.

HOME AND AWAY: IN THE ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD

> "Basically, you try to participate in as many community activities as possible—volunteering, joining student societies, anything you can find. And hopefully there will be one spot somewhere that you can fit in." (Joseph, Malaysian-Chinese undergraduate)

Joseph, a Malaysian-Chinese undergraduate currently living and studying in Melbourne, understands that a key way to adjust to an unfamiliar living environment is to make friends via community groups. Indeed, one of the core components of international student well-being is the ability to successfully adapt to and exist in the new environment of the country they are studying in.[29] This ability to adapt

18. Taylor, "The Assemblage of Play"; Taylor, *Play between Worlds*.
19. Taylor, *Play between Worlds*.
20. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (University of Chicago Press, 1972).
21. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*; Jos de Mul, Sybille Lammes, Valerie Frissen, Michiel de Lange and Joost Raessens, *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures* (Amsterdam University Press, 2015).
22. Taylor, "The Assemblage of Play."
23. de Mul, et al., *Playful Identities*.
24. Taylor, "The Assemblage of Play"; Taylor, *Play between Worlds*, 64
25. Ibid.
26. Sicart, *Play Matters*.
27. Larissa Hjorth, "Ambient and Soft Play"; Larissa Hjorth, William Balmford, Amani Naseem and Tom Penney, "Ethnography and Playful Interventions with Young People," in *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*, eds. Larissa Hjorth, Heather Horst, Anne Galloway and Genevieve Bell (Routledge, 2017): 288.
28. Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*.

has implications not just for their present living circumstances, but also can be seen as a part of a larger continuum of the student's progress towards a more cosmopolitan identity as a global citizen.

Leisure activities can often serve as a useful bridge for students to adjust to their environments in Australia. However, there are also cultural aspects to the play and leisure practices of international students, and therefore at a deeper level, the ways in which they are engaging with play and leisure also speaks to struggles of power, class, ethnicity and the clash of cultures.[30] In particular, emphasis within Australian undergraduate life, for our participants, appeared to be placed outside of study, around extra-curricular activities such as games or part-time jobs. An example of this can be seen in Joseph's story, where he recounts a feeling of "culture shock" at Australian students' categorization of daily life:

> I notice students here place a lot of emphasis—I mean, relatively to students from Malaysia and Singapore—that studies is not everything. That extra-curricular activities, part-time jobs, all these things play a very significant role in whether or not they'll have a successful career in the future, or whether or not they develop as a person in the first place. Whereas in the Malaysian and Singaporean culture, everything is just studies. You get better results than me, that's your way forward. But nobody works part-time, rarely, and leisure time is seen as a waste of time… But here if you work part-time people respect you for that, then if you are heavy on co-curricular activities but you sacrifice a bit of your results people will respect you for that as well, in the competitive academic environment and as part of a group. Whereas Asian communities—I think it applies to people from China as well—if you sacrifice results because of co-curriculum people will say that was bad time management.

Joseph's approach to his Australian migration becomes clear as he describes how he tried to get involved in community and how through these activities he built up friends. And yet, this is not uncontested. Embedded in these excerpts we can see different narratives of play clashing—the idea of play as frivolous "waste of time" alongside play as part of community identity. These interpretations of play highlight Joseph's understanding of play as a site for the contestation of power between different cultures. Joseph describes a very common perception among Asian communities according to our participants (and a key concern for them when they arrive in Australia) that the only purpose for their migration is to study. Anything else—especially leisure or extra-curricular activities, or even part-time work—is secondary, and should not interfere with one's studies. This, he contrasts openly with his perceptions of the Australian attitude towards the work-play-study balance.

The same approach to study can also be linked to aspirational mobility, i.e., what would give the best advantage in one's current and future contexts. For our participants, their previous Asian communities appear to focus on academic proficiency, whereby Australian culture takes a "wider" approach. Thus, in order to progress forward in Australian society, Joseph concluded that it was important to get involved in different aspects of community life, even at a minor cost to his academic results. Joseph's comment speaks to a larger issue of how hegemonies of power are embedded in the leisure practices of a nation or culture, and the difficulties that international students have to face when trying to navigate that cultural environment. Sutton-Smith has argued that:

> the more powerful group in power induces the subordinate group by persuasion or example to play the hegemonial group's games, under the presumption of their moral superiority… The value for the hegemonial

29. Christiane Meierkord, "International Student Migrationk," *Identities in Migration Contexts* 69 (2007): 35; Parvati Raghuram, "Theorising the Spaces of Student Migration," *Population, Space and Place* 19.2 (2013): 138-154.
30. Lorraine Brown, "An Ethnographic Study of the Friendship Patterns of International Students in England: An Attempt to Recreate Home through Conational Interaction," *International Journal of Educational Research* 48.3 (2009): 184-193; David Pyvis and Anne Chapman, "Culture Shock and the International Student 'Offshore,'" *Journal of Research in International Education* 4.1 (2005): 23-42.

> group is that playing the games can become a kind of persuasion to believe in the general ideology surrounding them.[31]

For our participants, playing games popular within Australia was not the only way such hegemonic power was experienced—ideological power was also seen in *how* these games were played.

Another participant, Sally, an undergraduate originally from Thailand, experienced a great moment of cultural foreignness when she joined a board-game group at her university on the advice of a friend. Expecting it to be a "serious" event concerned with the competition of games, she found it a largely social affair, with everyone "more concerned with talking and drinking than finishing the round (of the game)." For Sally, she had simply joined to maintain a single friendship, but found that by taking part in the (to her) unusual "Australian" form of co-present play, she found herself beginning to absorb the values and ideology of Australian students, placing social play more in line with studious focus.

Returning to our other participant Joseph, and turning back to home:

> "Unfortunately, regrettably as well, I turned back to my old gaming communities. So basically, friends who have separated, but went to UK or Singapore while I was in Australia. True, there are some delays, because internet connection and the distance… when we played games together it's like, we're back in high school again." (Joseph, Malaysian-Chinese undergraduate)

Beyond being a source of leisure and local community bonding, the games played by international students living in Melbourne can serve as a link to "home." For Joseph, as seen in the above quote, this is not always a positive link. He expands on this feeling further, sharing that:

> But if you rely on it solely to be your social support, then that's destructive. If that is your only source of social support… Then, you won't learn at all. Because… I think social life has a lot of learning involved. And, if you've already learnt a way to interact, which is through gaming, then that's it, like the next time you go into the gaming community you know how to interact again. And you never learn the outside world, how they interact. Professionals interact differently, Master's students interact differently, undergraduate students interact differently, high school students in Australia also interact differently.

For Joseph, maintaining such strong ties to home support was detrimental to his new position as an Australian undergraduate. Therefore, he began to start "cutting off" ties with his previous communities of support and patterns of play based around transnational communication. Thomas Apperley explores other examples of transnational communication within the opening chapter of Part Three of the present volume. His research focuses on a comparison of transnational communication between Melbourne, Australia and Caracas, Venezuela, highlighting how social exchange of this nature can reconnect and realign individuals from separate, and disparate, regions. While for many of Apperley's participants this transnational communication was born out of their social networks, our participant Joseph felt that transnational communication through games hindered his personal growth after his migration to Australia.

In Malaysia, it is very common to have young teenage males play networked online games together, as a form of social bonding.[32] Internet and gaming cafes dot the urban landscape, or with the advent of broadband internet, networked play now occurs more frequently at home amongst groups of

31. Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 96.
32. Sheila A. Paul, Marianne Jensen, Chui Yin Wong and Chee Weng Khong, "Socializing in Mobile Gaming," *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Digital Interactive Media in Entertainment and Arts*, 2008.

friends.[33] Thus, Joseph still maintained this familiar cultural pattern of play when he came to Australia, and indulged in it as a form of psychological and social comfort, which he later regrets. However importantly, for Joseph, the reason why he harbored these doubts is not because he wanted to cut off all ties with his former life, but rather because he realized that staying in his comfortable pattern of play would lead to maladjustment with his new social context. Therefore, for the sake of his future interactions and learning, he deliberately stopped gaming with his friends from home and sought out interactions with people in his new location.

Joseph also describes changing his patterns of play to suit the Australian gaming landscape. He talks about how he had to buy an original copy of a game for the first time, instead of a pirated one, and joined Steam—an online games distribution platform and player community. This led him to play games such as *Shogun: Total War* (Electronic Arts, 2000) and *Mass Effect* (Electronic Arts, 2007) with local Australian teenagers. He then described one of the major differences between the play styles of Australia and Malaysia—the players in Australia were far more likely to use microphones and voiceover chat, compared to the typed-out text chat messages that is prevalent in Malaysian gaming circles. Joseph then started to adopt some of the local patterns of gaming as well.

These digital links to home can also be interpreted as beneficial. Such is the case for Eugene, a student from Hong Kong currently studying in Melbourne. Eugene uses the game *Dota 2* to stay in contact with his close friends from high school. By having frequent play sessions together, Eugene and his friends manage to stay in contact despite their different geographical locations. Although they have no set time to play, Eugene estimated that they probably played around once or twice every couple of weeks for several hours. Eugene described these as "gaming sessions where we all felt like we were back in high-school on a Saturday night." Contained within Eugene's practices is evidence of kinship being maintained through gameplay, enabling social mobility, in spite of distance.

We can also see how the different notions of kinship—that is, ties to friends and family—that are affected by the digital and play *in* and *through* the practices. These practices are illustrative of what Hjorth and Richardson call "ambient play."[34] That is, games have the ability to move back and forth into the foreground and background in powerful ways that reflect the participants' everyday rhythms. While Eugene plays *Dota 2*, he can be present with his Hong Kong friends. These relationships can remain comfortably in the background of his everyday life, despite his pursuit of international studies in Australia.

Elsewhere in this anthology, Jerjes Loayza also discusses *Dota 2*, exploring how the social bonds generated through the game by youths in Lima, Peru remain important beyond the acts of play the game facilitates. Eugene's example both validates and complicates these findings. While friendships built through *Dota 2* continue to be relevant despite his migration to Australia, acts of play are periodically required to refresh and strengthen these social connections. At the same time, these bonds are further mediated through Eugene's new location within Australia.

From this, we can understand how patterns of play and leisure vary significantly between cultures, and how one international student tried to negotiate the differences between the cultural values by absorbing and adapting to the local patterns of leisure and play, along with the values that are embedded in these cultural forms. For other international students, a retention of previous gaming

33. Eow Yee Leng and Roselan Baki, "An Exploratory Study on the Reasons and Preferences of Six Malaysian Students on the Video Games Played," *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education* 3.1 (2008): 19-25.
34. Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson, *Gaming in Social, Locative and Mobile Media* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

practices are an important way of maintaining kinship with friends back home—a form of social mobility enabled in and through the act of game playing. For Camille, games are about relaxation, escape and recovery:

> I guess for me [online role-playing games are] like an outlet. Like, I guess in a sense you don't have to worry about, um… I guess saying "reality" is a bit weird, but it's like say if you're not happy that day, you just like take it out on whatever creature you find. (Camille, female Malaysian-Bruneian undergraduate)

Completing an undergraduate degree can be hard, even when conducted within your native country. By migrating to Australia for further study, our participants are making an already stressful and busy period of life all the more complicated, fraught with change and uncertainty. Accordingly, many of our participants stressed the need for "down time," exhibiting tendencies to engage in game playing as a form of escapism. Camille, featured above, is one such example of this consumption pattern. Originally from Brunei, she is now living in Australia studying Zoology. Another student, Steven, a mid-20s Indonesian currently completing his Information Technology degree hints at engaging games for similar reasons:

> If I have problem or something, it's like… uh, I just try to forget my problem, and then go to my games, and then… try to fight with people because sometimes we can do PvP at people… Like, in here—I don't know, people in here, if they have problem they always drunk, but for me, I always play games. Same thing.

Steven shows more classic coping strategies of playing video games to "forget [his] problem," hinting at an escapist strategy and seeking psychological detachment. This is further supported when he compares his gaming habit with people drinking to forget their problems. In addition, the types of games he plays are online games featuring intense player-versus-player combat, where there is no mercy. This interest also indicates that what attracts him to this game is the sense of mastery and achievement he gets from vanquishing other players, in an arena outside of his official studies. Likewise, it shows that he seeks out media content with high absorption potential, to change his current mood. Returning to Camille, we can see a similar sentiment in her game playing habits through her ability to psychologically detach herself from the "real world."

Both players take an emotion-focused coping strategy that relies on using gaming to cathartically vent their feelings and offload stress. However, notice that Camille takes a more nuanced approach to the coping strategy that Steven does. While Steven plays absorbing games merely to forget his real life problems, Camille views her activities in the game and in reality as two sides of her life. She is indulging in *identity play* or mimicry—one of the major forms of play identified by Roger Caillois in his book *Man, Play and Games*.[35] This is further supported by her mention of the lore, quests and people in the game. Her online persona has a full identity constructed in the world of the game. So therefore, in order to cope with stress in her real life identity, she switches identities to the other part of her life—achieving detachment through the art of role-play.

While previous studies on recovery effects have looked at video games,[36] not many have actively explored how the affordances of the medium for creative identity play interacts with the purposes of resilience and recovery. For those experiencing significant changes caused by transnational migration, online role-playing games that Camille enjoys can allow for a form of controlled detachment, as players juggle multiple roles and identities as a way of separating themselves from

35. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games* (University of Illinois Press, 1961).
36. Diana Rieger, Leonard Reinecke and Gary Bente, "Media-Induced Recovery: The Effects of Positive Versus Negative Media Stimuli on Recovery Experience, Cognitive Performance, and Energetic Arousal," *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* 6.2 (2017): 174.

stressors faced by any one identity. Although such practices are not exclusive to international students, they were consistently observed among our participants as the main reason for playing. This speaks to the ability of games to provide escape from the unknown into the familiar. Particularly for international students who are residing in a totally foreign country, this ability to find a familiar space can be incredibly useful.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented ways in which Asian international students in an Australian context deploy games and playful media as part of a negotiation of being home and away. The first section of this chapter provided a brief overview of the academic works crucial to ideas of play, co-presence and place. Such works are important to contextualize the experience of migrating to Australia for tertiary education. In particular, literature around the use of creative play to aid social cohesion can help to highlight the lived experiences of our international Asian participants.

Building on this review of the pertinent literature, our fieldwork explored the theoretical links between play and student aspirations. Importantly, the different interpretations of the daily focus between Australian and international Asian undergraduate students enable more nuanced understanding of the complexity surrounding migration. For our participants, the Australian focus on extra-curricular engagement led them to pursue leisure and play activities (including gaming consumption) in order to develop social communities within the locale of Australia, whilst also staying in touch with family and friends at home.

This chapter has illuminated gaming habits within international Asian student groups through its use of empirical case studies. Similar to other chapters within this anthology, our exploration has drawn attention to the different ways migrant members of the global south engage in game-based transnational communication. We see our participants repurpose video games and gaming platforms developed by the global north such as *Dota* and Steam to connect them to cultural environments—either to societies and ties back home, or as an entry point to achieve greater understanding about their host country.

With the increasing rise of mobile and casual games developed in the global south, as described elsewhere in this anthology, future research could investigate how international students can also serve as vectors through which these games become popularized in their host country. International students bring with them the games of their childhood, which may very well include video games developed within the region, and may share them with other international students from disparate nations as well as locals in their host country. These background experiences are also complicated by the identity politics of the migrant situation, as illustrated previously where the student Joseph gave up the gaming patterns of his adolescence in order to better fit into Australian society.

Future research into the area of migrant game practices within the global south could explore other migrant groups to further attend to the diversity of transnational communication and play practices currently in existence. International students do not exist as isolated individuals, but rather as nodes in a network of transnational family and kinship ties. As they are often responsible for the teaching of ICT literacy to their older family members, new forms of transnational familial interactions may arise through video games and other leisure activities, in which student and parent could play and learn together. Inter-generational play or the circulation of video games through transnational migrant family ties are another fruitful area of research to explore. Other avenues of

research into migrant Asian international students would also be addressing the digital inequalities between locations (such as rural versus urban migrants). This chapter's study was informed by its urban contexts—Melbourne—a place with abundant and accessible internet broadband and digital mobile devices.

Through its exploration of how games and migration interweave together, this chapter engages with broader concerns within the global south, particularly transnational communication and the ways in which migration can alter previous play practices. By combining ethnographic analysis with several key theoretical frameworks and concepts around play, we examined how gaming consumption practices are changing the everyday lives of international Asian undergraduate students living in Melbourne.

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