How and Why to Categorize Game Studies

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Acta Ludica
International Journal of Game Studies

Vol. 1, nº 1
June 2017


Bibtex: @article{koskela2017howwhy, author = {Mari Erika Koskela}, issn = {2527-0257}, journal = {Acta Ludica}, month = {jun}, number = {1}, pages = {31–59}, title = {How and Why to Categorize Game Studies}, volume = {1}, year = {2017}}

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the existing research in the field of game studies by proposing a model that can be used in categorizing the existing studies. By categorizing the studies, the question of “What is game studies about?” can be discussed further. I have constructed a model called the 3 + 1 model, that builds on the divisions Mäyrä and Juul use in describing the game studies.

According to the 3 + 1 model, all the studies that are game studies study either game, player, or context, or the intersections of each category that are game & player, game & context, and player & context, or the nexus of all the three, play(ing). This study tests the 3 + 1 model by analyzing a set of 24 articles from the following four journals: Eludamos, Game Studies, Games and Culture and ToDIGRA. The articles are categorized according the mentioned categories, and thematized in order to discuss the themes in each category.

In result, the 3 + 1 model needs some further refining which is proposed in the results. However, the preliminary results indicate that the model could be a valid tool in perceiving the field of game studies, but both the qualitative and the quantitative analysis are needed to further evaluate this.

Keywords: categorization; meta study; game studies

Introduction

Today, “game studies” can typically be placed in two or more fields of science: the other one of them is obviously game studies, but the other or others are oftentimes the ones a researcher or a research team has. Until very recently, there has not been people graduating with a game studies degree due to the field’s young age and only recently established study programs. Although the diverse background helps in building a cross-disciplinary field of studies, the cons include a somewhat fragmented cohesion of the current topics discussed and also challenges in harnessing the fast topics across the field. In this article, I discuss the related literature and share strategies for how the field could be unified by means of categorizations.

In this article, I discuss the categorization of the game studies. This article is a summary that continues the discussion opened by the recent master’s thesis of mine, “Studying the Field of Game Studies: A Proposal Model.
In my master’s thesis, I represented a categorization that helps to conceive the field of game studies which builds on the thoughts of Mäyrä and Juul. I call the constructed model the 3 + 1 model, which was developed through a meta-analysis of research published in top game study journals. While Juul mentions two key study subjects of game studies, game and player, and Mäyrä adds the contextual frames that surround both the player and the game, the 3 + 1 model has 7 categories all together: In addition to Game, Player, and Context, there are the categories of PLAY and the intersections that are Game and Player, Player and Context and Game and Context. I call the categories by their abbreviations, thus, player is a person who plays a game while P is the player category in the 3 + 1 model. Similarly, G stands for game category and C for context category, and any combination of them (GP, GC, PC) for categories in the intersections, and the PLAY category is written with upper case (fig. 1).

My research material consisted of 24 articles gathered from Game Studies, Eludamos, Games and Culture and ToDIGRA. In addition to categorizing the studies according to 3 + 1 model categories, I did a thematization of articles, which helped to identify the themes that have been studied in any of the categories. My presumption was that all the chosen research articles could be categorized with the

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Figure 1: The 3 + 1 model.
3 + 1 model. Thus, they all would belong in any one of the following categories found in the 3 + 1 model: game, player, or context, or in the intersections of them: game and player, game and context, player and context, or play. Because of my presumption, my research questions included the following:

1. Can all the examined research articles be categorized into the 3 + 1 model categories?
2. How do the identified themes fit into their categories?
3. Should the model be modified further, and if so, how?
4. Is the 3 + 1 model a valid tool to perceive the field of game studies?

**Research Process**

To analyze the validity of the proposed 3 + 1 model, I used a selection of game studies journals as sources of research material to the analysis. Melcer et al. compiled a list of current core game studies journals which were used to guide material selection. These journals included: *Game Studies*, *Games and Culture* and *Eludamos*. In addition, *ToDIGRA* which is published by DiGRA, the Digital Games Research Association, was included because of its prominence in the field. From these journals, I analyzed the first issues or numbers of 2015. In cases where there were no issues in 2015, the latest issues were studied. By choosing the first issues of the year 2015, I wanted to ensure that the articles were rather new, thus reflecting the current discussed questions of the field.

One early observation was that despite the fact we constantly discuss “game studies”, all of the sources focused mainly on digital games, only occasionally publishing non-digital game articles. *ToDIGRA* specifies “digital” in its name (Digital Games Research Association), and in *Game Studies* Aarseth states the computer game oriented nature of the journal in the introduction. *Eludamos* is named “Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture” which strongly suggests that the focus is on computer game studies. Finally, *Games and Culture* is formally named “Games and Culture: A Journal of Interactive Media,” which can be interpreted to exclude non-digital games like poker or Scrabble. After choosing the research materials, I also noticed that the volumes of *ToDIGRA* and *Eludamos* are special issues, first one publishing selected
articles from the DiGRA Australia conference, and the second focusing on digital seriality.

The study I conducted is a literature review that uses qualitative study methods. After collecting the research material that consists of game study articles, the research material was read and analyzed, and then the analyzed research material was categorized according the 3 + 1 model categories and thematized to be able to describe the contents and potential questions of each category in more detail.

In my study, I also introduced a concept of variable, which I used to describe the following thing: the question of whether one article can be categorized as a game, player, play or context study, or if it belongs to the intersection of some of these categories, can be answered by identifying variables in each study. These variables are the components of the study that are examined: basically, they answer the questions of whom or what were studied to acquire the answer to the research question. Thus, in a study that explores how children learn mathematics through playing, the subject of study is games’ ability to teach children mathematic, while the variables may be “player”, “game” or “play” depending on the way the research questions are formatted: For example, if the study asked questions like “what age group benefits most of playing games that teach mathematics” the player would be the variable, whereas if the variable was game, the study could ask questions like “what type of games are best in teaching mathematic skills” and so on. To distinguish the potential articles that were not game studies on the first hand, I asked the following question in relation to each article: Does this article produce new information about games?

I did the analysis by selecting the sentences from each article that stated the article’s focus. The authors’ statements of what the article is about, along with the metadata and research questions found in each article defined in which category I placed each article. An overview of the study findings can be found in table 1.6

6. Cf. p. 36.
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<th>Magazine</th>
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<td>ToDIGRA 2 (1), 2015</td>
<td>Remembering &amp; Exhibiting Games Past: The Popular Memory Archive</td>
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<td>ToDIGRA 2 (1), 2015</td>
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<td>ToDIGRA 2 (1), 2015</td>
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<td>The Demarcation Problem in Multiplayer Games: Boundary-Work in EVE Online’s eSport</td>
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<td>Me and Lee: Identification and the Play of Attraction in The Walking Dead</td>
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<td>Game Studies 15 (1), 2015</td>
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<td>Prolonging the Magic: The political economy of the 7th generation console game</td>
<td>David B. Nieborg</td>
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<td>Finishing the Fight, One Step at a Time: Seriality in Bungie’s Halo</td>
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<td>“Did you shoot the girl in the street?” — On the Digital Seriality of The Walking Dead</td>
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<td>Seriality’s Ludic Promise: Film Serials and the Pre-History of Digital Gaming</td>
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<td>Eludamos 8 (1), 2014</td>
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<td>Eludamos 8 (1), 2014</td>
<td>The Eternal Recurrence of All Bits: How Historicizing Video Game Series Transform Factual History into Affective Historicity</td>
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<td>Rikke Toft Nørgård, Claus Toft-Nielsen</td>
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<td>Games and Culture 10 (1), 2015</td>
<td>When Life Mattered: The Politics of the Real in Video Games’ Reappropriation of History, Myth, and Ritual</td>
<td>Sun-ha Hong</td>
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<td>User-Generated Video Gaming: Little Big Planet and Participatory Cultures in Italy</td>
<td>Francesca Comunello and Simone Mulargia</td>
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<td>Games and Culture 10 (1), 2015</td>
<td>From Discussion Forum to Discursive Studio: Learning and Creativity in Design-Oriented Affinity Spaces</td>
<td>Vittorio Marone</td>
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<td>Games and Culture 10 (1), 2015</td>
<td>Beyond Today’s Video Game Rating Systems: A Critical Approach to PEGI and ESRB, and Proposed Improvements</td>
<td>Damiano Felini</td>
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Table 1: List of articles used in the research.
Analysis

In this section I present a review of the categories and their contents. Discussion focuses on describing each category and considering how the contents of each category are related. In addition, I add a brief discussion of what could be typical content in each category, how the boundaries are set — if that is necessary — and how the categorized articles relate to these.

Game

There are four articles among the research materials that are placed into this category. Let us consider the game as a category for a while: what are the contents that can be placed into this category? As the analysis proved, the history-related game study is present. This category included four articles:

- “The Eternal Recurrence of All Bits” (WINNERLING, 2014)
- “When Life Mattered The Politics of the Real in Video Games’ Re appropriation of History, Myth, and Ritual” (HONG, 2015)
- “Types and Bytes. Ludic Seriality and Digital Typography” (GOTTO, 2014)
- “No Mastery Without Mystery” (VELLA, 2015)

Both the two first articles study history-related issues, as “How games represent history?” and “history in games” are the two themes identified in these studies. If these are questions that can be asked in the G category, surely history is not the only topic. Instead, by replacing the term history with other words, (How games represent religion? How games represent women? Travelling in games. Poor people in games.) we can understand what kind of topics could be placed into each category, even if the topics are not studied yet.

The same applies with two other articles. The themes identified within these two articles are “interrelation of text and icon in digital games” and “aesthetics and ludic sublime in a game.” Again, we can replace the “text and icon”, and instead, study some other phenomena like the interrelation of atmosphere and graphics in digital games or literature and ludic joy in a game — and discover new subjects that fit into this category. Returning to
the original research question concerning the contents that can be placed into this category, the answer is: various, and the amount of them is countless. However, they all have a common feature — they study a game, its contents, and the way the game represents various phenomena and the world. Interestingly, these are only few examples.

Nevertheless, there are some topics that did not appear in the analysis, most notably, all the technical research is absent. This is attributed to the selection of articles included in the analysis. By studying different articles, there could have been technically oriented articles. Most likely, technical articles would have been in G category: but the studies of games with the technical orientation are not a homogenous group of studies of one type, but instead they include a wide variety of studies from game engines to 3D coding and everything in between. Thus, although there is a possibility they would have been placed in this category, it does not mean that they are all the same, but rather that this categorization may have problems with more specific themes, and may require a more fine grain categorization. Despite the lack of some themes, we can see that the present articles categorized into this section are alike and logical, and this category is useful and can help to define subjects of study.
**Player**

In this category, there were two articles:

- “User-Generated Video Gaming Little Big Planet and Participatory Cultures in Italy” (Comunello and Mulargia, 2015)

- “From Discussion Forum to Discursive Studio: Learning and Creativity in Design-Oriented Affinity Spaces” (Marone, 2015)

In this analysis, there is a curious detail in research materials: both of the articles that study the player, research the topic in a context of the same game, Little Big Planet. Even so, the approaches of the articles differ. The two identified themes are “participatory practices among the players” and “learning through games”. While many of the potential themes are missing due to the little amount of research material, these two subjects are central and discussed topics.
Context

There are six studies that can be placed into this category altogether:

- “Conceptualising Inspiration Networks in Game Design” (HO, TOMITSCH, and BEDNARZ, 2015)
- “Gandalf on the Death Star” (NØRGAARD and TOFT-NIELSEN, 2014)
- “Digital seriality as structure and process” (MAEDER and WENTZ, 2014)
- “Seriality’s Ludic Promise” (HIGGINS, 2014)
- “Remembering & Exhibiting Games Past” (STUCKEY et al., 2015)

That makes the C category the biggest one, but since the amount of research material is limited, no generalizations can be made based on it. As discussed in this study, the C category is the most obscure one in a sense. “Context” as a concept does not define too well the studies categorized into it, but as it can be noticed from the analyzed articles, it is hard to define this category with any concept that would be more specific. Nevertheless, this is a little bit problematic, since it is tempting to try to fit all the studies that won’t fit in any other category into C category, even if they should not belong into C category either, and could thus prove the 3 + 1 model faulty. Thus, it is possible that this can be a reason why this category is a bit emphasized, and not necessarily representing the real situation in the field. However, there is also a possibility that this category is emphasized due to the reason found from the research material choices: When talking about a journal called Game and Culture, for example, it can be assumed that the cultural and thus contextual dimensions are present in articles. In addition, it is also a possibility that the amount of C category studies is the highest.

Themes involved in this category provide an interesting evolution of the history of games. In this category are topics such as a “prehistory of digital games” and “player memories of games”, as well as games’ media related connections, like in “digital seriality in web-based media” and “playful seriality across different mediums”. The only
article addressing game design can also be positioned into this category. “Conceptualising Inspiration Networks in Game Design” (Ho, Tomitsch, and Bednarz, 2015) discusses the “inspiration in design process.” The approach in this article is human-centric and thus the article cannot be categorized in the G (Game) category, which may seem to be a more natural placement. This is why titles alone cannot determine categorization and instead, article descriptions must be considered.

Finally, there is a good example of a C category study that is indeed game studies, but should not be positioned into either of G nor P categories: “Beyond Today’s Video Game Rating Systems A Critical Approach to PEGI and ESRB, and Proposed Improvements” (Felini, 2015) which discusses “digital games’ age limits” as thematized and suggests new guidelines in rating the games.

Even an analysis of a limited amount of research material can show that this category is quite fragmented and consists of many different approaches. However, the analysis also suggests that there is a lot of research going on in relation to games and players, but not directly about each one of them. Therefore, the C category is necessary. With a deeper meta-analysis, it could be possible to explore what amount of studies can be placed into the C category.
Play/GPC

Articles in this category are the following:

• “‘Blackout!’ Unpacking the Black Box of the Game Event” (Conway and Trevillian, 2015)
• “Me and Lee” (Chris Bell, 2015)
• “From NES-4021 to moSMB3. wmv” (LeMieux, 2014)
• “‘Tap, tap, flap, flap.’ Ludic Seriality, Digitality, and the Finger” (Heilmann, 2014)

The PLAY category is indeed one of the most interesting ones in the light of this research. The original hypothesis included an assumption that the PLAY category and GPC are one and same thing. In other words, my operating assumption was that if a study of play is present, it has all three components of game, player and context. In contrast, this could be interpreted that a study in which all the three components are present is actually a study of play. However, this analysis suggests that there can be a study that includes all the three components — GPC — but is not about play. This is the case with “‘Blackout!’ Unpacking the Black Box of the Game Event” (Conway and Trevillian, 2015). While the theme is the “game’s essence”, the article examines this concept through the lens of what’s referred to as a “Game Event.” This Game Event is not a study of play but rather of all the three components of player, game and context. This suggests that PLAY and GPC are not one and same category after all. However, the question of what defines play as play, if these three components are not sufficient to do that, is outside the extent of this study. This study is neither able to prove, that these three elements are always needed, even if that seems to be the case based on this study.

“Me and Lee” (Chris Bell, 2015) is a good example of this category as it discusses the decision making during playing. This article alone can suggest that PLAY category is necessary: While the player is the one making the decisions, the game is quite naturally a vital component affecting these decisions. Apart from this study, we can also assume that the context in which the play occurs can impact on decisions as well as the hardware that are used during the play. Let’s think about this a short while. The Sims is a digital sandbox game where you can build and decorate houses and towns, and have human characters that you play house with and educate and evolve their relationships. Let us now think that someone
buys the game and plays Sims for the first time. Most likely, in-game decisions along with reasons to make these decisions during the first play session are very different in comparison to decisions that are made, after a significant amount of game time, or if the Sims is played with a group, or played to consider different floor plans. With this example, it is easy to imagine how the context affects the decisions as well.

In addition to these two articles, there are the articles “From NES-4021 to moSMB3. wmv” (LeMieux, 2014) and “‘Tap, tap, flap, flap.’ Ludic Seriality, Digitality, and the Finger” (Heilmann, 2014), in the PLAY category. The identified themes in these two are “seriality in speedruns” and “digitality in games and digital media.” Speedrunning means playing a game in a way that enables the fastest possible playthrough, and thus belongs in this category. With this notion, we can conclude that probably different types or styles of playing could be placed into this category. The other article discusses the concrete action of playing, including the finger movements. The physical action of playing can be a great matter of interest, when considering for instance the interconnection of sport scientists and game studies. Therefore, this category could also include “playing as a physical action” themes. No doubt there are multiple other topics that could be placed into this category as well, but even this analysis is able to indicate that the play study is an important part of the field of game studies.
Game and player

The three articles positioned into this category are

• “Affect, Responsibility, and How Modes of Engagement Shape the Experience of Videogames” (Veale, 2015)

• “Self-Reflexivity and Humor in Adventure Games” (Giappone, 2015)

• “Art Video Games Ritual Communication of Feelings in the Digital Era” (Díaz and Tungtjitcharoen, 2015)

Of the identified themes, one included an obvious topic to this category that is “Player expectations and humor in games.” Player expectations is exactly one of the reasons why this kind of category is needed. First, it might appear that the connection between player and game is always play, but as I have discussed, it seems that play requires the third category of context (and maybe even something more than that). However, that is not the only existing connection between the player and the game, but the players’ expectations is one of the obvious, studied subjects. In addition to that, the emotions a game can create in a player is another link between these two. Both topics are studied in Giappone’s article.

Other themes identified in the analysis are “representation and communication in (art) games” and “player engagement”. Both these two themes discuss the player and game relation. The one big missing theme, which could possibly be discovered in the game and player context, is learning. Can the learning theme be categorized into this category, and are there some other missing themes? This should be studied further, with a larger amount of studies.
Game and context

In game and context category, there are four articles.

• “Tokimeki Memorial Girl’s Side” (Richards, 2015)
• “Prolonging the Magic” (Nieborg, 2014)
• “Finishing the Fight, One Step at a Time” (Bonk, 2014)
• “‘Did you shoot the girl in the street?’” (Sulimma, 2014)

When I was formatting my master’s thesis, and designing the categories, I first considered what could be the best example of each category. One of the reasons why the 3 + 1 model is designed as it is, is that I encountered studies like “Tokimeki Memorial Girl’s Side” (Richards, 2015), that discuss of a game and its impact on culture. A study of this kind is not only a contextual study, but a study of a game: but simultaneously, it is not just a study of game, but it discusses the culture and society level topics. This article is thematized with “game’s impact on culture”, but a more specific theme could be “how games modify females’ dating behavior in real world”, which is the topic it discusses. Again, this kind of a topic could be replaced with other phenomena that can be studied in relation to games. “How games modify aggressive behavior” might be one of the most asked questions in its different forms.

In addition to that article, there are three more articles in this category. All of these articles, “Prolonging the Magic” (Nieborg, 2014), “Finishing the Fight, One Step at a Time” (Bonk, 2014), and “‘Did you shoot the girl in the street?’” (Sulimma, 2014), discuss a specific game and examine the relation of that game to society, culture or other contextual frame. The discovered themes are “the nature of triple A-games”, “seriality in one game series” and “seriality in production, reception and gameplay”. As these themes indicate, one of the analyzed journals, Eludamos, was a theme number of serialization. Putting that aside, we can notice that GC category includes articles that discuss not only game contents, but the game as a product and a product distribution from the designers’ end to the customers’ consumption as well as how this product can be valued. Although there are only four articles in this category, they give a good general review of what could be placed in this category.
**Player and context**

Finally, there is a player and context, alias PC category. The article placed in this category is

• “The Demarcation Problem in Multiplayer Games”  
  (Martin Arnold, 2015)

It discusses the “demarcation of social rules in MMORPG’s” (MMORPG is an abbreviation of “massively multiplayer online role-playing game”) as it is thematized. Again, we can replace some words and end up with themes like “negotiating play tactics in PVP’s” to understand what kind of themes could be placed into this category. What kind of other studies could have been placed into this category? “How players tell about the games they play to other players and to non-playing friends?” could, for example, be among the topics within this category. The limited number of articles positioned in this category might be only random and not an aggregated reflection of the field, since the sample size is small, however this provides entry to another area of future study. Although the number of articles in this category is very limited in this analysis, it seems that PC category is not unnecessary, and a further research can discover new kind of approaches to it.
Findings

In this analysis, the focus has been on individual articles. While the articles were chosen for the analysis without a previous knowledge of the contents of each journal, there are certain limitations within this method: For example, can we be certain in advance that the analyzed studies are game studies? As the purpose of my analysis was to test and discuss the 3 + 1 model’s validity, we must be certain that the research materials consist of game studies: otherwise, the results could indicate that some of the research material articles could not be categorized. We would not know if this is due to a flaw in the model or because the article was not indeed a game study, and the model worked properly. Of course, we can also discuss if the model should even be used to analyze individual articles, or merely kept as a theoretical presentation of the field. What is the value of analyzing individual articles? Although these questions were beyond the scope of this study, the value of analyzing individual articles hopefully extends beyond validity testing of the no 3 + 1 model to also aiding in the positioning of one’s study to the field. This could potentially also help highlight the connections and relations it may have in relation to other studies in the field of game studies.

I attempted to construct my study and the 3 + 1 model in a way that any issue published in any given year would qualify within the framework. Thus, replication is possible with any given research materials. Analyzing the articles was not as straightforward as I expected. The three separate subjects of study — game, player and context, are overlapping\(^7\) for a reason. In many of the articles, it is hard to tell the subject of the study precisely, because it can have elements of all the three, and sometimes the different variables are inseparable. A misinterpretation can have an effect on the results.

\(^7\) Mäyrä, An introduction to game studies (2008).
Discussion

How does a chance of misinterpretation affect the results of the study, then? The purpose of this analysis lays within testing the 3 + 1 model, and not within doing a categorization to these exact articles. Being mistaken, then, however unfortunate, wouldn’t overly skew the results, unless there was a recognizable pattern of misinterpretations. In that case, the misinterpretations should of course be discussed in relation to model’s validity. In the more extensive analysis included into my master’s thesis, I try to explain how I positioned each article to their categories, but in addition to misinterpretations, it is in a nature of qualitative studies that somebody interprets the contents differently. Fortunately, the study and the analysis were not so much about categorizing a certain set of articles, but about creating a model and testing it in practice.

Throughout the analysis I followed the next principle: if the studies focused on the player as someone who plays a game, I placed the study in the P category. Likewise, if the focus of study was on players and their actions or attitudes etc. as a community or on a cultural level, the studies were most often positioned into the C category. Is this a rational division? With this analysis, the question cannot be answered. It can be assumed, that this kind of a division positions methodically similar articles to their own groups, but further research must be made to find out if this is the case.

So far, I have discussed about the subject and variables of each study. However, the analysis revealed that there can be more issues that should be considered when analyzing the articles and categorizing them. An example of this is an article: “Prolonging the Magic” (NIEBORG, 2014). This study discusses Triple-A games and uses Call of Duty as an example. While this study produces information of Call of Duty branch, it does not examine Call of Duty as a game, but as an example of serialization and an object belonging into triple-A class. Is this a G category study then? Or does it belong to C category? In the analysis, I concluded that it belongs to GC category. However, different interpretations are possible. I categorized the articles based on the variables, as explained in the methodology section. It is not always easy to define the subject of study and the variables: For this evaluation, I asked if the study produces additional information about its subject. In this article, additional information of a game, Call of Duty, is produced. However, other inter-
pretations could be possible as well. The way in which the subject of study is positioned in the article affects the categorization: player is not always in a player position, but sometimes a forum writer, designer or something else. When categorizing articles, the position of both, subject and variables, should be considered as well.

Both the volume of ToDIGRA and the volume of Eludamos were unique considerations. The theme of seriality seems over emphasized in my data, and that is because the Eludamos analyzed volume was a special issue of digital seriality. The analyzed volume of ToDIGRA was a collection of articles from the Australian DiGRA conference. How could a different kind of research material have affected to the study? Because this is not a quantitative study, the number of topics in certain categories is not interesting. Choosing different research materials could have affected the way the studies are situated in different categories, but since that is not significant in the context of this study, the research material chosen for this study served its purpose despite its area specificity. It must still be noted that the themes reflect the research materials’ contents rather than the topics of game studies. They should not be considered to represent the field of game studies.

An additional limitation associated with the C category, is that it is too wide, which makes it difficult to describe the studies belonging to C category. It would be advantageous to explicitly define why an individual study belongs to the C category, but too often the reason seems to be that it won’t suit any other category, and still is a study that produces additional information of games, playing or players — or all these three. Quite obviously, a question like “how does the gamer community treat women” belongs to issues that should be, and is, understood as a content of the field of game studies. But a question of this kind cannot be categorized into a P or G or PLAY categories, there must be an additional category that includes this kind of questions. Therefore, the C category is necessary, even if it resembles a trashcan where all the topics that cannot be categorized into any other category are dumped. Is that a problem, then? It is, and it is not. To help the new researchers and students develop a comprehension of the field, there should not be a category of “others”, at least not a wide one: thus, while the intersections (PC and GC) help in defining the subjects of study with a greater accuracy, there is still a wide variety of “context” studies.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of the 3 + 1
model lies at the intersection of all the three categories, GPC or PLAY. After analyzing all the articles and discussing all the categories, it appears that the PLAY has all the three dimensions: There is a player, and a game, and a context in which the playing happens: This context is both physical and psychological, it is individual and social; it can be various things. The research material supports this claim, as the studies categorized into the PLAY category did indeed have all the three mentioned dimensions. However, with the limited sample size, this topic must be further examined. In addition, the other way around there seems to be studies that discuss all the three categories of game, player and contexts, but the actual PLAY component is missing or non-significant. The limitations discussed in this section provide a rationale for re-evaluating the model’s visualization.
**Revised 3 + 1 Model**

A revised version of the 3 + 1 model can be found in fig. 2. This depiction, which was designed based upon a careful analysis of the prior version’s limitations, more effectively illustrates the connections in the field and their interrelations. In this model, the PLAY is surrounded of all the three elements, but is not equal to them. The intersection of GPC categories is not necessarily play, as it was in the original version. Thus, the model is better able to describe how different sections are positioned in relation to each other. With this modification, the intersection of all the three categories can examine player, game and context even if the focus in not on playing.

![Revised version of the 3+1 model.](image-url)
Conclusion

Playing seems to be a profound part of our lives. Yet, only one form of playing was discussed within this study. As digital games are still a young form of entertainment, and constantly reforming with new inventions such as augmented reality games and some of the older inventions finding their route to market — 3D glasses as an example of this — it is obvious that a study focusing on articles discussing digital games in late 2010’s will soon be outdated in a way or other. Does this notion mean that it is not even worth of try to conceptualize a field but rather we should wait and see when the development stops? Certainly not. Rather, any model or visualization developed to capture and describe the field should be either able to follow its time and respond into changes, or kept as a portrayal of the times when it was constructed. The constant change in study fields and in the world we live in must be acknowledged and responded to. As discussed earlier in this study, we can assume that the subjects of study are somewhat stabile, but are they eternal? Definitely not. Thus, the categorizations illustrate the current situation in the field of game studies.

As Aarseth\textsuperscript{8} writes, game studies is a field that is hard to define. Making a definition can, however, be beneficial, if it can be successfully made. By this preliminary categorization, I hope that I can help in defining game studies, and throughout the definition, help to develop the field further by sparking conversations over the categorization model. We are — still — safely nested in our home bases, as Williams\textsuperscript{9} writes. Maybe it is time to start exploring, not only in the virtual worlds (but in them, too!), but also in the real world where we can build fruitful connections and offer new perspectives to the field of game studies by collaboration.

\textsuperscript{8} AARSETH, “Meta-Game Studies” (2015).

\textsuperscript{9} WILLIAMS, “Bridging the methodological divide in game research” (2005).
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**Reviews**

**Editor’s note:** *Acta Ludica* is an open peer review journal. What follows are the reviews for *How and Why to Categorize Game Studies*.

**Reviewer:** Nelson Zagalo  
(Universidade do Minho)

**Is this submission relevant for Acta Ludica, according to our focus and scope?**

The article presents an approach to the categorisation of papers in the domain of Game Studies.  
This is a metapaper on game journals.

**Are the methodology and protocols described in the text adequate, and clearly presented?**

The model presented is not wrong, but it cannot also be right, and this is a major handicap of the paper, more than of the model itself.  
The author should have stated why this model is needed, because models serve causes, not abstractions.  
The model is very broad, and categories are not enough discussed. The paper would gain with an in-depth discussion on the building of the model itself.  
The case to support the model is very thin, only 24 papers. More even because the study of each object is done at surface, so no problem in running the test in a hundred or more papers.

**Further comments**

The article presents an approach to the categorisation of papers in the domain of Game Studies. At first sight it could be relevant, but the author never explains why it is important, even if stated in the title.  
The paper presents a set of problems, that make the decision to accept it or not difficult.  
As it is, we’ve only an approach to the categorisation, its lacks motivation, lacks model theoretical support, lacks enough empirical base.
Reviewer: Thiago Schaedler Uhlmann  
(Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná)

Is this submission relevant for *Acta Ludica*, according to our focus and scope?

This paper describes an exploratory study about a possible methodology for game studies categorization, based on three main elements: game, player and context (and interactions based on these elements). This methodology (3 + 1) proposes this categorization based on a essentially qualitative analysis of research paper content, such as subjects and objectives.

The author analysed 24 papers from 4 game research journals: Eludamos, Game Studies, Games and Culture and ToDIGRA, and performed a categorization of these papers. The author concluded on proposing an enhanced model, and on the need for further game research definition and categorization studies.

This paper does not propose to be a conclusive study — it proposes the exploration of a possible method for game studies categorization, which can be improved or tested in further research. The relevance of the study is that the proposed method (3 + 1) can be used, for example, as an accessory tool in systematic reviews in game design, being of interest for researchers in game design or game development methods.

Is the submitted text clear and well-organized? Is it well written?

The author should use a more objective text style — instead, she uses a more personal and intimist language, which can generate, in more conservative readers, erronic interpretations about the credibility of the analysis.

Does the submitted text present innovative ideas or results?

The author proposes one possible method for game research analysis — but this method reflects a perception of the author about how game studies can be classified, and may not be suitable in other situations (ex.: serious games analysis). Further tests, preferentially conclusive tests, considering wider samples, should be done.
Are the methodology and protocols described in the text adequate, and clearly presented?

The author should clarify the methods used to classify the research papers on each category. As she suggests in the text, this classification was predominantly based on the personal experience and perceptions of the researcher.

Further comments

As mentioned before, the author should clarify the methods used to classify the research papers on each category. As she suggests in the text, this classification was predominantly based on the personal experience and perceptions of the researcher.

Reviewer: André Luiz Battaiola
Universidade Federal do Paraná

Is this submission relevant for Acta Ludica, according to our focus and scope?

The submitted article presents a systematic categorization of Game Studies. The three root categories in this system are Game, Player, and Context, which may be combined to create other categories.

In my opinion, this article allows for a better formalization of game studies, contributing to a better understanding and to a greater precision in these studies.

Does the submitted text present innovative ideas or results?

The departing point for this research was the work of Mäyrä and Juul. Since these references are over five years old, it would be useful to emphasize the originality of the proposal in the submitted article.

Are the methodology and protocols described in the text adequate, and clearly presented?

The research methodology is not presented clearly in the text. For instance, the research included a systematic literature review, but this is not discussed in a clear manner.
Further comments

The article is quite interesting and it may be published as is. However, it lacks emphasis on the originality of the proposal, and it also lacks a clear exposition of the methodology.