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A Qualitative Inquiry on the Case Example of German Professionals**  
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# The Professional Identity of Gameworkers Revisited. A Qualitative Inquiry on the Case Example of German Professionals

JEFFREY WIMMER AND TATIANA SITNIKOVA

Paid work significantly shapes the lives of most people in late modern societies. Indeed, who and what we consider ourselves and others to be as persons is frequently articulated in relationship to 'work'. (Du Gay 1997, p.288)

Computer games as a key medium of our society are a common topic of public discourse, although the discussion is mainly narrowed down on the aspects of addictiveness and violence. The different game cultures have been drawing attention of the researchers for many years already, whereas until quite recently the people who stay behind computer games – the so-called gameworkers – were undeservingly staying in shade: “While much is known about video game consumers and the products themselves, little is known about the actual makeup of the games’ creators” (IGDA 2005, p.4). Similarly Deuze et al. (2007, p.335) point out: “Unlike the detailed credit roll in movies or editorial bylines in journalism, gameworkers (much like their creative colleagues in advertising) generally remain unknown to their audiences.”

The lack of information about this workforce in general and its professional identity in particular is astonishing. The aim of this analysis is therefore to characterise the professional identity of gameworkers. Following the notion of mediated identities we expand the analysis of Deuze et al. (2007), which can be considered the first in this research area. As there is only tentative research about the professional identity of gameworkers so far, the study employs a qualitative and reconstructive research design. During the project nine German gameworkers were interviewed and an attempt to give an in-depth description of their heterogeneous professional identity was made.

## Theoretical Background

### Game Business and Gameworkers

Only a few studies investigated gameworkers as a professional group. A survey by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) (2005) threw a first light on the work demographics in the game industry. According to this study, 88.5 % of the respondents identified themselves as males and only 11.5 % as females (cf. IGDA 2005, p.12). This discrepancy is one of the reasons why men strongly dominate the work positions in the core game development jobs: design, programming, visual arts (cf. Deuze et al. 2007; Consalvo 2008). Based on its survey results, IGDA (2005, p.10) provides a somewhat ironic portrait of a typical gameworker, which is “not

disabled, 31 years old, working in the industry just over 5 years, university/college educated.”

The title of our analysis is referring to a study of Deuze et al. (2007), who conducted a multi-methodological study with the aim “to describe the issues and challenges facing gameworkers in their everyday lives in terms of how they construct and give meaning to their professional identity in the global computer and videogame industry.” (Deuze et al. 2007, p.337) This study can serve as a starting point for understanding the nature of gamework. Deuze et al. (2007) grasp the contexts of professional identity from the view point of five domains following the culture of production framework of Peterson and Arnand (2004):

1. Deuze et al. (2007, p.338, see also Dovey and Kennedy 2006) identify *technology* as the driving force for game industry: “As the global hardware manufacturing industry continually renews and replaces its technologies, the creative work of game developers (including, but not limited to, the technicians) must be understood as taking place in a context of permanent change, looking for and exploring new capabilities, discoveries and experiments.”
2. *Law and regulation* in the game industry mainly concern two aspects: the first is the publishers’ control over the co-creative process with its ‘informal’ labour contracts (Kücklich 2005, Nieborg and van der Graaf 2008); the second aspect deals with the formal contracts which are used by professionals inside the industry (Deuze et al. 2007: 340). The process of game development itself is very complex and includes many steps, the number and scope of which can vary depending on type of a game, platform, target audience, budgeting, and other factors (cf. Bartle 2006; Kerr 2006a). Taking into consideration the complexity of game development makes clear why it implies teamwork as well: “Game development can be seen as a specific form of software development where certain product and/or service is designed and developed. The outcome of the development, i.e., digital game, comprises of assets – audio-visual material and software, which generally exist only in electronic format. Due to the heterogeneous nature of game assets, the development requires multi-talented teams consisting of skilled individuals working in seamless collaboration.” (Manninen et al., 2006: 5)
3. Concerning the *industrial and organizational structure* of the industry, the following peculiarities have to be emphasised (cf. Consalvo 2006; Kerr 2006a; Deuze et al. 2007, p.341ff.): Games are often produced in temporary projects and in collaboration with other people than just gameworkers – software developers, modders, etc. – which could be described best as a highly participatory business structure. The industry relies heavily on transnational game development studios and publishers, which brings people from different nationalities and countries of residence to work together on projects (Consalvo 2006; Potanin 2010). Normally games are created in teams of professionals where every member has its own role and tasks. Thus there is often a strong system of seniority and subordination within teams.
4. The *occupational careers* in the game industry are determined by the specifics of its business *structures* (cf. De Peuter and Dyer-Witford 2005; Deuze et al. 2007, p.345ff.; Consalvo, 2008; Potanin 2010): The overwhelming majority of gameworkers are still males, which often provokes male-slanted orientation of

marketing and design. The labour market is highly competitive, and the amount of people willing to enter the business keeps growing. The specifics of game production make the work environment stressful, or to put it bluntly: “While it may be fun to play games, it is often far from fun to make them.” (Potanin 2010, p.135) The gameworkers constantly face so-called crunch times (often unpaid) and work under the necessity to constantly meet deadlines. Passion is therefore often regarded as one of the essential compounds in gamework. Empirical research underlines the stressful character of gamework and its large workload: “The workplace is a stressful one everywhere, more so in the game industry than in most others.” (IGDA 2004, p.5) According to IGDA (2004, p.30), three out of five gameworkers usually clock more than a 46 hours work week, and when it is crunch time (finishing phase of project); “35.2% of respondents work 65 to 80 hours a week and 13% work over 80 hours a week.” Moreover, more of the half of the respondents reported to the IGDA that their management treats crunch times as a normal way of doing work (IGDA 2004, p.30ff.).

5. The *game market* also possesses several peculiarities: digital games are an ubiquitous phenomenon bearing a plethora of game types and genres. The game market is stereotypically predefined. The game industry is heavily driven by demands of the audience and the steady pressure of offering contemporary games (Deuze et al. 2007, p.348). Therefore, it is crucial for the game industry to consider gamers as co-creators of games, not just as audiences (e.g. modding communities). Livermore (2009, p.1) specifies the connection between game business and conditions of the gameworkers' labour: “Digital games have historically been rife with crisis, defining the games industry and its practices to a significant degree.” The fact that it is originally harder to gain profits in this business than in other media (such as movie production) and the immaterial nature of gamework explain the work strain that gameworkers have to cope with.

Dyer-Witford and de Peuter (2006, p.601) characterize a workplace in game industry as a “site of conflict, rather than of acquiescence” and describe (2006, p.601ff.) gamework rather dramatically with four catchwords: enjoyment, exclusion, exploitation, and exodus. People entering the industry enjoy the creative freedom they have, which features minimal bureaucracy and a lot of teamwork (“enjoyment”). Over the years they get the sense of being in a “total ‘old boys’ club” as the game development is a kind of “masculine dungeon” (“exclusion”). Game work is permanently followed by stress, long working hours and crunch time situations (“exploitation”), which results in a high rate of turnover in the industry and a lot of gameworkers who plan to leave the business in the near future (50% want to leave the industry within ten years, 35% within five years according to IGDA 2004) (“exodus”).

### **Game Workers and Professional Identity**

Although Deuze et al. (2007) centre their analysis on the term *professional identity*, they surprisingly don't provide a definition of this construct at all. They constrain their analysis on the so-called domains of gamework (see chapter 1), which are for them the driving forces behind the game industry and “map(s) the key issues which inform

and influence the working lives and professional identities of professionals in the global computer and videogame industry.“ (Deuze et al. 2007, p.335) They perceive the identity of gameworkers as being “inseparable from the products of their work“ (Deuze et al. 2007, p.350) and therefore as a site of conflict and pressure, which is reflected in the daily routines of the gameworkers:

“The culture of gamework, or prevalent mentalities towards a professional identity, can best be described as a series of negotiations taking place on a daily basis by the individual game professional. The options for negotiations of employment styles are limited as any discontent can be countered by the thought of a legion of younger workers (and co-creating gamers) waiting to break into the industry, willing to tolerate the same tough working conditions and probably (at least, initially) for less pay.“ (Deuze et al. 2007, p.350)

From a sociological perspective social identities like a professional identity are in general a far more complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the aforementioned contexts of gamework alone. Group-related identities are the result of multifaceted and often long-term social and cultural constructions. Thus, identity refers to a communication process which incorporates both individual attitudes and practices and structural contexts. As Castells (1997, p.7) points out: “The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations.” Based on structuration theory, Scott et al. (1998) provide an integrative framework for understanding the process of identification in a work environment. Professional attachment is shaped both by individuals and social contexts; the individuals are part of and refer to “the linkage between an individual and some ‘target’ or social ‘resource’ based on perceived social memberships and the manifest behaviors that produce and are produced through those perceived memberships” (Scott et al., 1998, p.299, see also Patchen, 1970).

Because of the relevance of work in everyday life professional identity plays a important part in a person's social identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identity refers to “a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, organization, work group) within which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, and provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category – a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept” (Hogg and Terry, 2001, p.3). Individuals can possess several memberships, which vary in importance in the self-concept. Each categorical membership is represented in the individual's mind as a frame that both describes and prescribes an individual's attributes as a member of a certain group (e.g., work team) – for example, how one should behave and think or feel: “Self perception and conduct become in-group stereotypical, and intergroup behavior acquires, to varying degrees depending on the nature of relations between the groups, competitive and discriminatory properties” (Hogg and Terry, 2001, p.3).

People do not possess identity as such, rather constantly develop and articulate their identity upon communicative practices and encounters. Since medial patterns and topics increasingly influence everyday life (process of mediatization of society), the articulation of personal and group-related identities nowadays occurs increasingly by the means of *mediated resources*. Case examples are on an individual level the self-identification by means of mediated symbols and appropriation of media content, on

a collective level the group related self-assurance through mass media and media generated publics (Morley & Robins, 1995). Therefore all current identities – whether people are aware or not aware of it – can be understood as “mediated identities”.

Following the paradigm of interactionism (Mead, Goffman etc.), Krotz (2003) differentiates several aspects of this communicative process. First of all, he states that media communication can change the structure and the consistency of individual self-concept and role taking (Krotz, 2003, p.41). By use of communication media and digital technologies, people enjoy more role-based experiences, which can only be accomplished by media. Krotz illustrates this mediated process with the historical example of writing a diary, which is connected to the gradual differentiation of the individual from familial and social cohesion. This process accelerates in times of computer-mediated communication and identity plays in the Internet. Second, media can influence the structure of relationships of reasoning and behaviour in certain situations, insofar as specific peculiarities of these relationships, in relation to various forms of mediated communication, are being socialised (Krotz refers to the case examples of a person being a “nerd” or a “couch potato”). Third, media can offer and hold ready content as attributes for the constitution of individual or collective identities and their specific lifestyles. Finally, media can provide para-social relationships with media figures and/or practical orientations which in turn influence the construction of identities.

Derived from these shortly drafted perspectives, the following definition serves as a basis for the analysis: professional identity is a mostly mediated self-concept of an individual as a member of a certain professional group, followed by a strong sense of coherence with professional life and understanding of and behaving in accordance with professional standards, values, and roles.

The insights of the analysis could help us to understand better the changed and heterogeneous self-concept of gameworkers in comparison to traditional media workers. We suppose that the professional identity of gameworkers like all modern media employees is strongly contextualized by popular media culture in general – but of course with a distinguished role of digital games in particular (Charrieras and Roy-Valex, 2008). Games shape role-based experiences, behaviour, and forms of lifestyles and group-bound characteristics of gameworkers. This process will be supposedly reflected in the individual biographies. Before making a professional choice as a gameworker, a person spends free time playing games and when a person is already employed as a gameworker, she/he keeps gaming because she/he likes this amusement and because gaming is necessary in order to keep up with what is going on in the game industry.

## Methodology

As outlined above, there are quite a few studies about the work routines of gameworkers. However, the issue of professional identity and its contexts has been neglected most of the time. The pilot study by Deuze et al. (2007) gives the first points of reference, which, however, have to be looked at in more detail. When analysing phenomena that have not been in the focus of research so far, an explorative and therefore qualitative research design is necessary (see Lindlof,

1995). Several in-depth interviews were conducted with the intention of gaining detailed information about the characteristics of this profession from the internal perspective. Because it was decided to investigate first in one country as a explorative case study, Germany was considered to be a good place for such research because it's currently the second largest game market in Europe and it could still be qualified as a booming market (e.g. Newzoo, 2010). Moreover, the profession of a gameworker is relatively new to this country and therefore probably as a occupational field not that professionalized and standardized as, for example, in the USA or Japan (Consalvo, 2006a; Kerr 2006a).

A theoretical sampling method was chosen because it allows gathering data and getting a deeper understanding of the formation and heterogeneity of the professional identity of the gameworkers (cf. Flick, 2009, p.117). Following this goal it was decided to interview the respondents of different positions in the game industry, employed in the game development studios of different sizes as well as independent gameworkers (freelancers). Also, it was aimed at involving the basic specialists who make up the core of the game development teams: designers, artists, programmers, producers (cf. Deuze, 2007; Kerr, 2006b). Interviewees from the large studios like Ubisoft and Electronic Arts were excluded because of the strong and transnational corporate culture and identity of these studios. Nine interviews were conducted via phone or Skype. Table 1 gives an overview of the interviewed persons and their gaming profiles (all names have been changed to guarantee anonymity).

Name	Age	Gender	Level of education	Time in the industry (years)	Current position	Size of the studio
Peter	32	M	Ph.D.	13	Executive director	~25
Manuel	39	M	High school	20	Artist, graphic designer, director	~5
Philipp	36	M	University	14	Freelance script writer	n/a
Dennis	37	M	High school	13	Freelance programmer	n/a
Anja	34	F	University	5	3D- and level designer	~25
Tommy	34	M	University	9	CEO	~5
Felix	36	M	University	10	Programmer, producer	~25
Andreas	32	M	High school	10	Creative director	~10
Alex	34	M	University	10	Creative Director, producer	~15

Table 1: Gameworkers' profile

For data collection a semi-structured interview method was used. In accordance with this method, the interviewer wasn't strictly stuck to the sequence of the questions, and mostly open questions are involved (cf. Flick, 2009, p.156ff.). Deriving from the specific theoretical approach and surveys so far the following empirical categories of the professional identity of gameworkers can be differentiated: *work biography*, *work life*, *media experiences* and *preferences*, *professional orientations*, and *self-concept*. Upon these dimensions the interview guideline was implemented. The category work biography served as the starting point of the interview and refers to following aspects: working background, lifestyle, hobbies and spare time. Additionally sociodemographic data like age, education and marital status was collected (in most cases via e-mail in order to avoid possible embarrassment). As Deuze et al. (2007) propose, professional identity is inseparably connected with the various aspects of current work life. The second category therefore included questions about the peculiarities of the work life, including information about why this profession was chosen (subcategories motives and influences on the career choice), gameworkers' view of the work process, tasks and workload (subcategory work load/production process), how the relationships with the colleagues are assessed (personality-group relations) and what a person likes/dislikes in his or her work (subcategory work preferences). Following the notion of media identity the third category was established in order to gain information about media preferences and media-cultural background of our interviewees. Through the fourth category – professional orientations – we hoped to receive information, from the internal perspective, about such aspects as professional standards, values, and ethics. Last but not least, the category of self-concept should elaborate on to what extent the gameworkers associate themselves with their profession. Corresponding to categories, a questionnaire consisting of 25 questions was created. All the recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed with the means of a qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2000). Following a deductive logic, the data was condensed according to our categories.

## Findings

In the following sections, we will present the main findings of this analysis according to the five dimensions of professional identity. Examples and individual statements will be added to give some in-depth impression of the everyday working experiences that lie behind the more general and abstract trends described below.

### Work Biography

Concerning the time span during which the respondents were involved in the game industry professionally, the shortest time is five years, the average time is ten to thirteen years and the longest time is twenty years. But the majority of the respondents were already interested in this business in childhood and their teen years, so in most cases we found a seamless transition between amateur and professional gamework. For example, Manuel, who has twenty years of professional experience, started drawing when he was a little kid and at the age of eleven he drew on his first computer using a paint program. Gradually game design became his

passion – at the age of seventeen he had already created his first game together with friends (the game was never released though). A year later he was employed as an assistant art director in a game development studio. A similar story was told Dennis, who can look back on thirteen years of professional experience. He began programming long before he started working for money, so when he was hired as an intern in a studio, he was already quite an experienced programmer. Before Peter and his roommate founded their own company, he was extremely interested in all aspects of game development (gameplay, programming, etc.) and their potential – this basic interest followed by amateur and freelance projects led to the foundation of his own business. A look on the list of jobs the interviewees had before their current employment, reveals following commonality: the overwhelming majority of them had been, in one way or another, previously engaged in the game development business.

The interviews additionally show that with growing professional experience and time spent in the industry it is common for people to start executing other tasks in addition to those they had been initially responsible for before – e.g., acting as a cross-functional worker fulfilling both creative and business tasks (interacting with publishers). For example, two of the respondents who are now CEOs started their careers as programmers. With time, they became familiar with all the aspects of game development and this made it possible for them to switch their status. It is quite typical that specialists holding such superior jobs as producer, creative director, CEO, etc. have originally set foot in the industry in another position and then with the growth of experience they turned to the administrative side of the production. It can also be concluded that it is obligatory for the gameworkers to change occupations as their experience grows.

Upon talking to the gameworkers, it became clear that university degrees are not always a must-have. From their perspective one can still become a professional through curiosity, self-development and practical skills. On the other hand, today's situation has been dramatically changing because of growing competition.

## **Work Life**

Work tasks are performed in accordance with the specific hierarchy at work in a particular studio and the level of autonomy, which is defined by the studio direction and/or the publishers. The fact that our sample consisted of members from small- and medium-sized studios could explain why the interviewees all stated they have a medium or even high level of autonomy and creative freedom. Also, the interviewees indicated that they don't feel the hierarchies on the social level. It was claimed by some that everybody in their studios had his say and the atmosphere of the decision taking is quite democratic (both owners of studios and gameworkers in management or regular positions pointed this out). This perceived freedom of creativity and autonomy likely varies from project to project and from studio to studio. Also, it depends on the stage of the project – thus, members of a studio have more possibilities to express their ideas at the stage of the planning when initial brainstorming takes place. They must comply more tightly when design documents are ready and the project starts. On the one hand gameworkers are encouraged to act creatively, and on the other hand the work they perform should fit to the story of

the game, the project in general, and demands of the superiors. The perception of work roles and positions in particular show great promise for further research.

Similar to other media professions, during work great importance is attached to a vibrant social life in order to increase job satisfaction, productivity, and cooperation. For example, in many studios it is traditional that the colleagues engage in social activities after work (like parties, watching football, drinking beer, etc.). Anja says it is typical in the industry for gameworkers to do something together and the atmosphere in a studio is good and positive. Alex says:

And we do spend some time together after work. Like drinks sometimes. It's very comfortable work. I think it's the reason why people can actually deal with the business, because it sometimes can be really demanding in terms like working hours. We wouldn't be able to keep up the high quality work; we couldn't work like this. People would like run away including myself.

### **Media Experiences and Preferences**

In terms of media preferences it was interesting to trace connections between respondents' media use and their profession. Computer games (both playing and making) were naturally mentioned as the main leisure-time pursuit. Although some of respondents don't game that much anymore because of lack of time, games still take an important place in the spare time.

Moreover, same as movies, it is a source of inspiration for work. Felix's statement is representative: "The more you play, the more ideas you get for the projects. So it's good if you have hobbies that are placed in this environment."

Despite these characteristics, interviewees do not comply with stereotypes, which are often prevalent in public discourse, indicating that most of gameworkers (as well as gamers) are nerds only dealing with games all the time. For most of the interviewees there is naturally an equal mark between work and hobby. Thus, a digital artist mentioned graphic design as one of his hobbies (Interview Peter), a programmer mentioned artificial intelligence as his hobby (Interview Dennis). Thus, gamework doesn't essentially differ from other professions. Of course personal friendships and family take one of the leading places. Most of the respondents are married and some have children and thus mention spending time together with families as one of their free time activities. Anja says that her child is her biggest hobby now, she even works part-time because of him. For Dennis and Felix, their families also take one of the first positions after their work. Even though the respondents play games with different levels of involvement, it is to be pointed out that playing games is for them one of the current demands of the profession. The gameworkers must be aware of what is going on in the game industry, so they keep an eye on the market demands, released novelties, new technologies, etc. (e.g. O'Donnell 2009). So, all in all, gaming is an important aspect of the professional lives of gameworkers. One producer commented on this phenomenon, stating:

"You know, for this special position in development it's of course highly important that you play every game that comes around. Also it's obligatory that you look on the

market: what is in, what is out, what do the people like, what they don't like." (Interview Felix)

Concerning media and pop-culture likes in general, the majority of the respondents have a broad taste. Among favourite genres there listed were action, fantasy, and horror movies: "I like science fiction, fantasy and I think you can find this in every gameworker" (Manuel). Anja said that the movie "Avatar" inspired her a lot and served as a source of creative input. Besides reading books (Alex, Dennis, Manuel, Philipp, Tommy) some like comic books (Alex), one of the respondents says he likes audio books and audio plays (Andreas). Peter mentioned that he regularly reads daily newspapers and various magazines. At this point the following response by Manuel exemplifies the open-mindedness of gameworkers: "I am very open to new information to see what is going on in the world, yes." As stated above, the lives of gameworkers – in contrary to the common stereotypes – are not only about playing games and making games – they like to do a lot of other things not connected with their work. Also, reading books, watching movies (and even football in the case of Peter), etc., can serve as a source of inspiration for a gameworker. And if Felix speaks of doing sports as an important thing for some projects, in addition to playing as many games (not only computer games) as possible, then for gameworkers their pop-cultural and media likes and habits make them more open-minded and also serve as a source of creative input.

### **Professional Orientations**

Professional orientations refer to the professional standards, values, and ethics of gameworkers. Therefore some of the following concrete questions were being addressed: what is important in this work to them, what aims they want to reach, what they aspire for, which values they perceive as being important in their profession? The gameworkers were also asked where they see themselves in several years.

Regarding the professional standards the gameworkers must meet, most interviewees mention the importance of a specific professional knowledge that functions as a prerequisite for a certain work specialization. For example, a 3D designer should be excellent in 3D interface and also be a good drawer, and artists must have a good knowledge of anatomy and colours, etc. Nowadays the educational background of the gameworkers mostly supports these qualification demands. This necessity of specialisation can be explained by the fact that the contemporary game industry is technology-driven and highly competitive, which furthers its professionalization. At the same time, being good in one particular specialization is not considered sufficient. It can be drawn as a conclusion that the interviewees perceive it as necessary to be familiar with all aspects of game production, which is predetermined by the team format of work and the collaborative practice regarding creative work (see e.g. Bilton, 2007, p.45ff.) – an internalised professional standard which also enhances the steady change of occupations (see chapter 1).

The interviews also indicate that it is crucial for gameworkers to have a good understanding of the current developments and news – which games have been

published recently, which games have received awards, etc. They also concretize certain personal skills, which they perceive also as professional standards and which are, in a way, contrary to the aforementioned rational and strategic aspects of game business. These qualities, such as talent and creativity are perceived as highly important because gamework is rated foremost as a creative work. Thus, there is a clearly observable connection between creativity of the gameworkers and their consumption of media – media products broaden the minds of the gameworkers and give them new ideas.

Social skills are also being mentioned as a “must-have” trait. This relates to the necessity of a person to being able to integrate into the team, become a part of it, while building connections with other parties, such as partners and publishers (this concerns primarily gameworkers who deals with business tasks). Speaking about the importance of fitting into a team well, Dennis says, “You know, it’s a hard work. You need to have real ability and the endurance to stay in the project and not give up. That is really important. Most of the people, who really fail the game industry, they cannot work in a team.”

As the game industry and the technologies are constantly developing, lifelong learning and the motivation to increase one’s professional competencies individually can also be referred to as professional orientations. For example, one of the respondents said, “I want to try some new stuff for a very long time – get to know knowledge about animation amongst other things” (Interview Anja). In addition, as game development implies time-consuming production processes, often accompanied by stress, it is very important for the gameworkers to have endurance and patience to cope with stress and long hours at work. Without having a pleasant atmosphere in the studio it would be hard to bear such a workload (see chapter 2). Also, high commitment to work and enthusiasm (caused by passion about games) makes the gameworkers turn the blind eye to such difficulties.

Finally, making quality games can be stated as one of the standards of the profession, because all the interviewees expressed their wish to deliver up-to-date quality games. Although some of the respondents mentioned that there are still a lot of extremely low quality games on the market; so, for them, the issue of quality in games is important only to professional studios that consider reputation an important factor.

Values of the profession partially overlap with the perceived standards. Answering the question, how a ideal gameworker should be, passion for games was stated first, followed by high dedication and motivation to work; “[f]irst of all you have to be passionate about games.” (Interview Peter) In this analysis, the conclusion was drawn that it is a great surplus for a gameworker if she/he has “a feeling of a game” – sort of an intuitional understanding of what would fit the game better and what the audience would appreciate. This expertise depends on a gameworker’s understanding of the current situation of the game market, its trends, standards, needs, etc. Also, understanding of every side of game production is necessary. “Feeling of a game” corresponds to the social skills, once again, but in a very particular context – with a gameworkers being good everyday psychologists who understand what common people want to play. This expertise can sometimes be a complicated issue because it implies that a gameworker goes a bit further in his work,

applies his creative forces. Therefore, the game industry can be seen at the interface of commerce and creativity and its gameworkers always have to look for a certain balance (cf. Deuze, 2008, p.6).

Among other values, high motivation to entertain gamers is often mentioned. This motivation derives from passion for playing and making games and dedication to work. Making highly appreciated games is not only about financial gains (although, making good profits is one of the aims) because it is important for gameworkers that their studio is a well-recognized brand that has proven its worth as a developer of high-quality games (see also next chapter). The people of this profession like to see the results of their work, how their games are estimated, what feedback they get from the audience. This is so because the gameworkers feel a strong coherence with the games they make. Making games it not just a work, it is a hobby and an expansion of their creativity. Ambitions for self-development and learning new things can also be referred to as the core-values of the profession and what is expressed as an enormous willingness to make more complicated games.

The same could be said about ethics of the game development – there is still no generally accepted ethical code of conduct of gameworkers established. The interviewees show therefore their own individual idea of ethics, which is formed by personal attitudes and/or by the attitude of the studio they work at. However, taking into consideration that the respondents mentioned that the issues of game quality and game ethics are important to them, it can be supposed that these issues are not ignored by the majority of the gameworkers, and the amount of studios that make low-quality games and ignore ethical matters, will be declining with the further expansion and professionalization of game industry.

In this perspective the opinion of the only female interviewee is interesting. To the question whether there is a game she wouldn't play Anja says, "I think I am going to try everything", but then adds that she won't work on "the sexist games". Therefore she advocates a working team with 1:1 male-female ratio. Anja's vision of game development ethics is when people of both sexes make a game, so that the main characters of the game are not exposed to the sexist stereotypes about women. The topic of sexism is also mentioned by Alex – he speaks about the clichés which are pushed in girl's games, stating, "[y]oung women are always pushed to clichés because many interactive media make these clichés work." He believes that these clichés do much more damage than ego-shooters.

### **Self-concept**

The notion of professional identity refers to the self-concept of a person as a member of a certain professional group, therefore the interviews finally touch upon the self-image of the gameworkers and as well as the stereotypes they have faced in the public. First of all, the respondents were asked whether they consider themselves as typical representatives of their profession. The opinions were naturally very heterogeneous – some respondents considered themselves to be not typical gameworkers, some typical, and some rather typical. Nevertheless the majority of respondents surprisingly associate themselves with the industry to a large extent. The following characteristics of a typical gameworker – which all are connected to the

aforementioned orientations and standards – were mentioned: a highly-established interest in everything that is surrounding computer games (both playing and making); an initial acquaintance with games as a hobby, which normally evolves to a profession; a strong devotion to media products – cinema, books, comics; quite often previous experience in making games long before entering the industry as a professional; and a lot of other interests (e.g. family, sports, social life, traveling, etc.).

Quite interestingly, the interviews showed that sense of belonging, not only to the game industry, but to the individual game studio as well, is quite high. For example, when reasoning about the goals and plans for future, many of the respondents spoke of the prosperity of their studio in one way or another. Among the statements was concern about becoming one of the leading German developers (Interview Peter) and for Alex “[o]ur goals are to strengthen our infrastructure of the company and for this, we’re looking into options for online distribution on our own” (Interview Alex). The owners of studios who, of course, aspire to financial prosperity and an increase in the size of business didn’t only mention this argument. The employees in the sample also expressed their expectation that their studios steadily grow and develop more and more sophisticated games with larger teams involved (expansion of the studio), entering new market segments (not only German ones), and archiving the status of a strong recognizable brand making high quality games.

Last but not least, what is still not typical for a gameworker is being female: “A typical person in the industry is male. ... I am not male (laugh)” (Interview Anja). She underlines the gender discrepancy in this profession, but also adds that nowadays more and more females enter the industry. For example, when she started five years ago at her current studio, she was the only female gameworker, and now there are five. But she perceives herself not as being very typical for a gameworker because she doesn’t play games that much and comes from another area – architecture.

## Conclusion

So, what is the professional identity of the gameworkers? Upon investigating this issue it became clear that it is not easy to describe what constitutes the professional identity of the gameworkers because it refers to several dimensions. Therefore, it was attempted to answer this question with a qualitative analysis based on five categories (work biography, media preferences, work life, professional orientations, and self-concept) in order to grasp the complexity and the enduring communicative construction of identity. The interviewees, surprisingly, show a very strong sense of belonging to their professional group in general and the team/studio they work with/at. The most salient reason for this is the deep passion in digital games (for both making and playing games). It is quite traditional for the game industry that people start with gaming, then get interested in some aspects of making games (be it programming, design, business or whatsoever), and begin the career path of a gameworker. This type of career entry certainly also can be seen in other jobs in new media. Following the notion of mediated identities; however, it becomes evident that in the special case of gameworkers digital games act as resources and mediators of identity. Despite or maybe even because of the strong moulding force of this media, the research findings highlight the diversity of individual identities. Therefore, a homogenous professional identity cannot be assumed in this media industry.

Similar to other modern media jobs, it is found that the interviewees typically relate their work to the hobbies; so, they do not perceive work as work because it is a vocation, or they are so strongly interested in making games that this process is enjoyable despite all the difficulties. For many gameworkers, there is therefore a slight division between work and hobby – some interviewees work on their own game projects in their free time. As gamework intersects with their hobby, gameworkers manage to cope with the difficulties, which follow the work process. If gameworkers are on the same wavelength with the game industry and work in accordance with the standards and values of the profession, they somehow survive the tough conditions. Also, it becomes obvious that the role of specialisation is growing, which is connected to the increasing competitiveness on the labour market and also to increasing complexity of the technologies and products of game industry. Social skills also play a very important part. Above all, this derives from the characteristics of gamework because gameworkers mostly work in teams. Teamwork is also the reason why a gameworker should be familiar with every aspect of the game production process as it implies a lot of collaboration between various members of game development team (programmers, designers, artists, testers, etc.). They also must have a clear understanding of their roles and tasks in the team, as well as of the roles and tasks of their colleagues.

In times of a highly differentiated market and a strong competition between game companies, it is crucial to be aware of what is currently of central significance on the market, e.g., what the target audience wants, what the competitors have released, etc. This demands the concern from gameworkers of all various specializations, not only by those who are responsible for the main idea of a game. Possessing specific personal qualities is also a trait of a contemporary gameworker. Creativity, social skills (as mentioned above), high ability to handle stress, enthusiasm about work, and willingness to learn new things are a must. Besides this possessing a “feeling of the game” – an intuitive understanding of what would fit a game the best – can be referred to as one of the most vital qualities of a gameworker.

## **Outlook and Further Research**

A tentative approach was taken to present the results of the study which aim was to answer the question “What professional identity do gameworkers have?” Despite some limitations of the study it is clear that it opens a number of interesting prospective paths for further research. In addition to a representative survey, it could be investigated how the professional identities of gameworkers working in small, medium, and large studios differ. Another interesting prospective for possible further research is an international comparative study and the difference between national and transnational companies. Especially interesting seems a more profound look on female gameworkers. Even though the number of women employed in the game industry has grown recently, they are still a minority. The work conditions of female gameworkers differ from their male colleagues (Consalvo, 2008). But do their professional attitudes also differ on a representative level? And, finally, one of the next steps of research could be the development of a model of influence on professional identity. Which aspects show the most salient influence on the formation

of the professional identity? Would it be the game market and the demands of the audience, the individual passion for games, or maybe something else?

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