Graduate School of Development Studies

Exploring Ideology in Gaming:
Youth playing "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2"

A Research Paper presented by:

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialization:
**Children and Youth Studies
(CYS)**

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The Hague, The Netherlands
November, 2010

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I must thank my family: my mom, dad, and brother, for the unwavering support, faith, love, and motivation you have always given me. I have learned a lot from you all and could not have made it this far without your guidance.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Hintjens and reader, Professor Okwany, for you advice throughout the process.

To my friends at ISS, thank you for all the moments of inspiration, both inside and outside the classroom. I have learned so much through our exchanges.

To Tania and Dylan, thanks for having a look at my paper and for allowing me to discuss my ideas with you. You are amazing people and neighbors.

To Jonathan, for always challenging me. Thank you for your help and support throughout the process and for inspiring me to explore my topic.

Contents

List of Game Passages

List of Images

List of Acronyms

US: United States of America
CODMW2:   Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
MEC: Military- Entertainment-Complex
CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

Abstract

This is a two-part study. The first part is an analysis of a war-themed video game, Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2, a game combining violent conflict in a contemporary setting of modern technological warfare between the US, Russia, and the Middle East. The second part moves on to analyse ten open-ended interviews, reflecting youth gamers' experiences playing the game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2. The aim of the study is to understand how war video games portray certain hegemonic ideologies and how that may be transmitted to youth. A second aim is to analyze how playing these games may affect youth experiences of game play, and their perceptions of war and the military. Methods used include discourse analysis on the narratives and images within the game, a socio-political analysis on events leading to the 'War on Terror' and an analysis of President Bush's speeches during his first term in office (2000-2004) to provide a background to the political and social reality in which the game is based, as well as open-ended interviews with youth gamers. The key findings are reflected in Chapters 3 and 4, which demonstrate a complexity in the representation of hegemonic ideals and experience among youth gamers. Conclusions reflect upon finding alternative views through the use of video games as well as reflections on the research and forward looking statements. The research was intended to provide some insight into a pervasive medium, namely, video games, its construction in terms of narratives and images and the experiences of youth gamers that play them and how they can be used to promote social justice and alternatives to war.

Relevance to Development Studies

Development should be a continual process between all countries of the world, constantly reinventing itself to find a way to rid of the inequalities that exist. I believe one way in addressing these issues of inequality and imbalance of power is questioning the knowledges we hold to be given. This paper wishes to explore certain knowledges apparent in the US and its transmission through the use of video games in efforts to deconstruct and promote alternative and more balanced knowledges. This paper also aims at providing a critical perspective in the understanding of how knowledges come into existence.

Keywords

United States, war video games, youth, military-entertainment complex, power, knowledge,hegemony, discourse, critical discourse analysis, representation, narrative, 'War on Terror', Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

Chapter 1
Introduction

In the last decades the use of video games has become a very predominant activity among youth across the United States (US). The purpose of the chapter is to present the research objective, central research question, and sub-questions.. This is followed by a justification for the choice of approach and focus, and a brief overview of key concepts used in the study. The final sections of the introduction concern methods and structure of the research.

The objective of this research is to analyse how youth perceive the world around them in relation to war video games and the experience of playing, individually and with other players. This research tries to understand the ideology behind the narratives and graphics of *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2(CODMW2),* a first-person shooter video game. The assumption behind this study – and its central justification - is that games can have serious political implications for youth. In particular, the working hypothesis is that such games can desensitize youth to the implications and rationale of war in the 'real world'.

1.1   Key Objectives and Questions

By focusing on the analysis of the war video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, this research aims to achieve the following key objectives:

(a) Understand how the war video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 is constructed in terms of narratives, themes and images that may perpetuate hegemonic ideologies of the US military and war

(b) Understand how youth perceive the themes of US war, power, military, and terrorism portrayed in a war video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

Based on the analysis and findings of the first two objectives, I will reflect on

(c) Ways in which video games can be understood and experienced to deconstruct ideologies for the formation of alternative ideologies that promote social justice and peace or alternative ways of thinking about development, war, and human suffering.

These objectives are reflected in the key research questions as follows:

1.   How can the video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 and the experience of youth gamers who play it be analyzed and understood in terms of ideologies of power, warfare, and military?

There are also a number of sub-questions:

1. What narratives and images are used in the war game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2?
(This will be covered in Chapter 3)
2. What effect does Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, as an example of the virtualization of war, have on youth's perceptions of war and the world around them?
(This will be covered in Chapter 4)
3. How can we deconstruct these ideas to promote awareness and peace?
(This will briefly be covered in Chapter 5)

1.2   Justification and Background

The interest in this topic began with reflection on post 9/11 overt anti-muslim sentiment in the US. This seemed to happen quite rapidly, and made me more interested in why and how people, especially youth, believe certain things and come to accept certain views of the world. It is also noted that Americans have not been encouraged to examine the place of their country in the international order, much less understand the rights, interests, and place of others (George in Vanaik, 2007: 54). After reading Foucault, I also became very interested in the power dynamics behind what we think of as 'knowledge', 'facts' or reality (Foucault in Mills, 2003: 72). Since video games are such a prevalent part of youth's life in the US, I was curious to look into the knowledges constructed and conveyed through war video games.

One concept has stood out and helped shape my outlook on what it means to be critical and what it takes to understand the course development has taken throughout history. This concept is power. Power relations are the driving force of politics, economics, culture, and social relations. As Foucault mentions, power is the basis of the knowledge we have today (Foucault in Mills, 2003: 70) Central concepts will be considered in Chapter 2, particularly theories of power, knowledge, discourse, and hegemony.

The relevance of this research to development involves an of how technological-transmitted power (through video war games) can shape and influence young people in the US. Sample notes that video games are significant cultural productions that reflect and comment upon social and political issues (Sample, 2008: 1). The growth of the video games industry, particularly, war video games – seems to perpetuate ideologies of the powerful versus powerless, of 'us' versus 'them', and 'self' and 'other'. Therefore, the endeavor of this paper is to understand the social and political issues portrayed through video games and to look at how this particular medium influences youth. Understanding these relationships between power, video games, and youth may help in developing a more critical approach to 'gaming' that youth in the US (and other societies) have increased exposure.. This study proposes

to analyse the way war games can influence youth's views of 'reality', as received through the a combination of elements such as video games and/or the news.

The interviews conducted are not meant to be representative but rather shed light on how youth may view war video games and its representations. Without critical engagement and understanding, these ideas develop into a further ignorance of the world around them. As Chomsky notes, the actions and guiding doctrines of the US (as a superpower) must be a concern for everyone, particularly for Americans, many who enjoy unusual advantages and freedom, hence the ability to shape the future, and should face with care the responsibilities that are the immediate corollary of such privilege (Chomsky, 2007: 4). Therefore, it is my hope that this research paper serves as a reminder to be aware of the privilege we may have within our own circumstances and to be critical of the implications that may come with the privilege.

Furthermore, the lines between reality and virtuality appear to be blurring. In Israel, for example, remote-controlled devices are used for defense purposes. One soldier notes that, 'it's no simple matter to take up a joystick like that of a Sony PlayStation and kill, but ultimately, it is for defense' (Cook, 2010: 2). Therefore video games are mimicking reality and vice versa. What implications could this have for youth growing up on war video games? For this additional reason, I wish to look at the justifications embedded in U.S. war video games specifically, through one example, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, used to promote the U.S military.

I do not wish to imply that video games – and even war games - have no benefits for youth. In fact, this medium can potentially provide interesting opportunities for educational exchange. For example, as Nichols in Huntemann and Payne notes, video games represent an ideal means to challenge ideologies as well as a means of enforcing such ideologies (Nichols in Huntemann and Payne, 2010: 49). Therefore, I hope to use the game as a case study, remain critical throughout, and come to understand how certain forms of knowledge and ideologies are produced, presented and experienced through such a game.

1.3   Methodology and Research Paper Structure

The methodolgy used in this research is two-fold. The first applies discourse analysis to the narratives and images in the game, and the second part is a series of in-depth open-ended interviews, limited in number and intended to give insight rather than representativeness.

The research paper has been structured as follows. Chapter 2 introduces key concepts of power, hegemony, war, military, and youth while briefly introducing the wider socio-political context of the "War on Terror'. The

visual and textual analysis of contents, themes, and graphics in the game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, then follows in Chapter 3 in combination with a socio-political analysis as well as political representation through the use of President Bush's speeches during his first term in officeThis helps the reader to understand how the legitimating ideologies of war prevalent in the US are constructed through the game. I spent two weeks observing the game to get a deeper understanding of the premise of the game and analyze its visual elements

The second part of the methodology consists of open-ended interviews lasting between 30 and 45 minutes, in some cases with follow-ups. The interviews were conducted with boys from the ages 9-18.   These discussions had to be adapted to the attention-spans of the gamers. All either played or had played Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 which helped get a better understanding of why they like to play, their perceptions of the game, whether they have learned something from the game, how they feel when they are playing the game, and what overall perceptions they may have of the world as a result of the game. A total of 10 gamers were interviewed. An analysis of the interviews and derived findings are the focus of Chapter 4.   I wish to stress that the findings of this research are not by any means intended to be generalized or to be representative of youth in the US today. In Chapter 5, the study returns to the overall, more general aim of the research, and proposes a deeper understanding of how engaging in a particular war game, which is itself embedded in prevailing military ideologies, can influence the perceptions and worldviews of youthinvolved in the process. Chapter 5 also explores, critical approaches to current dominant ideologies present in war video games and deconstructing these games as well as reflections and a forward-looking section .
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Chapter 2
Tools for Analyzing War Video Games and Experience of Play

In this chapter, tools will be presented that will help address the central research question in Chapters 3 and 4. First the chapter explores how war video games can be understood, in terms of how they transmit information about war and the military to people under the age of 18. The chapter briefly describes the socio-political context of the history leading to the current "War on Terror' and go in further depth in Chapter 3. This chapter finally considers key concepts, namely power, war, US military, hegemony, and construction of youth, used in the study to understand both the game and how it is experienced. These concepts work together to form the analytical framework outlined at the end of this chapter.

2.1   Understanding Video Games

To explain the growing interest in video games, as Perron and Wolf note, the advancement in technology, means that video games are becoming a strong and popular cultural force (Perron and Wolf, 2009: 4). To understand and study video games, Zimmerman notes that gaming literacy revolves around three main concepts that should be understood in an interlinked fashion: systems, design and play (Zimmerman in Perron and Wolf, 2009: 15). For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the latter two, design and play, with the purpose to understand through design[1] some of what Bogost notes as the cultural, political, and ideological dimensions of video games (Bogost in Perron and Wolf, 2009: 4) and through analyzing play[2] to understand how youth gamers take these representations and create their own experience in this virtual world of gaming.

Video games are an expressive medium, usually with an objective, that allow players to interact with the medium (Bogost, 2007: 1) This interactivity creates the setting for both meaningful expression and persuasion through the re-creation of the 'real' world in the virtual by selective modeling (Bogost, 2007:

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[1] According to Zimmerman, *design* relates to the creative nature in the production of meaning (Perron and Wolf, 2009: 15). In analyzing the design, you can also get a sense of some of the ideological underpinnings that have helped shape the production of meaning and how this meaning is represented.
[2] Zimmerman also notes that *play* expresses how players engage within and with the systemic structures (ibid) but I also wish to look at not only how the players engage with these structures, but also how representations of design may have an influence on what the gamers perceive.

45-46). Chapters 3 and 4 will illustrate the elements present in CODMW2 as an example of a war video game with the lived experience of a small sample of gamers who play.

Video games are part of a big entertainment industry which also includes and competes with movie and music industries (Nielsen et al, 2008: 12). According to the Entertainment Software Association, in 2009, 273.5 million units (including consoles, computer and console software) were sold with revenue of approximately $10.5 billion (ESA, 2009 statistics). We need to have a background on the business side of video games to understand some of the trends in game design and the trends in producing war-theme video games (Nielsen et al, 2008: 3). This can partly be analyzed through the military-entertainment complex.

War video games are a part of the military-entertainment complex which Stahl and other scholars have elaborated on the implications of military and entertainment relations. Stahl notes how war video games have evolved through this relation to change the civic experience of war in the United States in the 21st century (Stahl, 2010: 3). Bogost further explains that this industry has established a medium to protray the US' one-sided perspective on matters of global conflict by justifying that the US is not only right by there is no explanation for the opposition's wicked behavior (Bogost, 2007: 78). Leonard further notes that war video games reflect a powerful medium to explore the ways in which images elicit consent for the US military (Leonard, 2004: 4). Turse also elaborates on the emergence of the military-entertainment complex as an endeavor established to feed the military's desire for high-tech training techniques and the entertainment industry's desire to bring out ever-more-realistic computer and video combat games (Turse, 2003: 1). Therefore, Chapter 3 will look at some elements of CODMW2 that emphasize some of these points as to how this video game was constructed to promote the US military and its wars.

Crawford's classification of video games as containing certain elements which include representation, interaction, conflict, and safety[3] (Crawford in Nielsen et al, 2008: 33). In conjunction with the element of representation of a reality, video games can reveal values about a culture (Nielsen, 2008: 28). As Schwartz mentions, video games are culturally constructed spaces of entertainment and communication created through human imagination by representing ideas and transmitted, experienced, and explored by those who play them (Schwartz,

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[3] Conflict in this classification refers to the obstacles blocking a goal or objective in the game. Safety refers to the virtuality of the game, despite depicting real-life scenarios or themes, video games are not part of an actual world, but rather a way to experience the world (Crawford in Nielsen, 2008: 34).

2006: 313). , The research explores the representation of reality as seen in Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 as a case study of how the industry wishes to portray certain values, in the game's case, of the military and how young gamers are influenced or experience this representation. Gaming has a major importance in the shaping of the culture of any given society (Berger, 2002: 49,Caillois, and Sutton-Smith in Nielsen, 2008: 145). Therefore, video games blur the realms of 'real' and 'virtual' as the latter influences the former. In this sense, this research aims to provide some insight as to how these games influence reality through the transmission of ideas as they become not only vehicles of entertainment for American youth but an additional way of socialization and socializing as exemplified in some of the gamers' responses on why they play video games.

An important element to stress relating the interactive nature of video games and the youth that play them is with regards to player culture. As Nielsen notes, gamer culture testifies to the desires of players to be active creators rather than passive consumers (Nielsen, 2008: 148) further exemplifying the notion of youth as a social construction of an active and revolving nature. Youth thus want to be involved in the greater world around them and look forward to interacting with other players, whether they are friends or not, to create a unique playing experience every time.

2.2   Socio-Political Background: The 'War on Terror'

The United States has become a superpower in large part, through the use of force. The US stands for a system of global democratic reform and neoliberal markets (Der Derian, 2001) whose ultimate goal is maximizing profits. Therefore, any influence outside of this realm is considered unwarranted. The ultimate means to eliminate any interfering influence is through the military. (Chomsky, 2003: 2005: 2007; Keen, 2006; Ahmed, 2003; Falk, 2003; Vanaik, 2007)

An essential part of analyzing the war video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 is understanding the socio-political context in which the game takes place. Although the game itself does not specifically note that the US and British forces are fighting the "War on Terror" it does explain in the guide (illustrated further Chapter 3) that the game portrays 'realistic enemies' and we can thus draw parallels to both historical and present global events to get a deeper understanding of the narratives and monologues involved in the game and how they are used for furthering US military cause in the "War on Terror".

Shortly after the attacks on September 11, 2001, in a speech addressed to the US, President George Bush noted,

> Our 'War on Terror' begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. (Bush, Address to the Nation, September 20, 2001)

Thus marking the US government's call to initiate the "War on Terror'. Bush further remarks that these terrorists hate the American way of life.

> Americans are asking why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber -- a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms -- our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. (Bush, Address to the Nation, September 20, 2001)

For Bush, the US is equated with democracy and freedom, particularly with his emphasis and constant repetition. Bush has created a binary between the good US and the evil terrorists, against US freedom and democracy. Yet, Bush does not explain the cause for disdain towards America's notion of democracy and freedom. These terrorists hate us for the freedom and democracy the people of the US have, but how do the terrorists view the freedom and democracy identified by Bush?

Several scholars have analyzed the socio-political roots of the terrorists' hatred toward the US, explaining that the tensions are not one-sided. Ahmed notes that an analysis on the 'War on Terror' should attempt to discover the political, economic, and historic policies created by the US and the West that may have cultivated the extreme psychological grievances that inspire terror (Ahmed, 2003: 1-2). Not justifying the violent actions committed by those known as terrorists, Ahmed notes that the events of 9/11 on the US were not isolated and hold a historical root to events in the non-Western world (ibid, 2). Chapter 3 will also provide a further illustration of the socio-political context not addressed in the game to understand the gaps and framing present in the game.

2.3 Power, Knowledge and Video Games as Mediated Experience

Video games are a type of simulation. Technological advances have made graphics, ambiance, and characters extremely realistic. In this sense, Jean Baudrillard's take on simulation (Baudrillard, 1988: 61) are applicable and why the ideologies within the simulation of war can be problematic as they are based on a real and that real stems from the notions of power discussed below. Baudrillard notes how symbols and media are used to represent reality (Baudrillard, 1988: 54). Video games are a virtual form of reality and war video games, particular Call of Duty reflect a current reality based on the '"War on Terror' and previous wars.

8

This paper argues that applying Foucault's theory of power and knowledge and its relation to discourse form the starting point in understanding the creation of war video games through its relation with the economic and political structure dominant in the US. As Foucault notes, discourse determines the reality that we perceive (Foucault in Mills 2003: 5). For this reason, Foucault's theory provide the base for analysis of the construction of the game. In its context, the game represents the power-holder as the US, and the discourses the game uses revolve around US efforts to try and maintain its power, most notably through its use of the military.

A second component of the analysis on the game CODMW2, looks at how the discourses within the game construct a certain knowledge about non-US cultures featured within the game, most notably in relation to the Middle-East. Mills notes that a production of knowledge occurs when an imbalance of power relations exists between groups of people or between institutions and states (Mills, 2003: 69). This chapter also looks at the current US socio-cultural context as the country is at present involved in the "War on Terror'. Analysis of this war will help explain the current imbalance in power relations between the US and the Middle East, most notably Iraq and Afghanistan, and how this imbalance serves to promote certain discourses regarding the people and culture of the latter countries. The discourses are also used to promote and justify military action against the countries mentioned. One of the mechanisms used to promote these discourses are war video games. I argue that war video games such as CODMW2 are used as a space to virtualize and produce knowledges of cultures outside the US to justify Western presence as we will see in the analysis of the game content but also through some of the responses by the youth interviewed.

2.4   Knowledge and Normalization Through Cultural Hegemony

Knowledge is also an important concept to analyze as it not only aids in the perpetuation of imbalanced power relations as noted earlier, but also in the normalization of these imbalances. This normalization is known as *hegemony* whereby those dominated by others apply the values and ideas of those in power and accept them as their own, accepting their position within the hierarchy as natural (Mills, 75: 2003). The danger of normalization is that people accept these ideas as true. Analyzing CODMW2 will help understand how power, as Mills notes, works in the production of a knowledge (Mills, 2003: 76) expressed through narratives, content, images, and themes.

This research will focus particularly on cultural hegemony. Specifically, this research looks at cultural hegemony through the normalization of US military and war through mediums such as war video games. Hegemony contributes by way of cultural practices which cultivate behaviors and beliefs, tastes, desires, and needs as a seemingly natural occurring quality or property (Smart, 1986: 160). The use of video games in promoting war is an example of how

technology as a cultural means is used to transmit pro-military and pro-US power ideologies. Despite scholars who argue that technology has moved forward to a post-hegemonic that focuses on facts versus normalization (Lash, 2007: 62), I argue that power constructs the basis of ideas which come to be known as facts, yet with the advancement of technologies and globalization erasing geographical boundaries and access to information, different types of knowledges have the potential to interact. This creates a more complex experience in the transmittal of ideas and room for alternative views. War video games normalize a dominant view, yet it is important to see how these views are experienced by gamers and to what extent gamers deconstruct such experiences. As Sample notes, looking at war video games can also provide a further understanding of the dynamics between power and knowledge in the world outside the game world (Sample, 2008: 2).

2.5   Power, Knowledge and Discourse

To begin, Foucault's notion of discourse as noted in Mills are a regulated set of statements combined with others in predictable ways and regulated by a set of rules leading to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements (Mills, 2003: 54). I justify this definition of discourse for my analysis of war video games because it has several crucial elements in which we can understand how discourse is used to perpetuate ideologies via outlets such as video games. Using the US and war video games as an analogy to this definition, we can note that the set of statements are justification for military action and is regulated by the the economic and political interests of the US. In turn, distribution and circulation of these statements is made by present technologies and disseminate to a larger population at rapid speed. War video games, is of particular interest because of its relevance to youth and can play a role in their socialization process.

Foucault's notion of discourse, transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (Foucault in Mills, 55: 2003). Therefore, a crucial first step is understanding how power is translated into discourse in order to deconstruct and work towards changing the uneven power relations. As Mills notes, this deconstruction serves to trace the way information we accept as 'true' is kept in a privileged position (Mills, 2003: 66) and examining more critically and raising awareness of this privilege.

The discourse underlying war video games is what Spigel terms 'militainment' (Spigel, 2004: 262) or Der Derian notes as the Military- Entertainment Complex (Der Derian, 2001: 2) and will provide the illustration of how discourse is embodied in a form (i.e. media) resulting from sets of statements (i.e. military ideology) to reach global audiences. As Mills further notes, understanding discourse and its relation to power is important in addressing the following:

10

- The way we know what we know
- Where that information comes from
- How it is produced and under what circumstances
- Whose interests it might serve (Mills, 2003: 66)

We will see in Chapters 3 and 4, how war video games can serve as a vehicle of transmitting information. It is thus crucial to see what type of information is transmitted and what discourses are behind the transmission that may influence youth's perception of the world around them.

2.6   Power, Knowledge and Construction of Youth

Power has always been more thoroughly dispersed throughout society (Mills, 2004: 34) and to understand how power works there must be a way to understand the ways in which people negotiate power relations (Mills, 2004: 35). This can be applied when trying to conceptualize youth. Youth are often conceptualized in relation to adults (Ansell, 2005: 12) yet also to a certain extent, considered with a degree of active agency (Tyyska in Helve and Holm, 2005: 8). With the case of war video games, youth are seen to be involved and emerged in an adult realm. Adults create the video game to portrary certain themes discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4, adults create the rating for the video game CODMW2 specifically, in essence taking away the privilege for youth to play such games, and thus continuing to perpetuate a notion of protection towards this group. Yet, youth find ways to play the game, through the consent of adults (usually family) or not, and with the advancement of the internet, can interact with people of all ages. Thus, the distinction between adults and youth blurs or as Sefton-Green notes these technologies offer an 'adultification' (Sefton-Green, 2003: 3) when it involves the participation of youth in the realm of war video games.

Wyn and White note that youth are seen as a social process (Wyn and White, 1997: 15) and should not restrict the understanding of youth to an age-based process as it homogenizes the experience of youth while ignoring the role of social institutions (Wyn and White, 1997: 13). Therefore, this research looks at youth through the experience of virtual gaming particularly with war video games as a social structure to understand how youth create their own perceptions of the world through the influences of such adult-mediated content. The research uses interviews from youth gamers to engage with their direct voices. It is important to understand what perceptions youth have at present, not only because they are seen as Wyn and White note as people who in the future have a role in society (Wyn and White, 1997: 150) but also because their perceptions influence their current behaviors and interactions. It is important to note the present and future element of youth as shapers of society. The present element of youth includes an active sense of agency due to the erosion of adult/youth/child barriers with the limitless access of information via the internet and other technologies. Therefore, this research will look at how youth shape their own experiences of war video games and

11

their thoughts on issues such as terrorism, US military, power, and war. Youth could also play a role in shaping alternative discourses to dismember the current imbalances seen in the world.

2.7   The Analytical Framework

In attempts to answer my first research sub-question:

How does Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 portray hegemonic ideologies dealing with issues of power and military politics?

I chose to embark on a critical discourse analysis(CDA) of the textual and dialogue narrative of the game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2. As Locke notes, CDA aims to:

- explicate a current social order as historically situated, therefore relative, socially constructed, and changeable.
- demonstrate how these social orders and processes are maintained by particular constructions of reality and less by the will of the individual
- view how discourse is influenced and produced by an ideology
- view power within a society as an inevitable effect of the way particular discursive configurations or arrangements privileging the status and positions of some people or groups over others (Locke, 2004: 1-2)

Therefore, it is my goal to use CDA in conjunction with a socio-political analysis of the background to the 'War on Terror' and former US President Bush's speeches as a reflection of the political reality in the US during the campaign promoting the 'War on Terror' during his first term in office (2000-2004) to demonstrate how CODMW2 is tied into a current socio-political reality that stems from the US' need to exert and extend its force as a superpower. It is also my goal to show how the discourses presented within CODMW2 are for the benefit of US military power and may influence the perception of those who play the game. But perhaps most importantly, I chose CDA to further understand that these discourses are socially constructed and can be changed with a proper understanding and can be used for socially transformative purposes (Locke, 2004: 2).

Despite the critiques of CDA as being too theoretical and the assumptions that language items have a single meaning in the use of CDA (Mills, 2004: 132), CDA is used in this research in attempts to provide a critical and alternative way of modeling the US military and rationale for war. CDA will serve to understand how discourses are shaped by relations of power and ideologies and how the construction affects knowledge and beliefs (Mills, 2004: 133). Chapter 3 will discuss how the military constructs a virtualization of reality to realize the discourses embedded within the game.

12

Chapter 3
Analyzing Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

This chapter seeks to understand how the war video game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 has been constructed in terms of its design, including the narratives and images used, addressing the research's first sub-question, 'What narratives and images are used in the war game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2?'. As former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfield notes, the "'War on Terror'is also a "War of Ideas", to spread the values appropriated by and associated with the US (Nye in Nieborg, 2010: 57). Therefore, I analyze this game with this war of ideas in mind to exemplify how power creates a knowledge that in this case the US wishes to create and spread to those who will listen. As Power illustrates, 'games enable the military to rewrite history, the complexities and geopolitical messiness of a conflict are edited out… with none of the external political, moral, historical, ideological, and humanitarian factors involved (Power, 2007: 285).

The chapter will also provide a socio-political analysis of the stories not told in the game. As Perry notes, games can be very selective in their memory wen it comes to portraying historical events which present a warped view of history for those who do not have a deeper understanding (Perry, 2009: 11)Therefore, the analysis will serve to understand the political and economic complexities behind the 'War on Terror' and how the exclusion in CODMW2 reinforces certain representations. Italicised quotations in this chapter come from the game or documents relating to the game.

3.1   Introducing Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

Call of Duty is a series of war video games created by a company called Activision. For the purpose of this research, I will focus on Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 because of the popularity of the game. Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (CODMW2) has reached sales surpassing the $1 billion mark worldwide and an estimated 15 million game units sold.[4] CODMW2 is the sequel to the Call of Duty Modern Warfare series chosen as a focus to explore its relevance and influence on popular culture as well as its attention to contemporary issues.

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[4] 'Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 tops $1 billion in sales' (LA Times, January 14, 2010)
http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/14/business/la-fi-warfare-game14-2010jan14

The overall premise of the game is highlighted in its official strategy guide, which are gamers' equivalent to subject textbooks we have in school.   For the Modern Warfare Series, Call of Duty (first part) was introduced as follows:

Get ready for one of the most exciting game experiences of your life! Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare immerses the player in a contemporary war zone with non-stop action, insane scenarios, and realistic enemies. It's the near future and a group of Russian soldiers is staging a full-scale coup to gain control of the country's nuclear arsenal. Meanwhile, in the Middle East, a leader by the name of Al-Asad has emerged. He is staging a coup to obtain control of his homeland and, with it, an entire army. US, British, and Russian forces must once again answer the Call of Duty when the two groups link up to pose a threat that could result in full-scale nuclear war. In Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare you play as a newly recruited member of the British Spec Ops and a US Forces Sargeant working on different fronts to stop these groups before they can impose their will on the world.

The sequel CODMW2 takes place five years after Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare with the main storyline of the US forces, namely the Army Rangers and Task Force, trying to take down a Russian leader, Makarov who has been trying to bring the world to the brink of collapse as noted by the game's publishing website. Makarov attempts to accomplish this objective through undermining US interests by controlling oil rigs, sabotaging US-Russian relations through terrorist attacks on both Russian and American soil. It is interesting to note that certain themes in CODMW2 are relevant to contemporary issues. Such themes include war, terrorism, power, and control of resources such as the control of oil rigs mentioned above. These themes are all linked to the 'War on Terror'. Chomsky and other analysts have noted for example, that control of resources, namely oil, is strategic and important for global control (Chomsky, 2007: 55) and this seems to be the focal point for much U.S. military intervention.

From the game's storyline, we see a combination of historical and current events. We see key countries, US, Russia, and Afghanistan that have been involved in events since the Cold War leading up to the current 'War on Terror'. A socio-cultural analysis included throughout this analysis notes why Russia, Afghanistan, and the US have all been involved in understanding the current war phenomenon and traces what some consider the roots of the current war.

Another point to note is the use of 'real', the game is introduced as portraying 'realistic' enemies and can therefore be seen as a virtualization of history, present, and future, as the game uses the backdrop of history, themes such as nuclear weaponry and Middle Eastern and Russian control of land and military, to predict an uncertain future. For example the guide notes that the US and British forces are working to 'stop these groups before they impose their will on the world' can be paralleled to Bush's speech shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. where Bush also

14

states that 'Al Qaeda's goal is remaking the world and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere' (Bush, State of the Nation, September 20, 2001) and where we can see that US and British troops have had a strong alliance in this "War on Terror'. For Bush the war is to fight off the terrorist's imposition on the world as in the game, the military is to fight off the enemy's will for the world through its various missions to stop Makarov, his men, and Middle Eastern insurgents. The game's premise can thus be seen to align with the political tactic used to support economic interests.

Ahmed, Shaul, Falk, Chomsky, and Esposito are among several scholars who connect the events of 9/11 and the subsequent "War on Terror' to the economic goals of the US. Ben-Shaul uses the core-peripheral model to explain how the US led cores interests deepen the economic and geopolitical dependence of peripheral states such as the Middle East (Ben-Shaul, 2006: 1). This dependence is due to what Ahmed refers to as the US goals of economic domination vis-à-vis control over natural resources (Ahmed, 2003: 4). The core-peripheral relationship is necessary and dependence by the latter crucial to maintain and expand on these goals. In part, the military is used to maintain the relationship and war video games are created to provide a cultural justification and promotion of US military action.

The strategy guide for Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2 begins its journey of game explanation with a quote from Martin Luther, the German Protestant reformer, *War is the greatest plague that can affect humanity; it destroys religion, it destroys states, it destroys families. Any scourge is preferable to it.'* The placement of this quote before getting into depth with the game is tactical. The quote is taken from a symbolic Western historical figure, perhaps as an attempt to create the perception that the US engages in war as a necessity. Despite its dreadfulness, war is a last resort, yet inevitable. This is how the game's guide begins the journey of promoting war as a just cause. The quote appears as a warning, before opening the doors to the game. If it is true that video games are just games, then why bother to take up space with this quote? The space could be used for advertisement, further illustrations, or could have included a different quote altogether. Yet, the authors of the guide decided to put a quote that stresses the dangers of war despite the depiction of war through a virtual game. It is almost as if they are warning players of the reality and gruesomeness of war. One might even be able to compare this quote to a surgeon general's warning on a pack of cigarettes – smoking kills, and therefore you smoke at your own risk. War is destruction and this game depicts war so you play at your own risk. But again, why is this important to understand, if we are dealing with just a game? For this reason, I wish to continue my exploration of the game and why the game proves to be a powerful vehicle for the transmission of hegemonic ideologies and why these games are not just a game.

Going back to the Martin Luther quote, perhaps the authors are trying to emphasize that they do not condone war. Their placement of that quote before getting into the details and knowledge of the game was perhaps to alert

15

the players to not take for granted war, especially since it is depicted in the game. Perhaps they want players to know that as people, the authors of the game and/or strategy books, franchise, etc. see war as a horrible reality and are trying to separate themselves from the horrors of 'real' war. 'Real' war is bad but this war game is not real, it is 'virtual', yet the experience of 'playing war' is real but for the author's sake and to prevent any association between the game and any influences it may carry, the authors want you to know that war is terrible. Yet, the quote is taken from a symbolic Western historical figure, perhaps as an attempt to create the perception that the US engages in war as a necessity. Despite its dreadfulness, war is a last resort, yet inevitable. This is how the game's guide begins the journey of promoting war as a just cause.

Nonetheless, as I mentioned earlier, if video games are just games, why bother putting a quotation on the 'real' war before entering the 'virtual' realm of war?

3.2 Ideologies and Narratives in Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

I have chosen to analyze a few texts of the game, which show a representational slant in favor of the US military. In the second part of the analysis included in this section, I will include several snapshots of the game to further illustrate the discourses represented in the game.

Game Title: **Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2**

The game title has two main components and each component has its own relation to the US socio-political military context. Looking at the first part of the title – Call of Duty – we must analyze some of the political ideology governing the United States. I will do so in part by reflecting on the current 'War on Terror' and some of the speeches given by the President who initiated the war – the 43rd President, George Bush. First, we must understand that the United States is a military superpower. The game's title makes a reference to the military aspect of US power. Analyzing the speeches of President Bush, especially during his first term in office (2001-2005)[5], we see Bush on several occasions referencing a US citizen's duty to their country through military service.

For example, on June 1, 2002 Bush addresses the graduating class of the US Military Academy at West Point[6]. I select this particular speech as a case in

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[5] The first term in office highlights the 'War on Terror'"War on Terror" more than the second or even Barack Obama's term in office because this term was essential in justifying the 'War on Terror'"War on Terror" and over time popularity for the war dwindled.

[6] West Point is a prestigious university in the US, located in upstate New York state that specializes in developing cadets intellectually, physically, militarily, ethically, spiritually, and socially to prepare them for the military world (West Point website, http://www.usma.edu/about.asp)

point because West Point is considered one of the most prestigious academic institutions in the United States and its strong ties to the military strengthen the importance of the military in US political policy. As Bush summarizes, 'The United States Military Academy (at West Point) is the guardian of values that have shaped the soldiers who have shaped the history of the world' (Bush, Commencement Address, June 1, 2002). Therefore, Bush notes that it is the military that has the power to shape world history, denoting they are the real political players.

In reference to understanding the uses of the word 'duty', we will see its usage three times in Bush's speech, the first to recognize the duty of the US – to build a just peace – yet ironically, this peace is built through the use of military force. The second and third mention of the word 'duty' in relation to the duty of the individuals sitting before him about to embark on their military career is included in the following passage:

> Today, your last day at West Point, you begin a life of service in a career unlike any other. You've answered a calling to hardship and purpose, to risk and honor. At the end of every day you will know that you have faithfully done your **duty**. May you always bring to that **duty** the high standards of this great American institution (Bush, Commencement Address at the USMA at West Point, June 1, 2002)

In a passage precursory to the one included above, Bush refers to 'history issuing a call to (the) generation graduating from this Academy in a time of war' (ibid). Therefore, the call of duty is reference to the individual duty of defending one's country in war. Bush further emphasizes that those who serve in the military are faithful to their duties, implying that those who are not in the military are not fulfilling their duties as citizens. The last duty refers to the obligation of upholding standards within the military to tie in the duty as an individual and as a country. Therefore, the 'Call of Duty' suggested in the game is representative of the player's role as a US military personnel trying to fight off the enemies from taking over and imposing their will on the world (CODMW2 Guidebook, 2009: 3).

The U.S. cannot allow other nations to impose their will for several reasons. As proceeding passages will illustrate, the US has a responsibility to maintain order and give countries a 'good civilization' (Chomsky, 2007: 60). This is achieved in the name of freedom and democracy, the mantra for the 'War on Terror'.

The second component of the title – Modern Warfare 2 emphasizes the difference between the earlier versions of the game, which take place during the World Wars setting versus the contemporary settings linking the game to current events. Modern Warfare also notes a newness in weaponry,

17

highlighting the advancement in technology compared to previous wars. As Bush notes in his speech in 2003,

> With new tactics and precision weapons, we can achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians. No device of man can remove the tragedy from war (Bush, End of Major Combat in Iraq, San Diego, California, June 5, 2003).

Again we can see parallels between the real and virtual world. Modern warfare denotes a shift from old tactics and what Bush refers to as 'military technology designed and deployed to inflict casualties on an ever-growing scale' (ibid) to a new era of military where the number of casualties is reduced. Yet, understanding war from a modern approach might provide a misconception that minimizing casualties means less severe consequences to those affected. More precision can be more deadly if we are not careful in understanding who is being targeted and for what reasons. The game itself does not have civilians in most of its scenes, yet on occasion a few appear in the background. As a rule, you are not allowed to shoot at civilians. Your mission will terminate and you will have to start the game over. However, it is interesting to see the messages that appear after each scene when a civilian is shot. Further analysis will be included below, but it is interesting to understand and keep in mind how the perceptions of war adjust to the ideologies behind the rational for initiating war with certain countries or groups of people.

Analysis of Passage 1:

Elements of the Game: Storymode Mission

Mission Title: S.S.D.D. (Same Sh*t Different Day)

Objective: Demonstrate proper fire control for the local trainees

Location: Satellite map of Russia

Speaker: General Shepherd

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Boundaries shift, new players step in but power always finds a place fo rest its head. We fought and bled alongside the Russians, we should have known they'd hate us for it. History is written by the victor. And here I am thinking we'd won. But to bring down one enemy and they find someone even worse to replace him. Locations change, the rationale, the objective. Yesterday's enemies are today's recruits. Train them to fight alongside you and pray they don't eventually decide to hate you for it too. Same shit different day you know what I'm looking for Sargeant Foley. Keep your eyes open.

Key Points: All text introduce the overall theme of the game.

The passage above is the first monologue that introduces players to the storymode (single player) portion of the game. It seems to be a metaphoric history lesson to bring the player to the present and understand why the mission is occurring and what you must do to stop it. The first sentence appears to be a quote reflecting on the history of war and power. If we look at US history and its rise as a military superpower, we can see that despite the

18

years that pass, the advances made in technology, medicine, and science, there seems to be something that remains static. For the military, it might be a cyclic recurrence of fighting off enemies for similar purposes. For example, in the late 1970s, 1980s, the US biggest enemy was the Soviets and in the 21st century, the biggest enemy to the US according to the government is terrorism, portrayed through the representation of an extremist Muslim. This quote could be representative of the eternal battle for power, and for the US, the eternal battle to maintain that power.

The second line seems to reinforce the first sentence by introducing one element that has been the cause and result of conflict – territory. Boundaries shift meaning one day there will be country X, but after a conflict, that country might be part of another or can become country X and Y (i.e. Former Yugoslavia is now several countries in the eastern part of Europe). Yet despite the shifting of these boundaries, power will find a country where it can stay. Power is personified and this line can be a metaphor for the current US situation as a superpower. The US has used its military force for decades to become the superpower known today and therefore, power has had a chance to stay and thus 'rest' within the hands of the elite in the US. The next line refers to the alliance between the US and the Russians during War World II, as the two countries comprised 2/3 of the Allies power against the Axis. The second part of the phrase refers to the tension post-World Wars between the US and the Soviet Union which gave rise to the Cold War. The storyline continues as the Soviets are brought down and a new threat emerges, one that is unpredictable, hence the 'even worse' part as the terrorists or enemies as referred to in the game, no longer use formal war tactics but can attack at any given time or place, as noted by a scene in the game where terrorists attack civilians at a Russian airport.

A deeper look at the socio-political background of the 'War on Terror' links the US, Russia, and the Middle East. Esposito carefully outlines several US-led policies in the Middle East that have caused tension over the last several decades. Perhaps one of the most fundamental conflicts dividing the West from the Middle East takes root in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Esposito notes that one of the major turning points in contemporary Arab history comes from the Six Day Arab-Israeli War (Esposito, 2002: 6) where a coalition of Arab countries were beat by the newly formed Israel, leading to an increase in Islamic movements, including the beginning of the extremist movements which are characterized today as terrorism.

A careful look at events during the Cold War and leading up to the Gulf War demonstrates growing tensions between the Arab and US world, whereas Falk notes the US has exhibited extreme insensitivity to legitimate grievances with

the probable effect of intensifying frustrations and hostility toward the US (Falk, 2003: xxiii). If we further continue with the notion of US economic domination as a rationale behind the tensioned history and look at what Ahmed terms as basic imperatives[7] in achieving that domination, we can see how the past-historical events could have given rise to the violence we see at present.

This historical analysis parallels the phenomenon depicted as terrorism in the game. With a deeper understanding of the political and economic forces, it is possible to see why terrorism has surfaced, whereas the game only emphasizes the actual acts of terrorism.

The next three sentences are transitional and are a combination of the past, present, and future. The first of three sentences make it clear that each war is different because the enemy is different and therefore each war has its own approach which ties into the first part of the first sentence, where things change, yet nonetheless, the battle for power is what remains the same despite the difference in objectives and rationale. The second sentence looks at both the history and present, where those that fought against you, for instance, the Iraqis during the first Gulf War, will fight with you at the present to win the objective. If we analyze the Iraq invasion, Bush notes that 'citizens are being recruited into a new Iraqi military – a military that will protect the Iraqi people instead of intimidating them' (Bush, Press Conference, Washington, DC, July 30, 2003). You can see parallels between the US military training the new Iraqi military and the game version where the first mission takes place, where the colonels and sergeants are teaching the locals in Afghanistan how to fire weapons. This brings us to the last sentence of the three which indicates a fearful future, you train the people and you hope they do not turn against you. We can see not only fear but also a clear example of good guy (US) versus bad guy (whichever is the enemy at the given time) for turning against you after helping to train and develop the military. It is also fear which is a common weapon used in creating these binaries and perpetuating the hegemonic ideologies of US military power.

A continued look at the historical socio-political backdrop to the 'War on Terror' is also analogous to this notion of enemies and supporters. It is interesting and important to note that the US at one point supported and

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[7] Ahmed notes that the US has used its military as a way of achieving the following:
-making the world safe for American corporations
-enhancing the financial statements of defense contractors at home who have contributed generously to Congress members
-preventing the rise of any society that might serve as a successful example of an alternative to the capitalist model
-extending political and economic hegemony over as wise an area as possible, as befits the US

provided resources for Osama bin Laden and his groups. Here we see an example of how the US uses its politics for its own pursuit. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet Union was perceived as US threat and enemy and therefore the US did what it could to end the threat. The US saw bin Laden as the means of ridding the Soviets from the Middle East, whereas bin Laden wanted to maintain an Arab-only presence in the Middle East explained below

Furthermore, the Gulf War was the turning point for bin Laden as Esposito notes[8], against the US which began the journey leading to the present 'War on Terror' against bin Laden and Al Qaeda. It is important to note several of these events to understand why there are tensions and animosities among different political, cultural, and social groups in the West and Middle East and to realize that the events leading up to the 'War on Terror' have a precedence that can be analyzed in political and economic terms. This understanding of US policy also helps in getting a deeper understanding and analysis of why narratives in war video games, for example, are constructed in a specific way to perpetuate US hegemony, once again illustrating the workings of the power-knowledge model.

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[8]This can be seen in Esposito's reference to bin Laden's Declaration of Jihad whose main intent was to drive out US forces from the Arabian peninsula and liberate Islam's holy sites of Mecca and Medina, among a few other clauses.

Analysis of Passage 2

Elements of the Game: Storymode Mission

Mission Title: S.S.D.D. (Same Sh*t Different Day)

Objective: Demonstrate proper fire control for the local trainees

Location: Fire Base Phoenix, Afghanistan

Mission script animation

Speaker: Sergeant Foley

Intro on Targets: (to private Allen – the player)

Welcome to Pull The Trigger 101

Private Allen here is going to do a quick weapons demonstration to show you locals how it's done. No offense but I've seen a lot of you guys fire from the hips and it's all over the range. You don't end up hitting the damn thing and it makes you look like an ass. Private Allen show them what I am talking about.

You spray bullets all over the place.

You have to pick your targets by aiming deliberately down your sight from a stable stance.

Private Allen show our friends here how a ranger takes down a target. (foreign language in the background)

Aim down your sights, if your target is nearby. You want to take down your target quickly and with control.

If your target is behind light cover, certain weapons can penetrate.

You need to know how to toss a frag grenade.

Several targets at once

Key Points in Text: a)Show you locals how it's done (patronizing, implies power-relations, skilled versus unskilled)

b)No offense (trying to be politically correct by saying something that not be nice but adding this before the statement is supposed to make it more socially acceptable)

c)Makes you (referring to locals, once again reminding of the power/skill imbalance) look like an ass

d)Use of word target – in practice shooting at targets that differentiate between civilians and the 'bad guys'

e)Show how a ranger takes down a target (uses specialization to emphasize that the ranger has superior skill and can show the local how things are done according to the rangers)

This second passage is an example of the usage of power through authority. The speaker is a sargeant attempting to teach some of the local people in Afghanistan how to shoot a weapon. We can see this illustration of power in several instances. The first is how the sargeant refers to the meeting. He uses the title 'Pull The Trigger 101' which in US academic settings refers to the most rudimentary or introductory courses in a particular subject. The sergeant therefore assumes that all the people before him know nothing with regards to weaponry. The sergeant also refers to the meeting as a class versus practice once again showing his sense of superiority instead of camaraderie. His use of the words quick and demonstration versus using the word lesson indicates that it is an informal gathering yet the speaker is patronizing. This is further exemplified with his phrase *'to show you locals how it's done'* signifying the local people's lack of knowledge, yet we do not know the history of the local men, whether or not they have been involved in previous battle, and it is assumed

they are at the demonstration with a blank military slate. The sergeant also points out the mistakes made by the locals but instead of providing constructive criticism, he says the way they fire the weapons make them look like fools ('*asses*'). As Casteel notes, this passage indicates Middle Eastern inadequacy and dependency on the US (Casteel, 2010: 3).

The sergeant is passive with his insult by initiating the phrase with no offense as if that were to lessen the way he speaks to them. This phrasing and class has a clear power imbalance between the US military and the locals they are training. The sergeant in command does not display a level of professionalism and uses an informal tone that does not inspire confidence, but seems rather condescending. To further illustrate this point, the sergeant continues by asking a fellow US military man, a private, to demonstrate the incorrect positioning of the gun and again emphasizes that their shooting is messy and not done to US military standards. Instead of using more constructive commentary, the sergeant emphasizes that the bullets go everywhere and make a mess. The shooting is wasteful and not efficient. The US military has the correct way of shooting and the locals must follow.

A second dimension of the monologue is the use of the word target. In this particular scene, the US military and local divisions are practicing their precision against bullseye targets. However, it is also standard for the military to replace the word 'human', 'civilian' or any other word that denotes a person with the word 'target' or another inanimate object. This seems to be a war tactic that dehumanizes the person to make it easier to shoot at them (Huntemann and Payne, 2010: 13). Therefore, the sergeant is using military lingo and preparing the people to continue this tradition of dehumanization by labeling the enemy as target. Intentional or not, it is hard to say, but there is a certain sense of arrogance in the tone of the US military. Unequal power relations are evidenced by the arrogance of the US military through the sergeant's tone, he is probably thinking that the US military as an organized institution is above the locals who are only now forming a collective to learn how to shoot. There is foreign (non-English) dialogue in the background making it clear that not everyone is American.

Analysis of Passage 3

Elements of the Game: Storymode Mission

Mission Title: Team Player

Objective: Search and destroy enemy forces in Afghanistan

Location: Afghanistan

Scene: Satellite map zooms into Afghanistan and transitions to army vehicles, enters into Afghanistan terrain

Speaker: General Shepherd

We are the most powerful military force in the history of man. Every fight is our fight because what happens over here matters over there. We don't get to sit one out. Knowing to use the tools of modern warfare is the difference between the prospering of your people and utter destruction. We can't give you freedom but we can give you the know-how to acquire it. And that my friends is worth more than a whole army base of steel. Sure it matters who's got the biggest stick, but it matters a hell of a lot more who's swinging it. This is a time for heroes, a time for legends. History is written by the victors. Let's get to work.

Key Points in Text: Perhaps one of the most hegemonic quotes in the game. From the onset, denotes the power through military and this sets the rest of the theme throughout the passage. Military is used to fight and train others to pursue freedom.

This section is the perfect illustration of dissemination of ideologies in the name of development. We clearly see who are the actors involved. The first actor is the US, the most powerful military, while the second involves whatever country they are involved in within a given time period. During the current time period, the US is writing the history about the Middle East. Bush on several occasions during his presidency comments on how America must help the Islamic world create a democratic and free society. For example, in one speech he notes,

'America needs citizens…to join a new effort to encourage development and education and opportunity to the Islamic world' and further notes the ideals that America stands for and what he believes should also be transmitted to the societies helped by the US, including 'human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of te state, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice, and religious tolerance (Bush, State of the Union Address, Washington DC, January 29, 2002).

For this reason, the US is paving the way and showing other countries how to fight in preparation for the ideals America presents to them. Most notably, we can see that the US encourages countries to pursue the economic models based off free markets and limited government access (Vanaik, 2007: 5). The most important thing according to this passage is not for the US to give a country freedom, but to teach them how to be free. Therefore, knowledge is the key and once again, the powerful US will use the knowledge they deem fit to carry across to different countries that are in need of help or new knowledge. We can see this reference to the power with the mention of stick and acknowledgement of someone/thing holding the stick. The holder has control

and thus power of the situation or power of the ideology that will enter a country or people that is trying to establish themselves after war.

In two of the four monologues presented (1 and 3) we see the quote 'history is written by the victors'. The repetition of this quote in two missions indicates an importance in stressing this theme throughout the game. The quote was taken from Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister during the Second World War. The quote emphasizes how history is a subjective process determined by the powerful. The powerful or in military terms, the victorious side, determines how events will be remembered and how the information about these events will be disseminated. Here we have a classic example of how power is used in the creation of knowledge and how power determines which knowledge will spread into future generations. In recognizing the US as a power, we can see that games such as these wish to depict a certain history about war, its purpose, and its goals. The game mimics the reality that occurs in US politics, especially as seen through Bush's justification for the 'War on Terror' as a war to fight for democracy and freedom. This is the information given to the masses, while a deeper understanding of political, economic, and social relations between the US and the Middle East would paint a different picture as to potential motives for US use of military force in Iraq and Afghanistan.. The timeline below highlights some events that have led to the current 'War on Terror'.

Timeline of Middle East Events Leading to the 'War on Terror'
(Esposito, 2002: 10-12, 14-16, 20-24)
1979 – Soviets invade and occupy Afghanistan
1984- Osama bin Laden* uses his resources to create a guesthouse in Peshawar for Arabs preparing to go to Afghanistan against the Soviets
1986- bin Laden establishes his own camps and commands Arab militant forces supoorted both by the US and Saudi governments
1990- Gulf War, US troops station in Saudi Arabia
1992- Establishment of Afghanistan as an Islamic state
*bin Laden is seen as a unique case in his version of social movements against the West. He comes from a well-resourced, well-connected family, and thus uses his resources to finance and push for his goals.

Analyzing Passage 4

During the very last mission of the game, General Shepherd who has betrayed his forces is trying to eliminate those aware of his plan to control the US forces and ultimately control the world (make sure this aligns with CODMW2 description). In one of the last scenes, the following passage is perhaps the most powerful as it summarizes how General Shepherd has epitomized hegemony.

Elements of the game: Storymode Mission

Mission Title: Endgame

Location: Afghanistan

Objective: Kill General Shepherd

Commences with satellite images – most wanted images of Captain Price and Soap (General Shepherd has betrayed the US but has used Price and Soap as scapegoats and listed them as traitors).

Speaker: General Shepherd

Cause all you need to change the world is one good lie and a river of blood.

Key Points in Text: All you need to change the world is one good lie and a river of blood. (Change, transformation can only be achieved through lies – manipulation – social, cultural – through media and entertainment - , poltical, economical. The blood is a reference to violence, war, and physical conflict. War is inevitable.

According to the character who has portrayed hegemonic ideals and themes throughout the game, what changes the world is lies and blood. Because of his engagement with the military and the military's relation to politics, Shepherd believes that lies in the form of political manipulation and blood through war are the only means to change the world. If we analyze the two term's Bush held in office as US president between 2000-2008, we can see that transparency was not always a priority and that several political, social, and cultural tactics of manipulation and 'othering' were used to defend the 'War on Terror'(Falk, 2003, Vanaik, 2007, Ahmed, 2003, Esposito 2002, Keen, 2006). Shepherd also believed that bloodshed through war was the means for change. Yet we have to wonder, what type of change was Shepherd envisioning? What has the present 'War on Terror' done for the countries involved? The betrayal of General Shepherd and the events proceeding perhaps serve as a venue of hope, that hegemony does not have to win and that we can still try to change the world through other means. Perhaps Shepherd's death is symbolic in the sense that hegemony did not win this time, but what then is the outcome? Perhaps this unclear ending is also representative of reality since as of this writing, the US is still in the Middle East and little has changed.

Furthering the analysis on the 'War on Terror' and its retreat from evidence-based thinking, as Keen notes, what makes this phenomenon unique and dangerous, even, is that we are threatened to live in a world where war can be granted based on a hunch (Keen, 2006:117). This type of tactic demonstrates how power can be used in destructive means. This tactic also refers to Shepherd's mention of a good lie. In fact, Keen notes a similar anecdote to the Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 storyline, specifically the betrayal scene. Keen explains how Rumsfield was originally a special envoy to Iraq in 1975-77 and played on the fears of burgeoning Soviet power to increase the power of the military at the expense of the CIA (Keen, 2006: 116). Similarly, Shepherd used his power to control and sabotage the CIA by creating a conflict between the Russians and Americans. Therefore, the game plays out these missions on a reality based on intricate and complicated political relationships and ploy. The

game is virtualizing reality and using Russia, the Middle East, and the US to mimic what has happened and what is happening in the current world.

Analyzing Passage 5

Element of the Game: Comparing Message that Appears on Screen When an Unarmed Person is Shot at by Player Forces

Favela in Brazil - You shot a civilian. Watch your fire!

Oil Rig in Russia - Mission failed. You killed a hostage.

'The Red Zone' in Afghanistan - You are unauthorized to fire on unarmed targets.

Key Points in Text: Notice the first two words denote people: civilian, hostage, whereas the last message denotes an inanimate object despite still referring to people. Civilian, hostage versus target.

This passage was important to include in the analysis because it demonstrates a change in the language used to refer to non-military actors. Each place is a different part of the world and it is interesting to see that in Brazil and Russia both scenarios identify non-military actors through words actually describing humans. In Brazil, they non-military actors are labeled as civilians, while in Russia, the actors are known as hostages. Yet when we come across a region in the Middle East, particularly in a place where the US currently has troops occupying the lands, it is coincidental to note that no humanly noun is used to describe the non-military actors who may get shot within the scene. Instead, the word used is that of an inanimate object, taking away any qualities or characteristics that could associate the actor with a human. This could be seen as an example of desensitization and could very well be a subtle technique used to detach the tragedy of war in the virtual realm.

3.3   Images in the Game

Image A – American Soldier looking at his smartphone

Image B – American Soldiers playing basketball during downtime

ENEMY FORCES

Image C – Middle Eastern Insurgents Standing Watch

Appearance of Players (US ARMY as friendly, every-day people, performing routine activities, versus enemy stout, demonized)

Leudar et al. discusses how categorizations 'us' and 'them' are created through the framing of a particular conflict (Leudar et al, 2004: 262) and continues to demonstrate how in the 'War on Terror' you have the framing of these binaries created by Bush and seen through a fight between civilization and barbarism as well as a framing created by bin Laden which uses religion as its basis (ibid). If we have a look at the above images, we can understand the depiction of the US military versus the enemy through the lens Bush has establish as 'us' being the epitome of civilization and 'them' being evil and those who want to destroy it (civilization). Of particular interest is the fact that in CODMW2, the scenes in the Middle East are secondary to the storyline, yet in observing the representation of the people from the different 'enemy' locales (Russia and Middle East), the Middle Eastern insurgents have a very distinct look as noted above in the image. Their stance is menacing and their wardrobe stereotypical of what is considered a terrorist in US context.. Leudar would note this specificity as a construction of creating the enemy which clearly distinguishes and creates that division between 'us' and 'them' (Leudar et al, 2004: 245) Whereas the Russian enemy (not to be confused with certain scenes where the US army does fight against the Russian army) looks similar to the army in the sense that they are wearing army fatigue uniforms with red camouflage that symbolize who they are fighting for or in the terrorist scene look like the

average Western person with shirt and slacks, except they are wearing bullet-proof vests.

These images are important to understand because these representations are related to actions and justify action that has occurred in the past and future action (i.e. conflict in the Middle East) (Leudar et al, 2004: 263). If we take the 'War on Terror'"War on Terror" and frame these pictures from Bush's perspective, the demonization of the enemy justifies why the US and its allies are fighting against them. These representations do not attempt to analyze the deeper socio-political issues that may have caused the current conflict, but rather create an acceptance that the US is fighting for a cause.

Following Kress and Van Leeuwen's analysis of visual representation, looking at each image in terms of representation, taking the images of the enemy in the Middle Eastern context, the men are at a distance. The image shows that these people are clearly non-intimates, their hands across their chest indicate that they want to be at a distance. As Kress and Van Leeuwen note, this distance is to ensure that they can look and keep an eye on you (the US forces) (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 370). This distance adds to the demonization and makes it easier to label them as the enemy. During this mission we see few civilians we can serve a double purpose. First the lack of civilians in the area could reinforce the notions of modern warfare as targeting only the enemy as explained elsewhere in the chapter. But perhaps the lack of civilians in the mission could also serve to homogenize the Middle Eastern group. They are strictly the bad guys and anyone who looks like them are also bad. Again, what is of particular interest is that in other missions (i.e. Russia, even Brazil) the enemies look like an ordinary Westerner which can hide among the crowd. It is interesting to see that these other missions do not make such a distinction between 'us' and 'them' even when the enemy is wearing army gear. This Middle Eastern image can thus be seen in what Zarkov notes as turning the image into a symbol, a representative example towards perpetuating US hegemony (Zarkov, 2010: 22).

With respect to the images of the US army, we have two examples of how the men do normal everyday activities despite participating in war missions. This depiction of normalcy has the opposite effect of demonization and adds an element of humanization. The US army are the 'good' guys and as referred throughout the chapter we see examples of civilization, democracy, and freedom through their humanness and ability to participate in various activities. The first image depicts an army man looking at his phone (which is also a discrete way of advertising for a particular product by including the product in an entertainment medium). This man could be doing a number of things with his phone- he could be trying to contact those he left behind or looking through pictures of those he left behind. Nonetheless, he is performing an activity that we can all relate to. Similarly, in the second image we see two men playing basketball. We see an attempt at normalcy despite the circumstances which could also appeal to our empathy for these men fighting for a cause. I
30

wish to emphasize the humane aspect of these images because they help to create a connection throughout the game with the US characters you are in control of playing. Keeping this empathy or connection to the characters in mind, there are several missions in which you are shot at by either the opposing force (Russian enemy in the terrorist scene) or by your own commander (when Shepherd betrays his Task Force). Even I at first going through the storymode felt saddened at such turn of events. Several of the gamers interviewed also expressed shock and disbelief when they were attacked. Kleinman and Kleinman write about depictions of suffering note that sentiment is used to mobilize support while also with repeated view enabling a desensitization effect (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1997: 4 & 9). Several of the gamers noted that the video game CODMW2 in fact helped them see the horrors of war and sympathize with the men that go to defend the US.

3.4   Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided an overview of the narratives and messages embedded in CODMW2 which perpetuate hegemonic ideologies of US power, war, and the military. Using CDA and a socio-political analysis, the chapter attempts to show what kind of history is narrated through the game and what is missing. CODMW2 presents one view of US themes. The next chapter will illustrate the experience of youth gamers and how their perceptions may be influenced by such representations.

Chapter 4
Analyzing Gamers' Perspectives on Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

This chapter will explore the relevance of context, in this case as a combination of a social-political reality experienced in the US and the virtual construction of this reality through war video games, for young gamers. This chapter aims to address the second sub-question of this research, 'What effect does Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, as an example of the virtualization of war, have on youth's perceptions of war and the world around them?' As King and Krzywinska explain:

> Gameplay does not exist in a vacuum, any more than games do as a whole. It is situated instead, within a matrix of potential meaning-creating frameworks. These can operate both at a local level, in the specific associations generated by a particular episode of gameplay and in the context of broader social, cultural, and ideological resonances (King and Krzywinska in Nielsen, 2008: 167)

In understanding how gameplay is experienced and how it is influenced by context, I interviewed[9] a total of 10 gamers, most of them from the United States (US) or had at least an identification with the US[10]. Ansell notes that young people exercise some control over their own situations (Ansell, 2005: 6) and this section will also reflect on how youth gamers create their own constructions from the experiences of gameplay. Interviewing is the method of data collection for this part of the analysis because as noted 'interviewing as a process of knowledge collection or as a process of knowledge construction' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 48). Therefore, the interviews will help illustrate how youth gamers construct their reality and views on war and the military through games such as CODMW2. Additionally, this research aims to understand how this construction influences how youth are perceived through the influences of video games. In this chapter, the words of gamers themselves are italicized.

4.1 Socializing and Socialization Forces
This section will illustrate two aspects of video games' influences on youth gamers. The first focus will be on video games as a socialization medium. As

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[9] The interview questions are included in Appendix A
[10] One gamer was born in the US, but has spent the last 8 years living in the Netherlands. However, the gamer very much identifies with the US.

Parson and Bales note, the central focus of the process of socialization lies in the internalization of the culture of the society into which the child is born (Parson and Bales in Jones, 2009: 13). As discussed in Chapter 3, several themes arose from CODMW2, namely, themes of war, military, and US hegemony. Also, as seen in Chapter 2 and 3, these games parallel US contemporary reality and are part of an embedded cultural phenomenon explained as the military-entertainment complex. Therefore, this chapter will look at how youth gamers perceive these concepts and will be elaborated in sections below. It is important to note, that all the youth gamers interviewed did respond to having an increased awareness of either differing aspects of the military or current US war involvement. Therefore, CODMW2 is a vehicle in which aspects of war and military culture are internalized. However, the experiences and elements of what is actually internalized differs among youth gamers as will be shown below.

A second focus involves the role of video games as a socializing medium. Buckingham states that 'technology is seen to creat new styles of communication and interaction' (Buckingham, 2006: 7) and video games are no exception. All gamers responded to playing video games including and especially CODMW2 for some, because it allowed them the opportunity to play with their friends either online or at home. Some gamers noted:

I like playing CODMW2 because I get to talk to my friends while I play a video game, you get to use a strategy, and you talk about it with your friends.

I like it [CODMW2] when I have a lot of people that I am playing with, it's fun…a big reason why I play is..well my friends like it and because my older brother and his friends play.

I like CODMW2 because it's a great online game, one that you can play with your friends, you can connect with your friends while playing and it's an intense experience.

Therefore, not only do gamers use video games and their online capabilities as a means of socializing with their peers, but they also enjoy playing the game because they can interact with their peers. Video games have become a social component for these gamers. As Prout and James note, 'social life is seen as being constantly created through the activities of its social actors' (Prout and James, 1997: 15). CODMW2 and video games in general can thus be seen as a medium that has emerged into another form of socializing and a big part of gamers' social life.

The next few sections will explore the socialization process of CODMW2 and how themes of war, military, and US hegemonic ideals are perceived by the gamers that play. The next sections will also demonstrate that youth are active in constructing their perceptions of the world with regards to the

33

aforementioned aspects (i.e. war, military, US hegemony) covered in CODMW2.

4.2 War Video Games and Influence on Gamers' Perception of the US Military and War

One of CODMW2 main themes involves the military. Chapter 3 discusses how the video game portrays the US military as the 'do-gooders' and 'freedom and democracy fighters'. Chapter 2 discusses how the US military is used as a vehicle for promoting a US agenda based on acquiring more power and economic dominance. The chapter also discusses how technologies such as video games are used to promote a positive image of the military to pursue these interests, without much reflection as to the underlying causes of war and conflict, especially for instance, as seen with the "War on Terror'. As Huntemann and Payne note, video games have paved the way for civilians to play the military, using the same technologies, tactics, and discourse employed by the Armed Forces in simulated yet real contexts were the player is participant and part of an immersive experience (Huntemann and Payne, 2010: 3). Therefore, this section of the analysis will reflect on gamers perception of the US military and whether CODMW2 had any influence in constructing such a perception. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, these video games are a form of socialization and the interviews shed some light as to how this process plays out. More specifically, the socialization process involves how gamers may perceive the US military and war as a result of war video games such as CODMW2.

Five youth gamers responded to having an altered perception of the military as a result of playing CODMW2 especially (as well as the CODMW2 series, in general) because it has a modern warfare premise and was thus something they could relate to especially with the current US operations in the Middle East. All five gamers responded with a deeper understanding of the plight of war and a concern for the soldiers in combat. Some of the gamers thoughts are presented below:

It [CODMW2] has changed my view of the military…I know what they [soldiers] go through on a daily basis as well as the danger they put themselves in…I think the military is more in-depth, tough, and hardcore.

Yeah, one thing [from CODMW2] that has positively influenced me about the military is that I feel a lot more for the soldiers…because playing as a soldier it's just a guy like me and you, who has feelings and opinions…they are told to kill other humans…they are not monsters or machines…they [soldiers] can't come back to an ordinary life…but at the same time you kind of get an insight with how rough and unnecessary the army can be.

When you are shooting at people [while playing CODMW2]…it reminds you that people sacrificing their lives for other people…it makes me appreciate the military a little bit more.

Another gamer has a family history of involvement in the military. For this gamer, the stories passed on from grandparents, parents, and relatives, are enough to get a broader picture of the horrors of war. However, the gamer notes that some of the friends that also play CODMW2 say that the game has sparked in interest in exploring other countries and fail to see the more brutal side of war. This gamer notes that the game has given him a first-hand perspective on the strategies involved but because of the family history, the gamer has conversations with fellow friends to discuss that war is of graver consequence than can be portrayed in the game. Two gamers who were also among the youngest of the group did not go into much detail as to whether or not the game influenced their view on the military. Perhaps it is because they were too young to understand the concepts of the game and played merely for an entertainment purpose. The seven gamers who were older, however, did reflect on war and its association with the video game. This reflection was based on not only the game itself but occurred in combination with awareness of current events or a personal affiliation to the military.

Also interesting to note, despite playing war video games, not all participants were in favor of war. Despite sympathizing with soldiers, several gamers mentioned that they felt war was unnecessary. Therefore, it can be seen that war video games can also play a role in creating a deeper understanding for the harsh reality of war and gamers may instead make the choice to not associate with war. Some gamers, however, despite not necessarily being in favor of war, agreed that war can be necessary, especially if it is to defend US freedom which resonates with the dominant ideological justifications to war addressed in Chapter 3. These quotes can be noted below:

I'm totally up for [war]…whatever we have to do to keep our freedom.

War is always going to happen…I don't think people with guns are going to listen to someone without a gun…I do realize it is [war] about defending the country and I'm up for that.

I understand why war is happening. I don't like it, but I understand what is happening to us. The game tells the story that is happening to us.

Therefore, the game to some extent demonstrates that war is about defending and defeating something that goes against the US way of life. Chapter 2 and 3 has discussed how war is justified in the socio-cultural and video game context. While not all gamers expressed a justification, it nonetheless shows that the game has potential to transmit certain views of the US military and war. However, gamers also construct their own opinion and perception which indicates as Wyn and White and Jonesnote that youth are not passive recipients of information (Wyn and White, 1997: 15 and Jones, 2007: 6), but rather have a sense of agency in their own construction of the world.

4.3 Gamers' Sense of Reality: Technical Aspects of the Game

Almost all gamers agreed that the graphics were among the most realistic of the games they play. The depiction of the people and places in the game were realistic. And most gamers even stated that one of their favorite aspects of playing the game was its realism. Only one gamer wished the game had more realistic elements, noting:

How some people get shot and they don't die…if you get shot at you should die. You should not be able to sprint away and get over (to another spot) and recover your health. But that's about it.

The gamer who was unhappy with the realism notes that you do not automatically die once you are shot at despite the reality of carnage. Although even in reality, you may not always necessarily die if you are shot at, the gamer feels that in the game, if you are shot at, you should die. It is interesting to hear this gamer's perspective on death. The game deals with death yet takes away the emotional consequences of death. The players just focus on the winning and losing aspect of the game. Death to them is nonexistent, it is just the equivalent of gaining or losing points. This gamer was one of the older ones of the group (18 year old) but even the younger (9 year old) gamers agreed that when they die they get upset not at the death itself but that they lost points or status within the game. Almost all the gamers unanimously responded that their anger was over losing. Therefore, during the gameplay itself, death is not associated with war but with playing a game. However, death becomes associated with war once there is a reflection of the game's themes. The association thus occurs at times other than gameplay but nonetheless affect gamers' perception of war. The video games themselves are

36

known to be 'just a game' by all the gamers, however, the game also plays a role in shaping perceptions and to some extent, serve as an educational component. Video games are thus a combination of entertainment and serve as a cultural, social, political and economic component of the gamers who play them.

Casteel notes that the true genius of the Call of Duty franchise lies in its emphasis on the intertwinement of war's political aspects with its inherently personal 'feel' (Casteel, 2010: 2). In accordance with this, several of the gamers note that the first person shooter perspective in combination with the storyline enabled them to feel completely immersed in the game as if they were actually performing all the activities (mostly shooting) required in the game. The storyline becomes complex as scenes of betrayal are also inserted. Some of the gamers noted two specific scenes to be the most memorable. The first is part of a mission titled 'No Russian'[11] where you are an undercover CIA agent trying to capture a Russian terrorist group. The scene takes place in a Russian airport and the objective involves a terrorist attack where you shoot at civilians. Some of the gamers responded to feeling 'bad' or 'sick' or in 'shock' at the scene. Three gamers indicated that they had to turn the game off for a while after playing that mission. One gamer could not complete the mission and thus resumed it at a later time after the *initial shock factor wore off*. The gamers who react to the scene noted that the presence and tactless shooting of civilians was the main reason they found that scene hard to deal with and all gamers agreed that the scene was a clear example of terrorism. This is one of the few missions in the game that actually involves civilians. This was discussed in Chapter 3, but it is also important to re-iterate that clear definitions of terrorism and war are illustrated in the game, as with war, few if any civilians appear where the US military fights, yet in the terrorist missions, there is an abundance of civilians to reinforce the difference and the narrative of 'just war' versus 'terrorist war'. Not only is this differentiation made, but again the lack of civilians seems to emphasize the sophistication of technology and the argument of 'precision' in modern warfare.

The second mission that some of the gamers mention is called 'Loose Ends'. In this particular mission, the game player and comrade are trying to find intelligence against the Russian terrorist group, yet at the end, both are betrayed by their commanding general. Both are shot and throw into a pit where their bodies are covered in gasoline and burned. Some of the gamers responded to feeling attached to the characters throughout the missions so when this mission surfaces and the ending comes, it is first, unexpected, and second makes the gamers angry, sad, and frustrated at the betrayal. As Jenkins

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[11] You are not required to take part in this mission as it was controversial but all the gamers interviewed did participate in the game and thus explained their experience playing this scene.

notes, 'young people embrace emotional meaning of stories and images' (Jenkins in Buckingham and Willett, 2006: 25).

These two illustrations show that CODMW2 not only illustrates realism through its graphics and accurate portrayals of locations, artillery, and contemporary issues, but creates an immersive environment where different emotions occur. These emotions may also reflect a certain understanding of concepts such as war, terrorism, and politics. A further look at terrorism will be illustrated in a later section included in this chapter.

4.4 A History, Geography, and Cultural Lesson? Educational Aspects of the Game

Huntemann and Payne discusses how video games have the potential to instill gamers with a better sense of history as well as an appreciation of the high costs of warfare (Huntemann and Payne, 2010: 86). Most of the gamers admitted to either learning about the existence of the countries presented in the game (Brazil, Russia, Afghanistan) or becoming more interested in learning more about these countries as they played the game. Two gamers cited learning about places, especially the Middle East, through the game and the game helped them understand why the US was at war in those regions. For these gamers, the 'War on Terror' is justified, as they understood the conditions of the countries the US is occupying. One gamer noted that that game:

is telling a story that is happening to us…I didn't think [the places in the game]… *were that negative as in the game and I understood why* [war]… *happens.*

and another gamer comments:

The maps on the game are pretty specific, they show you how people live, like the conditions of the area before and after the war…usually the areas are poor areas.

Furthermore, the gamers also admitted to learning about country locations, different cultural aspects, and becoming more interested in some of the topics presented by the game. One gamer noted that before each mission, the game zooms into different parts of the world on a map and explains that there could be no better way to learn about geography than through a game. Another gamer noted that what made playing more fun was hearing different accents from non-US people. The gamer noted a curiosity for British and Russian accents. One gamer also noted being able to keep up with certain conversations about modern war, but also made references to the world wars which were portrayed in earlier versions of CODMW2.

38

You can go to somebody who takes the same history lesson, you don't know it as in depth but you can follow them…you get a vivid image in your head…Everybody who plays the game gets to see a little bit about the world and it does teach you history and geography…you get a better perception than you average person of different areas of the world.

Again, my purpose is not to generalize, but rather to provide a closer look at how some gamers may perceive the narratives and storyline within the game. All these gamers indicated that the game showed them something they might not have known otherwise. Therefore it is important to understand what knowledge is being transmitted and how to understand what views these games are promoting. Although all the gamers attend school, they nonetheless play video games and enjoy the experience and thus use games not only for entertainment but also as a way of understanding their political reality through this virtual means. As Schwartz ntoes, video games become travel spaces of sorts (Schwartz, 2006: 314). The danger in using video games as a medium of virtual travel space depends on the form of representation takeing place. History is not neutral as politics are always involved when creating historical narratives, so the game's portrayal seems to reinforce a historical narrative and is not questioned. The youth respond with an idea that the history presented in the game is an accurate history. For this reason, it is important to not dismiss video games as 'just games' but rather question and understand the value youth give to these games.

The experience of gaming is not homogenous as revealed by my small sample of interviews. This section illustrates how gamers perceive CODMW2 to have an element of learning. While the accuracy of the portrayals of different cultures can be questioned, it is nonetheless important to note that video games are a powerful force. Considering the time youth gamers spend on video games, it would be detrimental to youth studies to ignore such a medium.

4.5 Gamers' Perceptions of Virtual Terrorism

Three of the gamers associated the bad guys with people from Iraq or Afghanistan despite the main storyline involving Russians extremist groups as the bad guys. Four of the gamers use the word terrorist to describe the enemy in CODMW2. As Graf and Nieborg note, 'reality' of terrorism is lost in the maze of entertainment functions that games about terrorism provide…as gamers come to understand terrorism from a specific vantage point, that of the military (Graf and Nieborg in Kavoori, 2008: 12). These same four gamers also admitted to watching the news either on their own or with their families, in part to learn more about the countries in the game, especially the countries we are currently at war with. Therefore, the gamers made an association between war video games and the news, which seems to resonate with the idea of the military-entertainment-complex. These gamers watched the news to get an idea of what is happening in the world. It is thus interesting to see that connections are drawn between video games and their perception of reality.

39

In continuation with the above section discussing how for some gamers, CODMW2 has been a tool to teach certain aspects of history and geography, three gamers mentioned the depiction of particular regions, namely the Middle East, with an understanding of why the US is at war with the area. As Huntemann and Payne argue, the colonization by US forces of spaces and places highlighted in military video games, namely the Middle East, becomes normalized, rationalized, and justified in the 'real' Global 'War on Terror' (Huntemann and Payne, 2010: 13). One gamer notes that the countries [in the Middle East] are poor and have no government, providing further justification for US war in the area.

Another interesting point that surfaced from the interviews included a perception on terrorism. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is one mission that deals with the killing of innocent civilians at an airport, epitomizing what is known as 'terrorism' by an opposing force. In three of the interviews, gamers expressed feeling frustrated, angry, or shocked when they understood the significance of terrorism as portrayed through the game. There is another scene in which Washington, DC is attacked by Russian forces and one gamer expressed the vulnerability felt when first watching this scene and paralleled the scene to the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, DC. Thus, CODMW2 includes the concept of terrorism. The gamers expressed a knowledge in terrorism as portrayed through the game. However, because of the contemporary nature of the game, many of the gamers associated terrorism with the Middle East, paralleling the current "War on Terror' and neglecting the game's storyline that deals with Russian groups terrorizing in different missions. Therefore, a blur between reality and virtual experience can be seen as these gamers play but also link the relevance of the game with current events.

For this reason, it must be reiterated that a critical look at the themes involved in war video games is important to prevent misconceptions of world events, but also to provide a background as to why events, especially war, occur around the world. All gamers were aware of the fact that the US initiated a "War on Terror' against the Middle East and can parallel some of the virtual representations seen in CODMW2 with reality, however, a deeper understanding as to how this war came about and why, would provide a deeper knowledge. Therefore, war video games can be a useful tool. It is perhaps just necessary to find ways to be more critically reflective, since it is evident that these gamers have thought about the issues presented in the game outside of their time of play.

4.6 War Video Games Influence on the Construction of Youth

Wyn and White note that youth is conceptualized as a social process in which the meaning and experience of becoming an adult is socially mediated (Wyn and White, 1997: 4). This research was intended to provide some insight as to

how the playing of war video games as a social process affects how youth experience certain themes such as war, power, and issues of the military. This process not only includes youth's exposure to these themes, but also connecting to other games of all ages, thus further exposing youth to various themes that may be traditionally referred to as 'adult' themes.

Sefton-Green notes that digital technologies affects the concept of youth. Sefton-Green states that these technologies, seem to offer a kind of 'adultification' since young people can act in the digital realm with an equivalence of grown up power, (Sefton-Green, 2003: 3). . Despite not paying much attention to the themes or storylines during play, the gamers are aware of the themes of war, US military, and power portrayed in CODMW2 and how they parallel to contemporary times. The gamers have reflected on these issues and have created their own perceptions, indicating the sense of agency these youth have in these conceptsand how it shapes their view on the world. Therefore, it is interesting to see how war video games are a medium which present complex themes and how young people who play these games create their own perceptions from the images, narratives, and representations present in the game.

Chapter 3 showed how Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 has realistic components paralleling US events and dominant ideologies. This chapter has shown the experience of gamers included in the research. As some of the gamers suggest, CODMW2 is a game that deals with the US versus terrorism, yet the game itself is not explicitly defining the enemy as terrorist. Therefore we can start to see how some gamers might make the association of the game to actual events as illustrated in Chapter 3. The danger lies in labeling and categorizing people without taking a closer look at the political context in which the events were shaped, creating societal divisions. Yet youth gamers experienced more than a passive transmittal of images and representations.

The gamers also created their own perceptions and decisions from a combination of factors, including CODMW2. Therefore, CODMW2 is a vehicle of transmission but works in complex ways and in relation to other factors not addressed in this research. Chapter 5 will look at ways of finding alternatives to hegemonic ideologies, provide a reflection on the research, and describe ways to look froward with the topics presented.

41

Chapter 5
Alternatives, Reflections, and Looking Forward

This section will briefly discuss ways of deconstructing dominant ideologies as well as reflect on the questions and issues present in the research to address the final sub-question, 'How can we deconstruct these ideas to promote awareness and peace?'. Finally, the chapter concludes with ideas for future research as this analysis hopes to serve as a starting point in looking at war video games and the experience of youth gamers who play them.

5.1   Looking For Alternatives

This research has attempted to show how war video games, through the example of CODMW2 takes part in what Power notes as exploring ways in which visual culture can be used to elicit consent for the US military and enable militaristic fantasies (Power, 2007: 273). Chapter 4 illustrated how some youth gamers are not in favor of war, yet CODMW2 has enabled them to develop a sense of sympathy for the soldiers invovled in war and for some, even a curiosity to involve themselves in war. Video games are a significant cultural production that reflects upon social and political issues (Sample, 2008: 1). Chapter 3 has discussed through an analysis of narratives, images, and themes how CODMW2 portrarys certain political themes paralleling the 'War on Terror'. The last objective of this paper and the focus of this section is to explore alternative ways of thinking, specifically looking at games that promote peace.

As explained in Chapters 2 and 3, the military workings of the US are interlinked with the economic practices. War video games are a combination of these forces presenting certain ideologies promoting US military. Therefore, as George notes, 'if we recognize that a market-dominated, iniquitous world is neither natural nor inevitable, then it should be possible to build a counter-project for a different kind of world…the now-dominant economic doctrine…has been carefully nurtured over decades, through thought, action and propaganda' (George in Vanaik 2007: 71). There are several games that attempt to educate and provide critical reflection on matters such as war.

Jenkins notes that games are produced supporting more reflection and discussion, combining critical analysis with media production projects that allow young people to re-imagine and re-invent game content (Jenkins in Buckingham and Willet, 2006: 29). An example noted was Tropical America which allowed students to understand the political violence and human suffering that occurred in Latin America in the 1980s (Jenkins in Buckingham and Willet, 2006: 30). Thus, games can provide a basis to change our ideas about the world and how we act in it (Gotterbarn, 2010: 369).

Video games are becoming a significant form of representation and part of everyday US life as noted by its popularity in Chapter 2, that construct the US as an indomitable force and thus in need of critical attention (Power, 2007: 286). As the interviews noted in Chapter 4 illustrate, video games are becoming spaces where youth learn certain elements about the world around them. Therefore, Leonard urges that it is more important than ever to grasp the ways in which war video games construct images of race, nationality, and military prowess often reinforcing dominant ideas and status quo (Leonard, 2004: 6). Even games such as CODMW2 could serve as an educational tool if analyzed with critical dialogue and deeper understanding of the politics and histories of current conflicts, as this research has attempted to carry out. Video games present players with a simulated world and if well constructed could present opportunity for reflexive social practice (Shaffer et al, 2004: 2).

Chapter 4 has also demonstrated that youth gamers do not simply absorb all the hegemonic ideologies, but rather form their own complex notions of the world. Therefore, this medium has enormous opportunity to provide alternatives to the current ideologies of war, militarism, and power. By focusing on dialogue of cultural understanding, a deeper reflection on history, economics, and politics, it is possible to use video games to work towards creating a more balanced world.

5.2   Looking Back

To provide a bridge between the start of the research and the direction in which the research has evolved, I would like to reflect on the sub-questions which provide a more detailed focus. This section will aim to reflect on the way in which the research tried to reach its answers and reflect on the methodological approach.

The first sub-question, 'What narratives and images are used in the war game Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2?' was addressed in both Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 constructed both a conceptual and analytical framework, providing the tools for analysis. Chapter 3 used the analytical framework in combination with a socio-political context to illustrate how the game is represented, what is excluded, and how this exclusion reinforces certain ideologies, and provide a more comprehensive view on the background to the 'War on Terror' which the game excluded.

The second sub-question, 'What effect does The Call of Duty, as an example of the virtualization of war, have on youth's perceptions of war and the world around them?' was addressed in Chapter 4. Data collected from open-ended interviews was used to analyze how youth experience the playing of war video games.

The final sub-question, 'How can we deconstruct these ideas to promote awareness and peace?' was discussed in the first section of Chapter 5 by providing literature review on examples and methods scholars in the field of game studies have been working to construct alternative worldviews.

This section will take into consideration two counterarguments to the methodology used in the research as well as the way the research was constructed. CDA is critiqued for being too theoretical. However, the intent of this research was to provide an alternative way of looking at the ideologies prevalent in war video games. As George notes, 'the question is whether a return to a more accurate, though less innocent, view of American culture and politics is possible or whether the changes wrought by 50 years of manufacturing and imposing neoliberal ideology are permanent' (George in Vanaik, 2007: 85) and emphasizes 'although many good, kind, and generous Americans remain, the vast majority has no idea whatsoever what their country is doing at home, much less in the world at large…Americans almost never receive any cultural input that does not come from America itself' (ibid: 86). The dominant knowledge constructed has shaped the way Americans view the world. Therefore, this research used CDA as an attempt to unpack the discourses that have kept the US ignorant of international affairs.

The second issue involves the sample of the youth gamers. All gamers were American males. This occurred for several reasons. First, due to time constraints, it was hard to find and get in touch with female gamers. Secondly, I used American gamers to get an understanding on how they perceive the world around them especially with the biased information disseminated through the media and war video games. This sample was in no way meant to be representative or generalize the experience of gamers, but rather was an attempt to provide some insight into how youth experience video gaming, especially with games that explore issues of war, US military, and power. The interviews were meant to hear a direct perspective from youth gamers themselves.

The intent of this research was to provide a look at a medium that is slowly gaining attention in academia- video games and provide an understanding not only of the construction of war video games, but also the construction of youth through their experience of gaming. For these reasons, the aforementioned methodologies, despite its limitations, were chosen to fulfill the purposes of the research.

5.3   Looking Forward

This section aims to provide a forward-looking perspective that can be used to build upon this research. This section will illustrate four points that could provide further insight into war video games and the experience of gaming. Perhaps in the future, a bigger sample of gamers could be interviewed to provide representational perspective. However, the first point I wish to

elaborate on refers to Jones' point 'understanding the concept of youth means understanding the relationship between young people and society' (Jones, 2009: 30). This study did not address intersecting factors that could affect youth's experience of gaming and worldview perception. Such factors include gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and age among other factors. Due to time constraints and the anonymity of the gamers, it was difficult to go in-depth and discuss how these factors might influence their experience and perception. Yet further studies could look at these factors which are important in understanding the societal context of youth.

Secondly, it would have been interesting to provide a cross-cultural view of US war video games. This would probably provide a variety of perspectives and analyses of the themes present in such games. This cross-cultural view could perhaps also serve to promote a dialogue and exchange of ideas which work towards providing alternatives to current knowledges.

Third, as Wyn and White have noted, youth are often constructed in relation to adults (Wyn and White, 1997: 13). Therefore, a comparative sample between adults and youth who play war video games could have provided an interesting look at how games shape player's perspectives and vice versa. It would have also been interesting to look at how adults view youth gamers and vice versa to understand the power relations at play within the realm of video gaming.

Lastly, the issue of gender is important to address. All of the gamers in this research were males. The main goal of the research was to look at ideas within video games and its potential transmission onto gamers, gender was out of the scope of the study. However, gender was a very interesting concept noted throughout the research investigation process. First, most of the gamers admitted to encountering few females while playing. Even so, when females were present they usually played with a male friend for several reasons. This in itself, has important implications for the culture of gaming. Secondly, at least in CODMW2, the focus of this study, no women are included among army characters, once again providing an interesting point to keep in mind for further studies on gender and military as well as gender and video games.

This study was created in attempts to challenge the ideas that promote the inequalities that exist in our world today. Though subtle, many US cultural forms include representations that exclude. Therefore, it was my hope to provide a deeper look into war video games to reflect and understand what is really behind war and how its portrayals through medium such as video games are not necessarily accurate or provide too superficial an understanding of the power imbalances that exist in war and in the world.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questions Asked to the Youth Gamers

This appendix includes the questions used to conduct the open-ended interviews. These questions served as a guiding point and were not necessarily strictly followed but rather depended on the youth. However, in all the interviews the topics I wished to focus on were covered to some extent and the majority, if not all, questions were used and answered.

How old are you?

What are some of your favorite video games?

How often do you play video games? How often do you play Call of Duty, especially Modern Warfare 2?

Why do you like Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2?

How would you describe the game CODMW2 to someone who has never played?

What do you think of shooting people?

How do you feel about shooting people in the video game?

How real does the game seem to you?

What do you know of the scenes within the game that take place in different parts of the world? Is there a difference between what you knew before and what you know after playing the game?

What do you think of the scenes that take place in different parts of the world?

What do you feel when you are shot at?

How do you describe the enemy in CODMW2?

How do you feel when you are playing as the enemy?

How do you feel about the war and violence aspect of the game?

How do you feel about war in real life?

Would you ever join the military?

Has the game influenced your view of the military?

Is there anything you would change about the game?

What do your parents/ guardians/ family think about the game?

Do you watch the news or any other program (TV or radio) to get an idea of what is happening in the world?

Do you feel the game has taught you something? If so, can you explain?

When you are online, do you ever notice if females are playing?