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Guitar Hero Night at Gallagher's Pub:
Culture, Community Formation & Casual Gaming[1]

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Abstract

In the following, I take an ethnographic approach in examining the cultural phenomenon of *Guitar Hero*, through the particular exemplar of *Guitar Hero* nights at Gallagher's Pub in Ocean Beach, California. I assert that casual video game play in public settings, such as at the Irish Pub, *Gallagher's*, facilitates conversation, participation, and exemplifies the social potential of game play in community formation of a spectrum of young and older game players. *Guitar Hero* night at Gallagher's Pub is significant for study of communication, culture, and community building as the interactions of game players and audience provide insight into the cultural phenomenon of new, casual video games in bar settings. I argue that participating in game play at *Guitar Hero* night at *Gallagher's Pub* is not so much about competition, but instead about community, socializing, and bonding. More broadly, I argue that the mediatization of new, causal video games in bar settings is a crucial source of redefining and fostering culture and community building in social space.

Introduction

> "*Guitar Hero* is a game where you play guitar to popular rock songs and occasionally not rock songs. It's a lot of fun. It's not hard to learn. And you just press buttons and follow along with the screen and that's about it. I mean I don't know what you want me to say about *Guitar Hero*. It's a fun game. It's cool to be a rock star. It kind of makes you feel like a rock star" (Interview with an avid *Guitar Hero* player and Gallagher's Pub regular, Adam A.).[1]

After being greeted by Tim's smiling face at the entrance, I ran up to the bar and said to John, "I just got an email from Adam! He says he's doing alright, but wishes he didn't have to leave San Diego. But, he did say they play *Guitar Hero* on the ship!" John quickly replied, "Tell him we all say hello, and to stay safe and well. Tell him people have been asking where the tall, blonde guy with glasses has been!" In the span of a few months of attending *Guitar Hero* nights at Gallagher's Pub in 2008, I became a

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go between for the members of the community scene in Ocean Beach, and the fellow community members who were deployed in the Navy for six months to the Gulf coast.

New and experienced video game players are hooked into playing *Guitar Hero* all over the world: whether it be thousands of people on a Navy ship, at *Guitar Hero* night at a local pub, or in one's own living room. *Guitar Hero* night at Gallagher's Pub is significant for study as the interactions of game players and audience provide insight into the cultural phenomenon of new, casual video games in bar settings. In the following, I argue that participating in game play at *Guitar Hero* night at Gallagher's Pub is not so much about competition, but instead about community, socializing, and bonding. More broadly, I argue that the mediatization of new, causal video games in bar settings is a crucial source of redefining and fostering community building in social space.

About *Guitar Hero* & *Guitar Hero* Nights at Bars

"In homes, dorm rooms and bars across the world, young and old are picking up toy guitars and shredding as though a musical doomsday approaches. Devil horns fly up from audiences planted on couches and recliners, cheering on faux rocker gods who wall on their artificial axes with enough rhythm-driven precision to slay the nerve-wracking notes of *Guitar Hero*" (How Stuff Works).

Guitar Hero is a video game created by the company RedOctane that has appeared on several systems (Wii, Playstation 2 and 3, Xbox360). It is a simulation game where the player takes on the role of a guitarist, using a specialized controller shaped like a guitar. By following a set of on-screen queues, the player "plays" famous rock and roll songs; if they play well, it sounds well, if they mess up, the crowd responds negatively. The game allows for different difficulty settings, so that both novices and professionals can enjoy the game. The levels of difficulty, in order, are: easy, medium, hard, and expert. The higher the difficulty is adjusted, the more "real" the song gets, as the player plays a higher percentage of the notes heard in the song. The *Guitar Hero* games: *Guitar Hero I, II, III, IV, V, Rock the 80s, Aerosmith, Beatles, Metallica, World Tour, Van Halen, Smash Hits*, as well as versions on the Nintendo DS have a broad and varied audience.

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Theory

In *Why Game Studies Now? Video Games: A New Art Form*, James Paul Gee (2006) argues for the need of having the field of game studies, as "video games are a new art form" which require new methods of study. Ethnographic research exists in studies of the performance style video game, *Dance Dance Revolution* (*DDR*), in arcade settings has been conducted by Bryan G. Behrenshausen (2007) in *Toward a (Kin)Aesthetic of Video Gaming: The Case of Dance Dance Revolution*. Behrenshausen's study focuses on the performativity of *DDR* among game players in arcades.

Prior research has been conducted at *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* bar nights by ethnomusicologist Kiri Miller (2009), in "Schizophonic Performance: *Guitar Hero*, *Rock Band*, and Virtual Virtuosity," taking an ethnomusicological approach and focusing on the dimensions on musicality and differences between *Guitar Hero*/*Rock Band* game play versus playing a real guitar. Miller's (2009) research importantly provides insight into the ways players interact with the music in the game, and how players become more attuned to understanding the musicality of songs, including different notes and riffs as a result of game play. According to Miller (2009), "In the case of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, the facets that come free include new modes of musical listening, a sense of the physical relationship musicians develop with their instruments, an intimate knowledge of a particular selection of songs, and assorted elements of rock history and ideology (some of which are presented in explicitly didactic form, written on a chalkboard that appears between songs." This work describes the ease of new and accomplished players at playing in a bar setting as well as argues for the significance of performance in playing these games; however, the crux of the piece is focused on authenticity and realism of playing a video game guitar versus a real guitar.

Though Miller's (2009) ethnomusicological work is significant in understanding the relationship between *Guitar Hero/Rock Band* players, realism, and authenticity, there exists a gap in the literature about how the translation of new media forms in public, bar settings serves as an important means of community building. To my knowledge no prior work seeks to unpack the relationship between new forms of casual video game play and community building in a public, social space. It is the goal of my ethnographic research to fill the gap in the literature through delving into the social

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dimensions of the casual video game, *Guitar Hero*, and the ways the introduction of the video game redefines understanding of community. To bridge the gap between causal video game play and community formation in public spaces, I draw from game theorist Jesper Juul's (2010), <u>A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games And Their Players</u>, as well as Ray Oldenburg's (1999) sociological book, <u>The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons And Other Hangouts At The Heart of A Community</u>.

Jesper Juul (2009), in <u>A Casual Revolution</u>, argues that new, casual video games are broadening the spectrum of game players vis-a-vis the transition of video games as "normal." Juul (2009) argues that casual games such as *Guitar Hero, Rock Band*, and *Wii Sports* fit well into social settings as comparable to traditional board games. No longer do games require players to play for many hours to accomplish tasks in a game, but rather new casual video games allow for fun and socializing through short term, easy to learn, game play. To Juul (2010), "The office and holiday parties of that year were also dominated by a new musical game with plastic guitars, and it dawned on me that this was not about video games becoming cool, but about video games becoming normal." *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* are prevalent in a variety of social settings and among a variety of ages, including at office parties, elderly homes, and bars. Juul (2010) claims *Guitar Hero* is a type of "mimetic interface games," where "…the physical activity that the player performs mimics the game activity on the screen." Juul (2010) argues that an appeal of casual games such as *Guitar Hero* is that they can be played by casual players as well as hardcore players, for the game allows for both brief and long term time commitments.

Juul (2010) also discusses the physical player space which is emphasized by the casual, mimetic interface games. Juul (2010) argues, "Casual games have a wide appeal because they move away from 3-D spaces, blending more easily with not only the time, but also the space in which we play a game." It is the physical space that significantly constitutes game play of games such as *Guitar Hero* and *Dance Dance Revolution*. The interplay between video game players and spectators bolster the physical, social space as a place of socialization, interaction, and community. Juul (2010) argues that it is the physical space of player, or player space, and spectator interaction that creates socializing rather than what is happening on the game screen. Rather than mimetic

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interface game players and spectators judging each other on failures, spectators often revel in watching others play and learn game techniques through viewing.

Another benefit of *Guitar Hero*, according to Juul (2010), is that there is a general social understanding of what it looks like when someone plays a guitar, and that playing a guitar is typically understood as a positive cultural experience. Prior to playing the video game, players typically imagine playing guitar as a positive, familiar phenomenon. The positive association with guitar playing allows the video game to be easily accessible to new players, which lends to the increased socialization in the physical, social, public spaces such as bars. Whereas karaoke nights at bars are also significant sites of community building, *Guitar Hero* nights at bars are unique in that you do not need a skill (i.e., be a "good" singer) to participate without embarrassment. The "no fail" mode on *Guitar Hero* allows players to participate without failing the song due to poor performance.

In Ray Oldenburg's (1999) book, The Great Good Place, he introduces the term, "third places," as a public space that is separate from the home or work setting. Oldenburg's (1999) sociological work examines third places in a variety of global settings. Oldenburg (1999) argues that third spaces, such as bars, taverns, and coffee shops, are inclusive spaces where status is not of importance. According to Oldenburg (1999), third places are by nature inclusive and not judgmental of socio-economic status and allow for more varied conversation and those to converse with. In relation to the inclusion of gaming in third places, Oldenburg (1999) argues that games facilitate conversation and thus foster community building. Oldenburg (1999) provides the account of Jackson at an English working-class bar, claiming "Much time is given over to playing games. Cribbage and dominoes mean endless conversation and by-the-way evaluation of personalities. Spectators are never quiet, and every stage of the game stimulates comment."

Oldenburg (1999) further supports his argument by Laurence Wylie's research at a French café. Wylie claims, "The wit, humor, sarcasm, the insults, the oaths, the logic, the experimental demonstration, and the ability to dramatize a situation gave the game its essential interest." Though Oldenburg (1999) claims that board games serve as conversation pieces and facilitate community building, he problematically argues, "A room full of individuals intent upon video games is not a third place," and that "Above all, it is the latitude that personality enjoys at each and every turn that makes the

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difference." Because Oldenburg's (1999) book was written in the 1990s, prior to the introduction of new, casual video game play in bar setting, his notion of video games as not facilitating community in third spaces is outdated. Importantly, Oldenburg (1999) provides the example of an English pub, and argues that an essential attribute of third places is the existence and essentialness of "regulars."

Oldenburg (1999) provides exemplars of the community building, inclusive qualities of third places. For example, he explains how German Beer Gardens are public spaces where inclusivity of all walks of life and a variety of ages coexist. To Oldenburg (1999), "The mixing of nationalities, presence of women, comingling of the rich and poor, and frequent instances in which three generations that had fun together at the same time and in the same place- these were the more striking signs of inclusiveness." The beneficial, social nature of pubs is their ability to foster conversation and build community in an informal setting through inclusivity. In examining English pubs, Oldenburg (1999) concludes, "People go to pubs because they want to feel welcome…Above all, fellowship must prevail and it depends most upon informality. Snugness, not smugness, is at the key if one is to feel the nearness of human company."

The work of Oldenburg (1999) and Juul (2009) are theoretically applicable to the study of socialization, community formation and redefinition due to the mediatization of new, casual video games in bar settings. Oldenburg (1999) laments that third places are dwindling and argues for the necessity of the proliferation of these spaces; however, I argue that community building has the potential of increase due to the introduction of new, casual video game play in a bar settings. I assert that casual video game play in public settings, such as at the Irish Pub, Gallagher's, facilitates conversation, participation, and exemplifies the social potential of game play in community formation. In the following, I take an ethnographic approach in examining this phenomenon through the particular exemplar of *Guitar Hero* nights at Gallagher's Pub in Ocean Beach, California.

An Overview of Methods for *Guitar Hero* night Fieldwork at Gallagher's

Over the course of a ten week spring quarter at the University of California, San Diego, I conducted fieldwork once a week for at least two hours on Monday or Tuesday nights at *Guitar Hero* night at Gallagher's Pub in Ocean Beach, California. Each visit, I spoke with bar patrons as well as participated in playing *Guitar Hero*. I divided my

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time between observing, playing the game, and talking with bar patrons and bar staff. I interviewed three people throughout my fieldwork. First, I interviewed Adam A., a 22 year old man in the Navy, who is an avid *Guitar Hero* player and regular to Gallagher's. I kept in touch with Adam A. via email during his deployment, and I acted as a go between for regulars Gallagher's and Adam A. I also interviewed John[2], the bartender at Gallagher's who hosts *Guitar Hero* night every week. Finally, I interviewed my brother, Peter[3], an avid video game player.

Description of Gallagher's Pub in Ocean Beach, California:

Formerly Bullfrogs, OB's Irish bar alongside the ocean suits all occasions, thanks to its three rooms that range from sun-drenched to shadowy to cavernous. The front opens to the street, where wooden cutouts of Ireland on the golden walls and a functioning Old World lamppost do what they can to transport you across the Atlantic. Room two houses the full-service area, where the wall of bottles oozes a green glow and stool warmers clutch Mason jars full of Emerald Isle brews along a bar that's fashioned to look like a giant keyboard. Two adjoining fireplaces keep the front rooms warm (or at least looking so) on chillier nights. The back area is home to a curling table, a row of booths, plenty of space for a body farm and the stage, where local bands and DJs play Wednesday through Sunday. Most every corner dons a flat screen that plays sports of all sorts; those of Anglo origins -- golf and hockey, namely -- usually take precedence. Happy hour happens from 5 to 8 p.m., even on the weekends. Budweiser pints go for $3 every day, all day. Think they have beach-themed bars in Dublin? (signonsandiego.com)

Gallagher's Pub in Ocean Beach has *Guitar Hero* nights on Mondays and Tuesdays from 8pm-close. It is very hard to miss Gallagher's, as it has a large, green fluorescent shamrock sign which is visible as you travel down the street. The bar is amidst many other bars, restaurants, and shops on the street, which leads you straight to the beach. Standing outside the bar you can see the ocean. There is an interesting array of people walking Newport Avenue at night: from homeless people in tattered clothes, to people whom one might classify as "hippies" (due to their attire and hair styles), to college age people out meeting up with friends for drinks or dinner. From the street you can see completely into the bar: it is open air and there are black tables and chairs right next to the sidewalk. On the side walk outside Gallagher's on Monday and Tuesday

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nights there is a chalkboard sign reading, "Monday [or Tuesday] Night: *Guitar Hero* Night with John", and also listed the beer specials for the night.

Fieldwork: Guitar Hero Nights at Gallagher's Pub[4]

In the following, I provide excerpts of the in depth interviews I conducted at Gallagher's Pub as an entry point into the phenomenon of *Guitar Hero* night as a means for socializing in a public setting. First are responses from the bartender, John: the Gallagher's bartender who decided to start *Guitar Hero* nights at the bar. He described his decision to begin *Guitar Hero* nights as well as how the bar space serves as a means of socializing through game play. Further, I follow the interview with John with an interview with a regular bar patron and avid *Guitar Hero* player, Adam A. The interview with Adam A. supports my argument that *Guitar Hero* game play in the public space of a bar allows for socializing through commonality of playing an all inclusive, accessible game for new and returning bar patrons.

Following my prior argument in accordance with Jesper Juul (2010), *Guitar Hero* is a form of causal gaming which allows for accessible, inclusive game play through the emphasis on the physical, social space of player performance which allows for new and returning game players to the social aspects of game play, similar to game play of board games. Though the pub originally served as a social space revolving solely around drinking as community building, the addition of the *Guitar Hero* to weekday nights at Gallagher's Pub has transformed and extended the formation of community building through casual, fun, and accessible game play.

A First Look at Guitar Hero Night at Gallagher's Pub

I have been a fan of *Guitar Hero* for a little less than a year at the time of conducting fieldwork, but had never been to a *Guitar Hero* night at a bar prior to my visit to Gallagher's Pub. My first visit to Gallagher's was also my first time going to Newport Avenue in Ocean Beach at night, and I invited two friends to join me as I had never been to a bar alone. Upon entering the bar a large Samoan man, Tim, asked us to see our driver's licenses. He had a big grin on his face, was wearing a black t shirt and jeans, had dark features, and was strikingly obese.

As I walked past Tim I immediately saw a man playing *Guitar Hero* with a wireless controller on a flat screen plasma television on the wall. Underneath the

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television was a fireplace, and there were many high tables and booths. Behind the bar were shelves of different glass beer mugs, and stood a man in his thirties. On the wall behind the booths were many framed papers with an Irish last name on them, discussing the origin of the name, the name's history, and what it means. There appeared to be twenty people in the bar when I entered, though within an hour the number doubled. I stood back and watched some young men play the game together, battling on the Easy setting to the song, "Slow Ride". The men were smiling and laughing, and their female friend who was sitting at one of the booths was cheering them on. My friends went over to the bar to get a drink, and I headed over to where the men were playing. When the men finished playing, Player Two (who lost the song) said, "Aw man!" and the two men joked and laughed and went back to the booth and chatted with their female friend and sipped their drinks. From this early point, I realized that *Guitar Hero* night at Gallagher's was a very friendly endeavor, where people engaged in game play for fun and with friends.

The Ease of Socializing at Guitar Hero Night

There seemed to be a small level of competition, but throughout the night I found that socializing with the people around you was more important than winning. I decided to ask the men if they minded if I took a turn playing the game, and one immediately jumped up and said he'd play against me. We played a two player battle on "Welcome to the Jungle", where I played on level Hard and he played on level Easy. While I was playing the song I could hear a man somewhere behind me in the bar commenting on how well I was playing. I heard things like, "Wow! I want to be able to do that!" When I finished the song, I put down the guitar and told the man I had fun battling with him, and the man whose voice I had heard behind me ran up and gave me a hug. "Oh my God! Can I hug you? You are my hero! I want to marry you! You have to teach me! I play electric guitar, but have only played this game twice tonight." I hugged him back and told him I would teach him. Having only played the game in the comfort of my own apartment, or my family's or friend's houses, it was completely different to experience playing the game in public. I found that whereas playing at home alone with friends or with family is mainly about besting your own scores, playing *Guitar Hero* in a bar setting is very different. At Gallagher's, playing *Guitar Hero*, watching, and discussing were parts of socializing not only with people you knew, but also with strangers. For myself as well as the group of three girls who

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entered the bar later to play, game play and discussion of the game was a means for men to mingle and flirt with women.

I sat at the bar with Gallagher's main bartender, John, who made the decision to begin *Guitar Hero* nights at Gallagher's. With his smiling face, John explained his decision to begin *Guitar Hero* nights and how inclusion of game nights fosters community formation and increases regular bar attendees. Oldenburg (1999) argues in his book, "Hosting is not the only consideration in the evolution of the third place, but few factors are more important. A tavern always reflects the personalities behind the bar." In accordance with Oldenburg's (1999) argument of the importance of hosting in the sustainment of bars, the introduction of *Guitar Hero* nights by John and his continual friendly interactions with bar patrons exemplifies the importance of those who run the bar with the bar's survival.

Julia: When did *Guitar Hero* nights start at Gallagher's?

John: We started *Guitar Hero* nights in January or February. I need to get people out here and this was a way to do that. I first went to Arizona and they had a big tournament and I got the idea from there. They were up on stage and there were tons of people. The game is a visual stimulant for people to see what's going on when they walk by the bar. We're thinking about getting a Wii or an XBOX eventually to do Wii Sports: Wii bowling and Wii tennis. Ya know, really, the main reason for *Guitar Hero* night is for money. It's hard to get people in at the beginning of the week- Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. So yes it's for fun, but the main reason is for money. We're trying to bring new people in other than the regulars. I mean, the regulars are great, but we want to bring in new people.[5]

Julia: Why do you think people like playing the game in a bar setting?
John: Socially it's an ice breaker and it makes it easier to meet people and it's easier to talk to people.

Julia: How is *Guitar Hero* night the same or different than a karaoke night?
John: You don't have to be good at *Guitar Hero* to play the game in the bar. If you're bad, you can just say it's your first time playing *Guitar Hero*, but if you're singing karaoke, people can tell you're bad and you can't really say it's your first time singing. Ya know?

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Julia: How many people are regulars to *Guitar Hero* night?

John: Between 20-25 people who are regulars. Usually I have to call last call on *Guitar Hero* before last call on drinks. I'll have to say, "Ok, last song guys." Usually 15-20 regulars who come every or every other week.

Julia: Do you think *Guitar Hero* nights or other video game nights will spread to other bars?

John: Definitely. It's a way of bringing people out. I mean, there are only so many hard core alcoholics who will come to a bar and drink and watch tv. And I'm one of them.

On a weekday evening at Gallagher's when *Guitar Hero* night was not in session, I interviewed the regular bar patron, Adam A., who revealed insight into the social dimension of playing *Guitar Hero* in the pub space.

Julia: Where do you usually play the game, and with who?

Adam A.: At home with friends, on the ship with friends and coworkers, or at the   bar with strangers that become friends.

Julia: What do you like about playing the game in a bar setting? Are you competitive playing in public? Do you play to socialize? Do you go to meet people?

Adam A.: All of the above. I don't try to be competitive but I naturally am so I want to beat people deep down, but I tell them it's no big deal. Cuz I don't get beat very often. Just, ya know, have a good time, meet other people. And secretly beat them. And say, ha ha ha I win.

Julia: If you are playing *Guitar Hero* at Gallagher's against someone else, would you be likely to talk with them after you play? Would you be likely to talk to other people in the bar that are also playing?

Adam A.: Of course, of course. Usually I encourage them to get better. And if they get angry, I tell them, "Hey, it's just a game." But usually they don't get

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angry. You [Julia] played "hard," sometime you'll have to play "expert." It's easier to initiate conversation cuz I mean the whole thing about talking to random   people is to find something in common. So you say, "Oh you play *Guitar Hero*? I   play it, too." That'll make at least a five minute conversation that can lead to   other things.

Julia: How would you compare *Guitar Hero* night to karaoke night at a bar?
Adam A.: Well I don't go to too many karaoke nights but from what I have been to I know that lots of people at karaoke nights can't actually sing. Like geez she sounds really bad. But with *Guitar Hero*, you miss a couple notes, it just goes beep, but you can still hear most of the song anyway. With *Guitar Hero* you can have two people at a time. *Guitar Hero* is easier to get up and do, cuz with karaoke you have to get up in front of a whole bunch of people who expect you to sing well, but with *Guitar Hero*, I've never seen someone embarrassed to play a   video game. Personally I'm not bad as a singer, I can keep   a tone, and I just chose to not sing in front of people. I get nervous. But with   *Guitar Hero*, I don't get nervous. When I start playing, people know.

New and Experienced Players

After playing a few more songs with various bar patrons, I decided to sit at one of the booths near the television and watch the continual game play. At one point a mid twenties man, Brian, with long brown shaggy hair tight black pants, and a black and grey stripped hooded sweatshirt and his friend (a young woman dressed in similar attire), walked in to Gallagher's. I watched as he played "Knights of Cydonia" on level Hard, and approached him following his completion of the song. In talking with Brian, he explained that he plays the game sporadically: he plays for long periods of time, and then puts it down for a while before picking it up again. He challenged me to battle him, and he and I went on to battle in four songs: three of which he won. Later when there was a lull in the amount of people playing, Tim, who was sitting on a stool near the entrance pointed to Brian and I and jokingly exclaimed, "You guys scared everyone away!" I chuckled and soon thereafter three young scantily clad Asian women and one thin Caucasian young man walked in. I overheard them speak of how they were all new to the game, and quickly picked it up and took turns taking pictures of each other while

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they played. A few young men that walked into the bar went up to the girls and started chatting with them about the game, asking things such as, "Have you played this game before?" and "How does that part work?", and claiming "I've never played before." My observation of these interactions furthered my understanding of how the game operates different in a bar setting, changing from just being a fun activity with friends or friendly competition at home, to something to do with flirting and socializing.

On another visit to Gallagher's, I was greeted with a warm welcome by the big grinned bouncer, Tim. I was surprised by the overwhelming welcome as I had only been to Gallagher's once before. When I finished playing a song with another bar patron, a round of applause and cheering from the few men sitting nearby roared through the bar space. I found that on a weekly basis at *Guitar Hero* night there are a range of new and returning bar patrons of varying ages, and despite occasional lulls in game play, there exist an overwhelming sense of enthusiasm.

Guitar Hero Players from Different Countries Playing Side by Side

I observed a group of four Australian men in their late thirties as well as one s Asian young man in his early twenties entering the bar and began to play *Guitar Hero*. Their ease in setting up game play lead me to believe they had played the game before, and I approached the players to ask where they were from. The Australian man, Drew, said he is from Newcastle, Australia, and the Asian man, Jeremy, said he is from Hawaii, though currently lives in San Diego. I asked how they knew each other, and Jeremy said, "We met five minutes ago!" I found it intriguing that although the two men were from different parts of the world, different ages, and did not know each other prior to game play, they bonded through playing the video game.

Whereas I originally thought widespread multi-player online games were main sources of connecting video/computer game players, the interactions this night at *Guitar Hero* night proved otherwise. I observed that there appeared to be an understanding between them and a sense of "you must be cool if you play the game because I play the game, too." I was amazed that Jeremy wanted to mingle with other players and I as he was playing the game. I mentioned to him that I found this to be odd, and he replied, "no, my roommates always joke around and talk to each other as we play. We do it all the time." After Jeremy defeated the Drew, Jeremy's roommate decided to battle him. Jeremy and his roommate, who was later introduced to me as Adam A., bantered back and forth before playing the game together. A funny point in the night occurred when

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Jeremy paused the game mid-play and ran over to the table and took a sip of his drink, then un-paused the game, causing much laughter from the people surrounding the *Guitar Hero* area of the bar.

Guitar Hero Night on Cinco de Mayo

During the course of my fieldwork, one of the *Guitar Hero* nights at Gallagher's happened to fall on Cinco de Mayo. When I arrived at Newport Avenue on Cinco de Mayo the street was not much more packed than previous weeks, as there was still plenty of parking. I walked up to the door of Gallagher's and was greeted by Tim, who immediately said to me, "We were just talking about you and wondering if you were going to show up tonight!" Along with the fact that he did not ask to see my driver's license before I entered, I realized that the people who worked at Gallagher's and the other regulars not only knew who I was, but were also very accepting of me. There were a few women promoting beer at the bar that night, and I was surprised when two of them stared and me and gave me dirty looks. When this occurred, I asked the two nearby men at the bar, and they jokingly said that perhaps this happened because I was talking to them, or perhaps because I am an avid *Guitar Hero* player.

Meeting the Adams

Soon after my arrival at the bar, Adam A. (age 22, who I had met last week) arrived with one of his roommates. I immediately approached him and he remembered that I had been coming to the bar to conduct research. I asked him how often he played *Guitar Hero* and he replied, "not often," however; his roommate (Adam B., age 21) butted in saying, "What do you mean not often? You were playing every day last week!" Adam A. jokingly confessed that he had indeed done so. I learned that the Adams roommates and in the Navy, held electronic jobs on the ship, and they were to leave for the Gulf Coast the end of the month. Adam A. agreed to be interviewed at Gallagher's on Thursday, as Adam B. would be out of state for a week. Adam A. told me about he and his roommates, chuckling, "all of us player the real guitar. But we actually play the game a whole lot more than the actual instrument."

In my interview with Adam A. to discuss reasons for the game's popularity:

Adam A.: Cuz it makes you feel like a rock star and everyone wants to be a rock star at heart. It's really addicting. It's a fun thing to do. When I got *Guitar*

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Hero   II, I was in prototype where you work seven days a week, so all I did was work, play *Guitar Hero*, and sleep.

I later asked Adam A. to talk about why he chooses to go to Gallagher's on *Guitar Hero* nights:

Adam A.: I usually come here when I can, cuz I've been out on the ship in the sea   the last couple months. Pretty much, any chance I have to come here and play *Guitar Hero* I do cuz I can play and get drunk. And *Guitar Hero* plus alcohol equals a really good time. It's more fun cuz you get more into it and start rocking   out and doing the dances, but I do that normally.

Further on Community Rather Than Competition

Adam A. and Adam B. agreed that in a social, bar setting, *Guitar Hero* is not so much about winning against an opponent, but more about the fun of interacting with other people and getting to drink while doing so.

I played two songs against two different people (including Adam A.), and won both songs. I was cheered on by the people around me and the overall sense of camaraderie was astounding. Once again, as in previous weeks, I found that people whom do not know each other but share the love of the game form a community in the bar setting with people they do not even know. In talking with Adam A., he told me that there are a number of people who frequent the bar on *Guitar Hero* nights throughout the weeks. He pointed out one man to me who he said came every week the past month. Later in the night the bartender, John, who in speaking to told me he was a huge fan of the game, asked for someone to hand him one of the guitars. He told the patrons, "Okay, nobody can order a drink for about five minutes!" John went on to play a song against an opponent, and was cheered on by those in the bar.

I've found that the bar operates as a family for many of the patrons, as many people in the bar had been coming for years, not only on *Guitar Hero* night. Tim explained that because the bar is also a sports bar, Monday nights bring more male patrons than other nights (e.g., Monday night football). The bar decided to have the game on Monday nights to draw in more customers, but as Tim explained, "It would be

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too crowded on other nights for people to play the game. People would just be bumping into each other and you wouldn't be able to hear the music as well."

Casual Game Performance: Players and Audience

The game is not only about the people playing, but about the audience involvement as players perform songs. Despite whether the game players have experience with the game, people cheer the players on while they play as well as when the song is over. Also, people from the crowd watching come up to the players after they played and ask them questions about how long they've played and introduce themselves. Upon watching interactions of players and audience, I find *Guitar Hero* night at Gallagher's to be exemplary of the way new, casual video games within a bar setting reformulate our understanding of how community is established and maintained through the physical location of the bar and player space.

Conclusion

The basis for unity and community is redefined with the introduction of *Guitar Hero* into the bar setting, demonstrating how the changing mediatization in public spaces influences and redefines the understanding of culture and community. Rather than bond solely over the act of drinking and conversation, *Guitar Hero* game play allows for inclusivity and what Oldenburg (1999) terms, "snugness," as the game is low pressure and does not require skill to be included. Whereas karaoke nights at bars are also significant sites of community building, *Guitar Hero* nights at bars are unique in that you do not need a skill (for example, be a "good" singer) to participate without embarrassment. The "no fail" mode on *Guitar Hero* allows players to participate without failing the song due to poor performance.

In Oldenburg's (1999) book, Wylie's account of the French cafe relates to *Guitar Hero* night at bars in that the demonstration of dramatic game play draws spectators and interest in providing an alluring, social means of interacting with other bar patrons.

Following Oldenburg's (1999) argument of the rising noise level in bars facilitating increased participation and inclusivity, at Gallagher's on *Guitar Hero* nights, the rock songs from the video game echo throughout the pub and, in addition to the central location to the television and game players, draws in new players, spectators, creates conversation, and fosters community building. Following Jesper Juul's (2010) concept of player space, it appears true at *Guitar Hero* night at Gallagher's that casual game

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play revolves around the player space, where bar patrons often cheer players without regard to skill level, socialize, as well as take note of game techniques. Rather than patrons at Gallagher's bonding and socializing over what appears on the screen where the video game appears, it is in the interactions in the physical player space at that fosters socializing and community building of players of a variety of ages and backgrounds.

The fieldwork and interviews conducted at Gallagher's Pub on *Guitar Hero* nights, bolstered by the theoretical framework, allows for an understanding of how community is shaped through the socializability of player space of new, casual video games in the bar setting. Throughout my ethnographic study, it became clear that the commonality of being *Guitar Hero* players at Gallagher's, whether new or experienced, serves as a means for socializing, bonding, fun, and being part of a community. The cultural dynamics of player space in *Gallagher's* pub setting: the performance of game players, the cheering of the audience, the friendly bar staff, and ongoing conversation, creates, redefines, and sustains a sense of community.
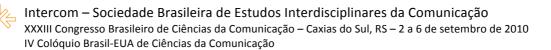
End notes

1. Interview with Adam A. conducted on May 8, 2008 at Gallagher's Pub in Ocean Beach, California. Adam A. approved the inclusion of the interview in my research paper.

2. Interview with John conducted in May 2008 at Gallagher's Pub. John approved the inclusion of the interview in my research paper.

3. Interview with Peter conducted in April 2008. Peter approved the inclusion of the interview in my research paper.

4. Fieldwork conducted in 2008 in Ocean Beach, California at *Gallagher's Pub* on Newport Boulevard.

5. In following up with the Gallagher's Pub website in April, 2010, I learned the bar is now including Wii Sports nights to the weekly schedule, as John suggested in our 2008 interview.

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