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Gamer self-perception of moral choices in *Dishonored*: a study of morality system gameplay in South Africa

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Abstract

Moral judgement tasks and morality-based gameplay are designed into video games with increasing frequency. Historical discourse related to video games and morality has predominantly focused on 'ethically problematic' content and the effects that playing these games will have on those who play them. Gamers' perceptions of their own morality and the morality-based choices that they make in-game have been under-explored to date. An emic perspective of the context of morality-system gameplay proved valuable in providing a thick, rich description of this social phenomenon. The game *Dishonored* was selected for this research study due to the simplistic morality-system integral to its core mechanics and storytelling engine. *Dishonored* is a first-person, stealth action-adventure video game developed by *Arkane Studios* and published by *Bethesda Softworks* in 2012. This study utilised a theoretically pluralistic approach comprising identification, ludology and social constructionism. Research methods included in-depth, personal interviews and an autoethnography. Findings indicated that *Dishonored* gamers make morality-based gameplay choices for moral reasons both when these choices align with their personal moral positioning and when they are in conflict. When moral choices align with personal moral positioning, gamers experience empathy for Non-Player Characters (NPCs) and feel morally accountable for salient moral infractions. When moral choices conflict with moral positioning, gamers morally disengage in order to mitigate the negative consequences of the conflicting moral choice. It was found that gamers also make morality-based gameplay choices for reasons entirely unrelated to personal moral positioning. These amoral choices relate to exploration of the core mechanics and the narrative of the game as well as gamers' individual personalities and motivations. It was found through analysis and interpretation of the autoethnographic account that moral salience plays a pivotal role in moral choices predicated upon personal moral positioning. A limitation of the study may have been a small sample size, but it was counterpoised both through the triangulation of methods and the purpose of the study which was to gain an in-depth and rich understanding of the topic. It is recommended that future studies focus on the impact of demographic differentiators, such as gender identity, on morality-based gameplay choices, particularly since the sequel to the game under study, *Dishonored 2*, facilitates the choice of either a male or a female avatar.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Print Name: …Tammy Ann Oppenheim…

Date: …04 June 2019...

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Gaming is emergent and becoming increasingly ubiquitous and seemingly affects and shapes the various forms of interactive media and gaming culture worldwide. Additionally, the electronic gaming industry is a significant element in the global economy. This is evidenced in the fact that it was reported by the Entertainment Software Association (2019) that video game revenue had reached a new peak in 2018 of $43,8 billion, an increase of 18 percent from 2017. The global games market value is reported by market analysts Newzoo (2019) to have grown over 10 percent to $134,9 billion in 2018. In South Africa the video games market total revenue in 2017 was over ZAR 3,0 billion and is estimated to reach ZAR 6,2 billion by 2022 (PWC, 2018, p. 99). With this tremendous revenue impact, it is imperative that more research attention is given to this media form.

Increasingly moral judgment tasks or morality-based gameplay are being designed into video games (Bartel, 2015; Deen, Schouten & Bekker, 2015). These moral choices may influence the gaming experience when the morality-based choices gamers make are connected to the story and when the outcomes of moral choice have significant effect upon the game (Zoss, 2010). Morality-system game design may enable a variety of different play styles that produce insight regarding gamer self-esteem and self-identity (Deen *et al.*, 2015). Morality-system game design may also lead to ethical dilemmas that incite player immersion through the perception that their actions have direct consequences on the game world (Pereira Santos, Khan & Markopoulos, 2018).

Current discourse regarding video games and morality tends to focus on the violent or ethically problematic content (Cuttell, 2015), and the effects that interaction with games will have on those that play them (Klemm & Pieters, 2017; Schulzke, 2010). Existing research in this field is principally presented from an ‘etic’ or an outsider’s perspective of the studied social context (Creswell, 2012; Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990). Gamers’ perception of their own morality and their morality-based gameplay choices have been under-explored in primarily quantitative research to date. The utilisation of a qualitative, immersive-participatory research method (Cuttell,

2015) may aid in filling the gap that exists of 'emic' or insiders' perspectives (Creswell, 2012) into an under researched social phenomenon.

In this chapter, an outline of the context of this study and conceptualisation of key terms will be provided in addition to an explanation of the research approach, research problem, and methodology that will be undertaken.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

1.2.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research study is to gain an in-depth understanding of gamers' perception of their own morality, and the morality-based choices they make during gameplay in *Dishonored,* a stealth action-adventure video game.

1.2.2. Background of the study

In the last two decades there has been much public concern and debate about the effect violent video games have on youth consumers of these media products (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010; Goerger, 2017; Kutner & Olson, 2008; Wonderly, 2008). An academic debate is echoed in research studies occurring in the public sphere and focuses on both the influence that violent videogames have on youth violence and aggression, as well as the most accurate methodologies used to research these issues (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010; Goerger, 2017).

Proponents of the position that morally problematic or violent video games have negative, real-world impact upon the minds of gamers argue that a causative relationship exists between gamers playing these types of games and a diminishing of empathy and increase in aggression of gamers in real-life (American Psychological Association, 2015; Anderson & Dill, 1999; Anderson *et. al*., 2010; McCormick, 2001; Waddington, 2007; Wonderly, 2008).

Opponents to this position state that there is insufficient evidence of the aforementioned causative link (DeCamp & Ferguson, 2016; Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010; Goerger, 2017, Kuhn *et. al*, 2018), and that there are methodological concerns in the aforementioned studies (Ferguson & Kilburn,

2010). Violent video games cannot be empirically proven to have negative real-world impact upon gamers (Goerger, 2017; Madigan, 2016; Kuhn *et. al*, 2018; Kutner & Olson, 2008,) or be morally indefensible (Goerger, 2017; Schulzke, 2010). Some theorists posit that video gameplay may be beneficial to gamers (Bogost, 2007; Delwich, 2007; Gee, 2003) and may provide practice in, for example, ethical decision making (Grizzard, Tamborini, Lewis, Wang & Prabhu, 2014; Madigan, 2016; Zagal, 2009).

Dishonored, the game under study, includes the option of violent acts against Non-Player Characters (NPCs) and is thus considered to be a violent game. Adams (2014) states that most games with a fantasy component also have an ethical system designed to define player behaviour, which is true of *Dishonored.* It contains a 'morality-system', also known as a moral choice system. Instead of a linear narrative created by the storytelling engine; morality-based gameplay choices made by the gamer will have an impact on the pretended reality or in-game environment as well as the plot and continuing narrative of the game (Bethesda Softworks LLC, 2016; Purchese, 2012a). The game itself does not have an explicit moral characterisation of the avatar, defined as "the direct representation of a player in a game" (Brathwaite & Schrieber, 2009, p. 12), but allows the player to make moral choices that affect the in-game world and subsequent story development (Triberti, Villani & Riva, 2015).

Dishonored is a first-person perspective game, which means that the vantage point of the game appears as if it is seen through the game character's eyes (Hitchens, 2011). The game is characterised by an emphasis on gamer choice (Porter, 2012) and one option of play is to avoid the detection of hostile non-player characters (NPCs) which are in-game characters with whom the player interacts (Bauman, 2012). This is also known as stealth gameplay or 'sneaking up to or past' enemies (Tremblay, Torres & Verbrugge, 2014). Stealth can be used for either non-violent or violent gameplay. *Dishonored* supports gameplay with non-lethal violence, lethal combat and violence or a combination of all of these options (Bethesda Softworks LLC, 2016). The story and in-game environment are affected by a morality choice system where players' moral choices throughout the game have clear consequences for the continuing story, gameplay and game world (Bethesda Softworks LLC, 2016; Onyett, 2012; Purchese, 2012a).

The game *Dishonored* was selected for this research study due to the simplistic morality-system integral to its core mechanics and storytelling engine. While there are a small number of morally ambiguous choices presented to the player in-game, the primary decision-making mechanic revolves around three potential explicit moral positions: non-violence (avoiding detection through stealth gameplay), non-lethal violence, and lethal violence (Bethesda Softworks LLC, 2016; Onyett, 2012). In-game actions in these three categories will cumulatively lead to one of two particular playstyle outcomes: high chaos or low chaos.

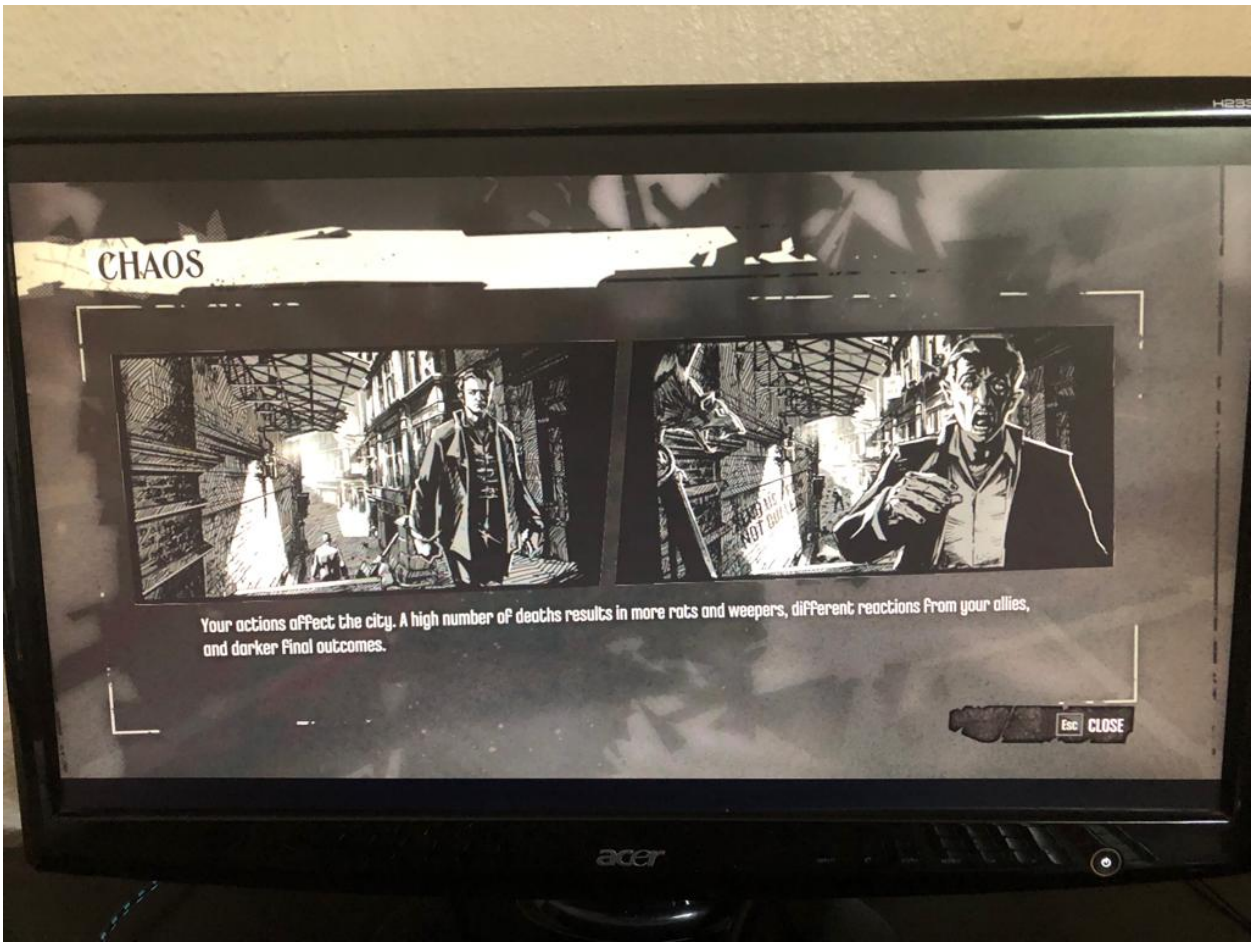


Figure 1.1 Screen capture of loading screen- Chaos (*Dishonored*, 2012)

A loading screen informs players near the start of the game of the beneficial effects of choosing a low chaos playstyle characterised by the use of stealth and a nonlethal approach.

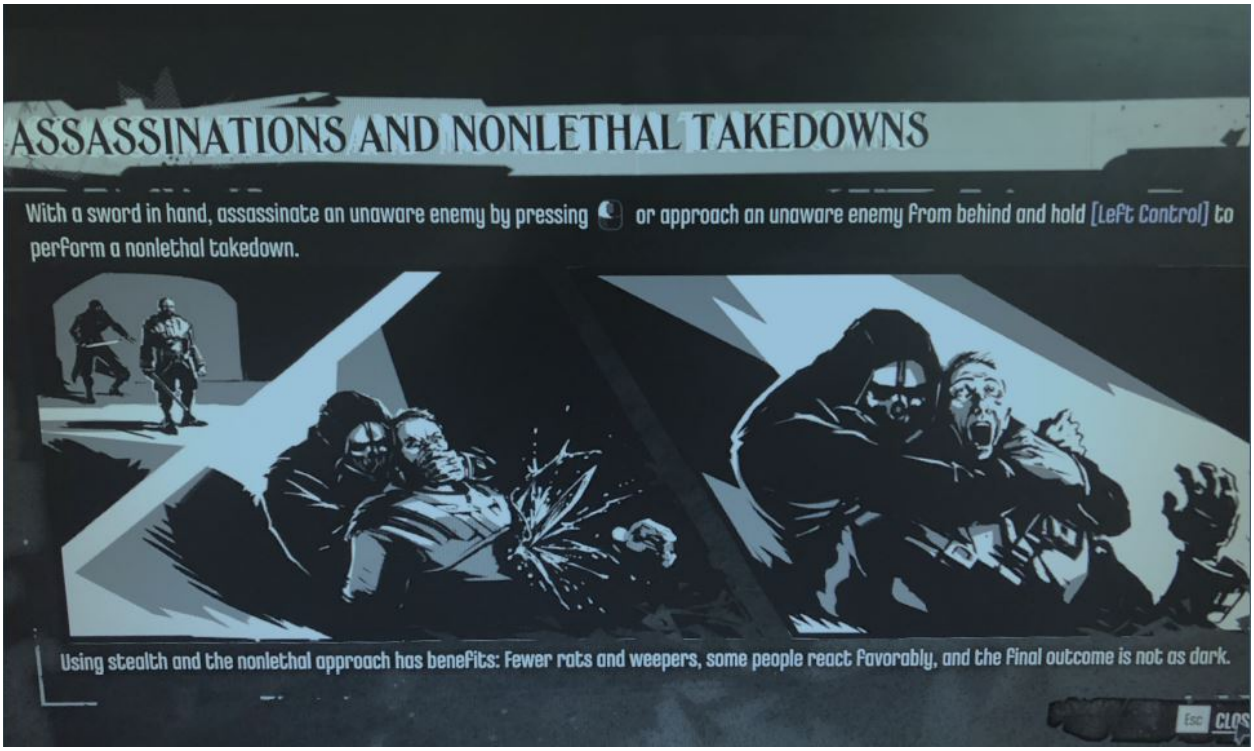


Figure 1.2 Screen capture of loading screen – Assassinations and Nonlethal Takedowns. (*Dishonored*, 2012)

Additionally, upon completion of each mission, a statistics screen is presented indicating general mission statistics as well as the current playthrough's overall chaos level.

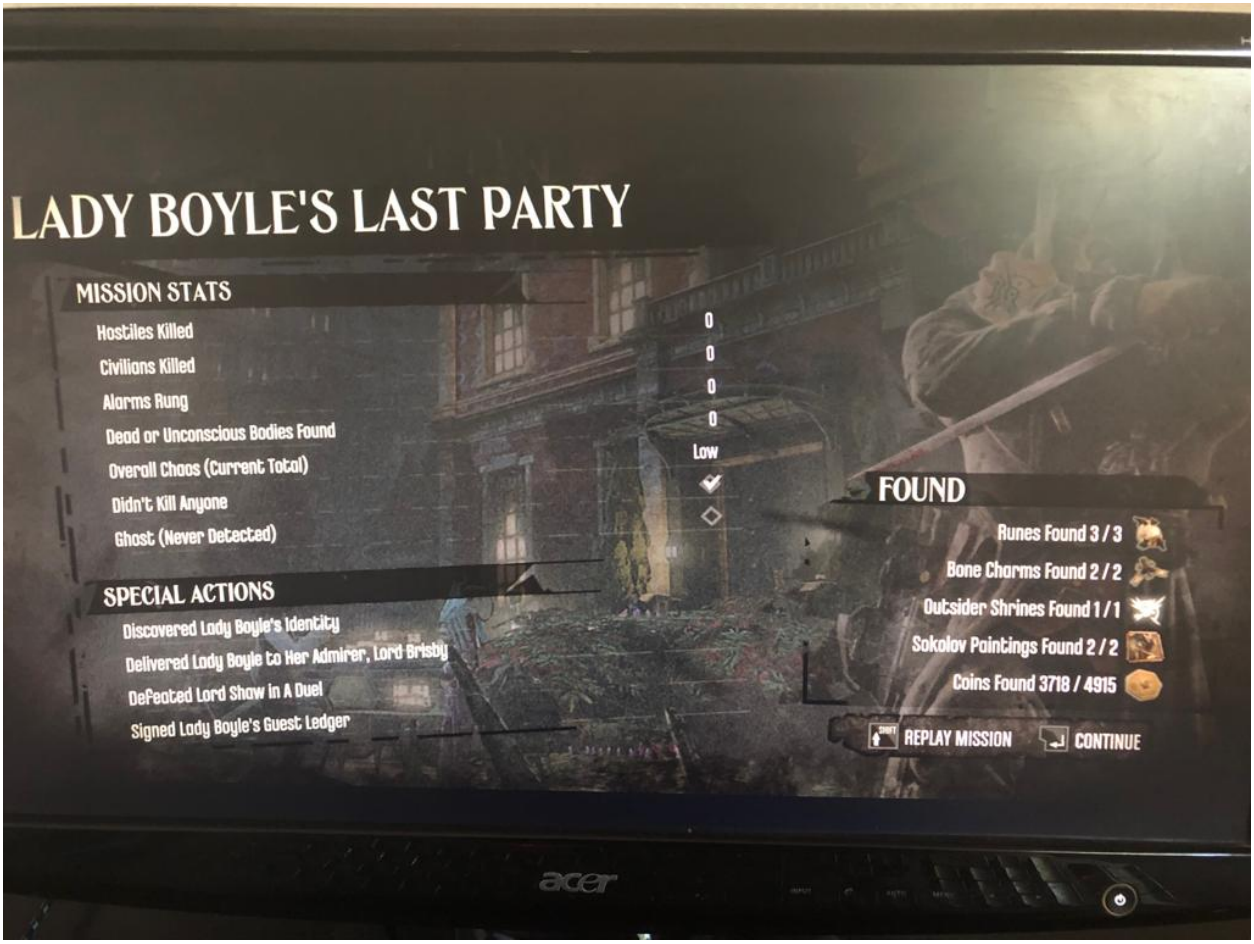


Figure 1.3 Screen capture of mission statistics - Lady Boyle's Last Party *(Dishonored* 2012).

In a representational game like *Dishonored*, the player is represented by an avatar that acts out the player's will. The player chooses to play a role, that of protagonist, *Corvo Attano* (Bethesda Softworks LLC, 2016). This protagonist is seldom seen by the player directly as *Dishonored* is a first-person game, additionally, *Corvo Attano* wears a mask for most of the game.

Figure 1.4 *Corvo Attano* game art – (*Dishonored,* 2012)

As Adams (2014, p. 319) states; “the most interesting games offer multiple ways to win”. *Dishonored* presents intermediate challenges throughout the game, each possible to overcome with a different moral choice. The outcomes of the plot and in-game environment vary according to these morality-based gameplay choices, but the game’s victory condition, or top-level challenge can be completed with any, or a combination of, these approaches (Onyett, 2012).

1.2.3. Relevance of the topic

The focus of this study is on gamers’ perception of their own morality and their morality-based behaviour and choices in-game. In this regard, there is a distinct lack of research into morality system gameplay, particularly in South Africa. A recent study was conducted on moral positioning in video games by Triberti, Villani and Riva (2015), however, this study was quantitative, lacked an in-depth, qualitative exploration and a South African context, and the level of researcher participation was low. Generally, given several moral panic debates and research on gaming reporting mostly on the negative effects of gaming (Van Rooij, Ferguson, Colder Carras, Kardefelt-Winther, Shi, Przybylski, 2018), it becomes imperative to gain an in-depth

understanding of gamers' perspectives of in-game choices. Since the recent classification of gaming addiction as a disorder on the DSM-5, Van Rooij *et al.* (2018, p. 6) cite a lack of transparency and methodological rigour and express optimism that "valuable qualitative work is starting to appear more widely" and propose "better research into the role that screen time plays in our lives".

Consequently, research into gaming and morality with a framework of both ludology and social constructionism, may add both a novel perspective and more understanding of gaming in communication studies (Montola, 2012). Further benefits of this study may be found in the association of moral positioning and gameplay choices as a platform for exploration of social and moral behaviours within a secure, virtual, environment (Triberti *et al*., 2015).

1.2.4. Relationship of the topic to the discipline of communication

Social psychologist, philosopher and sociologist George Herbert Mead (1934) posited that social activity is about communication, where people use a collective system of symbols to exchange ideas with each other. Play and games, being symbolic activities, are, for Mead, a form of communication (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2013). Games can also be seen as linked to social evolution as Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1971) suggest that games reflect how society has evolved; the more complex the social system becomes, the more advanced its games become. Marshal McLuhan (1964) states that gaming is tied to culture and views games as being social reactions and extensions of a culture.

Video games allow creative expression (Egenfeldt-Neilson, 2013; Flanagan, 2009), and it is important to consider video games as a media form with intrinsic procedural characteristics and not just as representational objects (Egenfeldt-Nielson, 2013). This is further supported by King and Krzywinska (2006) who state that games and gameplay communicate from within frameworks within which meaning is generated, and do not exist in a cultural vacuum.

Authors such as Murray (1997), Bogost (2007, 2008), Wardrip-Fruin (2009) and Flanagan (2009) have developed specific theories about how videogames communicate ideas. Bogost (2007, p. ix) proposes that one of the basic properties of the computer is procedural rhetoric, "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions…". Video games have cultural meaning as computational artefacts and it is not just the look of games, but what can be done in,

and with them that produce meaning (Egenfeldt-Neilson, 2013). Egenfeldt-Neilson (2013) further identifies the link between games and the discipline of communication by viewing games as communication media, communicating ideas and values and including aspects such as strategy, education and advertising. The International Communication Association, an academic association focussed on studying, educating, and the application of all aspects of human and mediated communication, has a Game Studies Division, recognising that video games offer opportunities for the study of human communication involving multidisciplinary approaches and merged disciplines (ICA, 2016).

1.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY TERMS

Key terms conceptualised for the purposes of this study include games and video games, violent video games, gamers, game design: core mechanics and storytelling engine, gameplay, and morality systems gameplay.

1.3.1 Games and video games

Adams (2014) defines a game as a form of play activity within a pretended reality, where participants attempt to achieve goals within a given set of rules. Brathwaite and Schreiber (2009) state that games may or may not have goals, conflict, other players, start and end points, and decision making, but that all games are activities with rules. As a subset of this definition, ‘video games’ refer to a game in digital form, mediated by a computer, using a digital video screen, played on an electronic device (Adams, 2014; Brathwaite & Schreiber, 2009). Multiple terms for video games are in common usage, such as ‘computer games’, ‘electronic games’ or ‘digital entertainment‘. These terms are not necessarily synonymous: for example, a computer game may refer to games on a personal computer whereas an electronic game may refer to electronic toys, and the term ‘video game’ may be used to refer exclusively to console gaming (Tavinor, 2008).

Video games are unique and differ from other media forms due to an inherently interactive nature that requires active participation from the user (Adams, 2015; Juul, 2010; Murnane, 2018; Vorderer, 2000) and “due to the rules which define and restrict interactive play” (Cuttell, 2015, p. 56).

For the purpose of this study the term ‘video game’ will be used to refer to all digital games that create a fabricated reality within which the individuals who interact with the game follow rules in order to achieve goals.

1.3.2 Violent video games

This study does not use the distinction included in a 2010 proposed, and ultimately rejected, California law regarding the sale of violent video games in which video game violent acts were only considered so if perpetrated against the image of a human being (Chesley Fisk, 2010). Maria Chesley Fisk, Deputy Director of Health Games Research, defines violent video games as video games where the representation of violence is the ideal or even only means of conflict resolution (Chesley Fisk, 2010). This definition is not utilised in this study as *Dishonored* provides viable alternatives to violence for conflict resolution in the form of confrontation-avoiding stealth gameplay (Bethesda Softworks LLC, 2016; Purchese, 2012), however, violence is still a facilitated option. Gabbiadini *et. al*, (2014, p. 451) state that violent video games are those games that “glorify and reward immoral behaviours (e.g., murder, assault, rape motor vehicle theft)”. Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) draw upon Baron and Richardson’s (1994) definition of aggression to define virtual violence as *“*any behavior that follows the intention to do harm to other social characters in a video game, while the game characters are motivated to avoid the harm-doing*.”* (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010, p. 95).

For the purposes of this study, a violent video game is defined as a video game in which the player has the option of killing or physically assaulting an NPC, or in the case of multiplayer games, another player. *Dishonored* allows for violent acts to be committed against both human and non-human NPCs, and although alternatives to violence will still allow a victory condition, for the purposes of this study, *Dishonored* is considered to be a violent video game.

1.3.3 Gamers

Within academic discourse there is a lack of an integrative definition for the term ‘gamer’ (Grooten & Kowert, 2015). As a general definition, gamers are people who elect to spend time playing video games for the purpose of entertainment, with the term ‘gamer’ suggesting a regular interaction with videogames, but not excluding occasional players who do not purchase games (Interactive Software Federation of Europe, 2010). This definition is limited as it does not draw a distinction

between the term ‘players’ who play video games as a normal part of their media usage (Juul, 2010) and the term ‘gamer’ that more closely refers to the level of personal importance assigned by that individual to the act of gaming (Grooten & Kowert, 2015). The term ‘gamer’ is actively debated among researchers as either simply those individuals who play video games or a more complex identifier of a personal and social identity (Grooten & Kowert, 2015).

The term ‘gamer’ is considered by some to be “culturally obsolete” (Grooten & Kowert, 2015, p. 71) as it expresses outdated negative connotations and stereotypes (Alexander, 2014; Kowert & Oldmeadow, 2012; Kowert, 2014; Shaw, 2012). A comprehensive and current definition of the term ‘gamer’ includes an individual who self-identifies as a gamer, as a representative of a gaming community, within situational, socio-cultural contexts and encompassing secondary virtual identities (Grooten & Kowert, 2015). The term is not simply a categorisation of people who play video games, but an indication of personal and social identity.

In this study ‘gamers’ are defined as those individuals who elect to play video games of their own volition, irrespective of demographic differentiators such as age, race and gender identity, as a part of their regular pattern of media consumption, who self-identify as gamers and have perceived membership in a larger socio-cultural gaming community.

1.3.4 Game design: core mechanics

Salen and Zimmerman (2003) define the core mechanic of a video game as the essential and repetitive play activity performed by players in a video game. Simple games may have a core mechanic of basic directional movement only, however more intricate, modern games tend to have a core mechanic that includes an interrelated group of activities and patterns of actions combined into multifaceted activity (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003). The core mechanics are the fundamental aspects that allow the player to interact with the pretend reality of the game; they generate gameplay and manage the player events and in-game events (Adams, 2014). Game mechanics “are the rules of the game and represent the things players can do” and the core mechanics define the game’s core idea (Heussner, Finley, Brandes Hepler & Lemay, 2015, p. 25). The core mechanics of a video game can be seen as a symbolic and mathematical model of the general rules or mechanics of the game; the rules may indicate variance in movement speed among game characters, but the core mechanics of the game will state exactly how fast each game character can move (Adams, 2014).

1.3.5 Game design: the storytelling engine

The storytelling engine manages the narrative events of the game and keeps track of the progress of the story and determines what part of the plot comes next (Adams, 2014). The core mechanics and the storytelling engine work together to create a unified experience, play and narrative (Adams, 2014, p. 219). For the purpose of this study game design is defined as the design of both the core mechanics and the storytelling engine of a video game.

1.3.6 Gameplay

Gameplay involves player interaction with a video game; the challenges governed by the core mechanics and the storytelling engine of the game (Heussner *et al*., 2015; Lanzinger, 2011). Gameplay consists of the game challenges that the player must meet in order to achieve the objective of the game, as well as the actions permitted to a player in order to meet those challenges (Adams, 2014). For the purpose of this study gameplay refers to all in-game challenges and player actions throughout the video game play experience.

1.3.7 Morality-system gameplay

Moral judgement tasks have become a popular plot mechanism in video game play (Bartel, 2015; Deen *et al*., 2015) and unlike other media, the actionable nature of video games means that the gamer becomes the moral actor and is not simply an observer and evaluator (Cermak-Sassenrath, 2015; Murnane, 2018; Weaver & Lewis, 2012). Moral choice in games can be compelling when the choices are connected to the game narrative and when the outcomes of moral choice have significant impact upon the game (Zoss, 2010). For the purposes of this study, a morality-system is defined as the core mechanics and storytelling engine of a video game working in tandem in order for morality-based decisions on the player's part, such as lethal violence against an NPC versus a non-confrontational stealth approach, to have an impact upon the continuing gameplay, the game world and the story.

1.4 TYPE OF STUDY

1.4.1 Interpretivist paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm is practically concerned with how ordinary people manage aspects of their everyday lives, and interpretivists seek to gain an understanding of the world of lived experience from the viewpoint of those who live it (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Maree, 2012; Neuman, 2011). As Bryman and Bell (2011) articulate; interpretivists emphasise the value of understanding human behaviour.

Interpretivists posit that there cannot be a universal truth about social reality, as social reality consists of meaningful actions, artefacts and events that must be understood from different people's perspectives (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014) within their specific reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Habermas, 1998). Mutual understanding and the sharing of meaning will count more to interpretivists than empirical observation when seeking knowledge (du Plooy-Cilliers., 2014).

According to interpretivists, human life cannot be understood through observation from an external reality and can only be understood from within by focussing on people's subjective experiences and their construction of their social world through the sharing of meaning and interaction with others (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Maree, 2007). Neuman (2011) and du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) echo this necessity for a social context for understanding the social world and state that context is required to discern meaning of social action or statements.

This interpretivist study is concerned with how gamers perceive their own morality and their morality-based gameplay decisions. Participants will report on their own perceptions of their realities and their actions in the constructed in-game reality. Thus, deeper insight and meaning of the social construct of morality-based gameplay will be sought by engaging with participants' subjective experiences of their social contexts. The following aspects form the philosophical foundation of interpretivism.

1.4.1.1 Ontology

Ontology concerns people's beliefs about existence and the nature of reality and relates to questions of whether or not objective truth and reality can exist (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Finke &

Gantz, 1996; Guba 1990). Interpretivists believe that reality is a social construct reliant on the meanings that people attribute to their own lived experiences and interactions with other people, and therefore do not believe in an objective reality that is experienced in the same way by all people (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Interpretivists view the social world as changeable and open to alteration by people's perceptions (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Thus, Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that qualitative researchers must be open to the idea that there are multiple realities. Ontology in an interpretivist study considers reality to be a subjective construct gained through meaning generated by lived experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Thus, an interpretivist researcher will attempt to gain an understanding of a particular perspective of reality by engaging with the researched social phenomenon, taking the unique perspective, or perception of reality of the participants into consideration.

In this study individual participants will be interviewed to explore their perceptions of their own realities as related to both their own moral development and the morality-based gameplay decisions they make in their constructed in-game realities. In accordance with interpretivism, it is understood that each participant's reality will vary and thus a qualitative approach is judged as best suited to gain rich data about participants' varied, subjective perceptions (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). An auto-ethnography will also be conducted in order to gain an understanding of morality-based gameplay and may aid in connecting the exploration of the researcher's mind with interview participants' experiences of the phenomenon under study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Maso, 2001; Méndez, 2013). Autoethnographic approaches are by nature subjective (Creswell, 2012) which is an acknowledged aspect of the interpretivist approach (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

1.4.1.2 Epistemology

The term 'epistemology' stems from the Greek word for knowledge: *episteme* (Krauss, 2005) and is the study of the nature and limits of knowledge, and the ways of knowing (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the subject matter of social science is fundamentally different from the subject matter of the natural sciences. In the interpretivist paradigm, people are considered to be different from objects due to peoples' susceptible and changing nature and complex behaviour and responses; thus, people and objects cannot be studied in the same way (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). For interpretive social science, a theory must make sense to those being studied and allow others to gain a deeper understanding of the

reality of those being studied (Neuman, 2011). Social meaning and consequence will be distorted if the aspect under study is removed from the social context in which it occurs (Neuman, 2011), and consideration of this context is necessary in order to understand and interpret constructed meanings (Maree, 2007). From an interpretivist perspective, the social world is inextricably linked to human knowledge and Maree (2007) thus states that we must be aware of the subjectivity of research endeavours and must regard perceptions of the world as internal and connected to knowledge and understanding.

Maree (2007) further proposes that theoretical and conceptual frameworks are enriched through increased knowledge and understanding of the varied, constructed realities that can differ in place and time within the social world. Maree (2007) proposes a two-way relationship between theory and research, where social theory informs understanding of social issues, which then guides research decisions. Epistemology in an interpretivist study has researchers making links between the theoretical and the empirical, with the ultimate aim being to provide insight into the way in which a specific group of people make sense of their lived experience (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Maree, 2007). Interpretivists are more likely to use inductive approaches to theory formulation, first collecting and analysing information before formulating a theory based on the information and analysis (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Within the social sciences particularly, truth is subjective, facts are not objective and neutral, but are changeable depending on context and interpretation of information. Meaning can only be assigned if the social context is taken into consideration (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Maree, 2007).

This study makes use of a research methodology that is sensitive to the context of participants and does not generalise beyond that context or aim to predict or control outcomes, as is the norm for epistemology in interpretivist studies (du Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

1.4.1.3 Axiology

According to du Plooy-Cilliers (2014), axiology is an important aspect to any paradigm and concerns the purpose of human inquiry, the study of values and value judgements centred on the question ‘why do we do this?’. The role of value in research is questioned and insight is given into what is valued within certain paradigms or traditions (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Heron (1996) identifies values as guiding all human action. He further argues that researchers utilise axiological

skill by communicating their own values as a foundation for what they research and how they do it. du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) supports this and states that interpretivists do not seek to conduct value-free research, they value the multifaceted understanding of unique realities, and the interpretations of participants and the researcher are taken into consideration (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

This interpretivist research study utilises semi-structured, personal, in-depth interviews; a conversation between the researcher and participant (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014) which can be perceived from an axiological perspective as an indication that greater value is placed on personal interaction than the anonymous responses that would be collected through a survey (Heron, 1996). The further use of an autoethnography is axiologically compatible with an interpretivist approach as it is indicative of the value placed on the researcher's interpretation of the studied context (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014) from the perspective of an "insider" (Cuttell, 2015, p. 57).

1.4.2 Basic research

The goal of basic research is to increase knowledge and gain a fuller understanding of a subject (Davis, 2014) without a particular need for application of the attained knowledge (Greek & Greek, 2010). Basic research is used to develop a number of aspects utilised in research methodology, particularly for qualitative studies in the social sciences (Davis 2014; Kumar 2011). This study is designed to gain knowledge of how participating gamers perceive their own moral positioning and their morality-based gameplay choices when playing the game *Dishonored*. Results from this cross-sectional study cannot be generalised and the desired objective is increased knowledge and understanding as opposed to data that can be broadly applied or used to solve a problem (Pascoe, 2014). However, in the process of examining theories specified in the theoretical framework in order to explore gamer self-perception regarding morality and gameplay, new knowledge will be gained, and the knowledge base expanded. Beri (2010) states that basic research adds to the knowledge base of a field and in the case of this research project, the disciplines of communication and media studies. This research study is basic as it aims to increase knowledge and gain a fuller understanding of morality-based gameplay, an area that has yet to be extensively studied.

1.4.3 Exploratory research

This is an exploratory study designed to explore the perceptions of personal moral positioning and morality-based gameplay decisions of participants during gameplay. The aim of exploratory research is to gain new information about a previously under researched topic (Davis, 2014). This is congruent with the relatively new discipline of video game studies (Apperley, 2006) in which few studies have been conducted, even fewer of which are qualitative in nature. Babbie (2014) expounds the value of exploratory studies, as they are necessary in social science research as a means of producing new insights into research topics. The purpose of exploratory research is to ask questions to gain an understanding of a certain phenomenon (Babbie, 2014; Davis, 2014; Gray, 2009). This research study will utilise personal, in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of participants' perception of their own morality and their morality-based gameplay choices. Exploratory research is useful for gaining in-depth knowledge of persistent phenomena (Babbie, 2007). Video games have become a multi-billion-dollar industry globally and an unavoidable presence in the global entertainment industry (Buckingham, 2006; Flew & Humphreys, 2005; Wolf, 2006) and can thus be considered a recurring phenomenon.

1.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

1.5.1 Qualitative research

This study utilised a qualitative approach, which according to Creswell and Creswell (2017), is based on the supposition that participants' personal perceptions form a part of their reality and thus need to be considered as a key source of information. Qualitative research is defined as the endeavour to collect rich, descriptive data to build an all-inclusive description of a particular context in order to better understand it (Hale & Astolfi, 2015; Maree, 2007). The purpose of this study is to understand gamers' experiences and perceptions of their own moral development and morality-based gameplay choices. In order to effectively achieve this, a qualitative research design is used in order to explore and describe the participants' subjective perception of the research topic and obtain rich, descriptive data. Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013) state that many kinds of information cannot be captured adequately with quantitative methods, and require words gained from open-ended questions and other methods utilised in qualitative research.

1.5.2 Cross-sectional

Cross sectional research design creates a general picture of a phenomenon at one point in time (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013; Maree, 2007). This design is utilised in this research study where participants are questioned about their morality-based gameplay and personal moral development to gain an understanding of their perception of their own morality-based gameplay at that time. The focus in this study is not on how the social phenomenon of morality-based gameplay has changed over time, but how it is perceived by participants at one point in time, thus a cross-sectional design is utilised.

1.6 FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.6.1 The research problem

Currently the predominant discourse around ethics and video games centres around the content of games and their effects on players (Klemm & Pieters, 2017; Schulzke, 2010), with games being evaluated based on violent or ethically problematic content (Cuttell, 2015). This focus, however, omits the role of core mechanics in the form of behavioural design, in addition to content, as an aspect of appeal for play (Klemm & Pieters, 2017). Behavioural design is defined as "user-centered design beyond simple usability of a product (or game) and encompasses design for behavioral-level responses" (Norman and Ortony 2003, p. 4; Klemm & Pieters, 2017, p. 82). Phrased differently, conversations about ethical or morality-based choices of gamers need to consider the impact of game design that directs players towards certain moral actions (Wilcox, 2018). Elements of gamer personality and motivation may also have an influence on in-game moral choices, and aspects such as factors of enjoyment of games (Quick, Atkinson and Lin, 2012), player motivation domains (Yee, 2006; VandenBerghe, 2012), and player personality (Quick, Atkinson and Lin, 2012) should all be considered as relevant when exploring morality and gaming.

Existing research in the field of morality and video games is predominantly from an 'etic' perspective, where the significance or meaning of a social context is presented from an outsider's perspective (Creswell, 2012; Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990). Little qualitative research has been conducted on gamers' perception of their own morality and their morality-based gameplay choices. The use of an immersive-participatory research method (Cuttell, 2015) will provide an

'emic' or insider's perspective (Creswell, 2012), and may prove a source of thick, descriptive data useful in producing new insight (Babbie, 2014) into an under researched social context.

Video games are distinct from other media forms in that they involve participatory play that impacts upon outcomes (Adams, 2015; Murnane, 2018; Vorderer, 2000), and progression through the game cannot take place without the individual playing the game. Gamer identification is complex and navigates both real and virtual worlds, with a gamer's identity being constructed with personal, group and virtual aspects (Grooten & Kowert, 2015). Identifying as a gamer is a choice that involves social discourse and cultural capital (Shaw, 2013). Thus, when researching morality and video games it may prove valuable to explore gamers' perceptions of their own moral positioning and the various contexts in which they make in-game moral choices as opposed to providing interpretations of significance of choice from an external perspective in isolation.

1.6.2 Research questions

What motivations do *Dishonored* gamers provide for their in-game morality-based gameplay choices?

What motivations does the researcher provide for her in-game morality-based gameplay choices?

In what ways are gamers' perceptions of their own morality enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored*?

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this study will consist of an exploratory qualitative inquiry involving the data collection methods of semi-structured, personal, in-depth interviews making use of an interview schedule (See Appendix A) with open-ended questions, and an autoethnography. Data will be thematically analysed through an iterative process of data coding, analysis and interpretation in order to gain insight into and understanding of the context of morality-system gameplay and the lived experience (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014) of South African *Dishonored* players.

1.7.1 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis, or most fundamental element in the analysis of data (Babbie, 2014; Wagner, 2012), for this study is individuals in the form of South African gamers who play or have played the game *Dishonored*.

1.7.2 Population and sampling

The population of this study, or the total group of people from whom information is required in order to answer the research questions (Pascoe, 2014; Wagner *et al*., 2012; Wiid and Diggines, 2013), is all South African gamers who play or have played the game *Dishonored* of their own volition. The population of this study shares characteristics of being South African gamers and having elected to play *Dishonored.*

A research sample is the segment of the total population that is accessible to the researcher and who then participate in the research study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Pascoe, 2014, Wagner *et al*., 2012). For this study the sample is South African gamers who have played the game *Dishonored,* who are accessible to the researcher and who are over the age of 18 years. The sampling method that will be used in this study is a purposive sampling method called snowball sampling, or chain referral sampling (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019; Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Maree, 2007; Trochim, 2006) where initial contact is made with a unit of analysis, or South African *Dishonored* gamer who then provides contact and access to other potential study participants who may otherwise be difficult to access through means such as records or databases (Pascoe, 2014).

The sample size for this study will be limited to seven individual gamers, a number appropriate for sourcing a concentration of rich, in-depth information (Bryman, 2008; Pascoe, 2014).

1.7.3 Data collection

Data collection is a sequence of interconnected activities intended to gather information useful for answering research questions (Creswell, 2017; Silverman, 2014). The data collection methods for this study will include semi-structured, personal, in-depth interviews conducted in-person utilising an interview schedule containing open-ended questions, as well as an autoethnographic account of the study.

1.7.4 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis relates to the organising of data by reduction; selecting, refining and sorting data into codes and categories to explore patterns and connections; as well as the display of data to organise information so that conclusions may be drawn (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2013). In this study a qualitative content analysis will be conducted which will involve iteratively and systematically analysing research data to gain understanding in order to richly describe a social phenomenon within the studied context (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014) of morality-system gameplay. Data interpretation will take place in an interconnected and iterative process along with data analysis in consideration of the research questions (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Creswell, 2012), and within the general studied context of morality-system gameplay. Data display or presentation involves the organisation of information in order to allow the drawing of conclusions (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and will take the form of extended text, verbatim quotes derived from interviews and an autoethnographic report, as well as tables and diagrams in order to clearly illustrate data categorisation.

1.8 FEASIBILITY OF THE STUDY

The feasibility of the study refers to evidence that the research study is achievable with regards to time, resources, validity and reliability, and the attainability of research objectives (Koonin, 2014). The feasibility of this study is assured through trustworthiness and its dimensions of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, meeting ethical requirements, and meeting the available time and budget. These dimensions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance will be obtained from the Monash University ethics committee prior to start of primary research. Explanatory letters will be sent to participants and letters of consent will be obtained from participants prior to commencement of interviews to ensure informed consent. Research participants will be informed of all ethics measures to ensure their comfort. Research participants will be de-identified to ensure confidentiality and that no names will be linked to any potentially sensitive data. No harm will be done to participants and at no point in the research study will participants be deceived. No incentives will be provided for participation in this research study. All participants will be notified that they will be entitled to a copy of the aggregate research findings and may contact the researcher to request a copy, should they wish. Ethical concerns related to autoethnography utilisation will be mitigated through ensuring that the researcher is familiar with the studied context and acknowledges her impact on the context of the study. The researcher will critically reflect on herself in a process of reflexivity, and report honestly and with integrity on all aspects of the autoethnographic study to prevent the generation of biased data.
All data will be protected and stored securely for a period of five years. Every effort will be made to ensure honesty and integrity in all research activities.

1.10 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter an outline of the proposed research study is provided, comprising: the context of the study, conceptualisation of key terms, the type of study, the research approach, the research problem and questions, the research methodology, and finally ethical considerations relevant to the study.

The purpose of this research study is to gain an in-depth understanding of gamers' perception of their own morality, and the morality-based choices they make during gameplay. The game *Dishonored* was selected for this research study due to its clearly delineated morality-system.

This exploratory, qualitative study will be conducted from an interpretivist paradigm in order to provide an insider's perspective into an under researched social context. Data collection methods that will be utilised in this study include in-depth interviews and an autoethnographic report. Data analysis and interpretation will be conducted using qualitative content analysis and thematic coding. Every effort will be made to ensure honesty and integrity in all research activities.

In Chapter Two existing literature on the topic of games, video games and gamers is explored as related to the contexts of morality and morality-system gameplay.

1.11 EXPOSITION OF THE STUDY

In Chapter Two existing research on the topic, relevant to this research study, are presented. Firstly, an exploration of games and video games is undertaken focusing specifically on morality systems gameplay and secondly gamers' personalities, motivations, self-perception, identity and morality are discussed.

In Chapter Three, the theoretical foundation of the study is presented. Social constructionism, ludology, and identification theory all form the theoretical foundation that underpins this study.

In Chapter Four, the research design and methodology are provided. This includes, but is not limited to, the units of analysis, population and sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation methods. The rationale for the selection of this methodology will be explained and the benefits and drawbacks of the selected methodology made clear. The connection between the value of selected methods and the purpose of this research study will be explained and the chapter will conclude by noting ethical issues and implications involved in completing this study.

In Chapter Five, the data collection methodology undertaken is presented, including the use of semi-structured, personal, in-depth interviews and an autoethnographic account of the study. A qualitative thematic data analysis will be interpreted and presented through a systematic and iterative approach.

In Chapter Six, the findings, limitations and recommendations of the study are offered and recommendations for future research will be made along with concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 2 GAMES AND GAMERS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The medium under study in this research study is video games, specifically the Bethesda Softworks (2016) game *Dishonored* (Dishonored, 2015). In order to gain a deeper understanding of gamer self-perception of morality and morality-based gameplay decisions, it is necessary to unpack certain ludological jargon and terminology. This chapter explores the concepts of games and video games related to gameplay and morality systems gameplay as well as personality, motivation, self-perception, social identity and morality.

2.2 ON GAMES AND VIDEO GAMES

In this section the concept of play and games is explored as they relate to the notion of 'real' and the nature of video games and morality-system gameplay is outlined.

2.2.1 Play and games

Johan Huizinga (1971) identified the idea of the magic circle in which he explicates the reality created by pretending when playing games. The magic circle delineates the boundary between the tangible world and the play world. Theoreticians of play have since adapted this term to refer to the "mental universe established when a player pretends" (Adams, 2015, p. 4). Consequently, the term 'magic circle' has come to be used as a metaphor to emphasise the unique nature of video games (Gergen, 2015; Salen & Zimmerman, 2003). Arguments have been made by a number of scholars (Aupers, 2007; Castranova, 2005; Consalvo, 2009; Copier, 2005) that the magic circle does not have the strong boundary originally suggested by Huizinga (1971). This boundary between the imagined and the tangible is in fact far weaker because it is being crossed back and forward in video games by cultural values, social capital and financial transactions (Aupers, 2015). In video games, the magic circle is created when the player joins the game and follows the game's rules and ceases to exist when the player logs out or finishes the video game. Play is an ongoing process and is inextricably linked to those who create or play it and can only exist as long as they player commits to it. The end of player action marks the end of their play. Huizinga's magic circle persists only until play concludes, whereupon the player returns to the

real world (Salem & Zimmerman 2004). The ordinary rules of life apply inside the 'magic circle' in addition to the game rules (Consalvo, 2009), and actions in either world may have impact upon the other (Castranova, 2005).

Game play is differentiated as a form of entertainment from presentational media forms such as books or film by the fact that play is participatory and involves choices that affect progression and outcomes (Adams, 2015; Murnane, 2018; Vorderer, 2000). Repeated consumption of presentational forms will progress and end in the same way every time but play involves freedom of choice that is limited by set rules and may have varying progression and outcomes in each experience. The computer is a medium with high levels of interactivity that depends on active, decisive participation from the user and play is dependent on players and their ability to influence the game (Juul, 1999). Games themselves may be highly structured through the core mechanics and goal driven actions. Play, however, is concerned only with its own existence and is entirely unrelated to outcomes beyond itself (Kuchlich, 2004). The activity of play is progressive, not a product or end goal (Cermak-Sassenrath, 2015).

Sun-ha Hong (2015, p. 37) describes the notion of 'real' in gaming as being "real enough" for a gamer to gain messages through a process of suspending disbelief and interacting with the game as though it is real, despite knowing otherwise. Gamers are required to interact with situations, not merely observe them and thus games considered to be 'real enough' may have the ability to leave an impression and shape players' cultural attitudes (Chen, 2013; Murnane, 2018).

2.2.2 Video games and morality system gameplay

Gameplay is the crucial quality of video games and while games may contain stories or narratives, these cannot subsume gameplay as the core essence of video games. This interactivity is what differentiates video games from other media forms; the gamer does not simply watch the screen but wants to interact and influence (Cermak-Sassenrath, 2015; Klimmt *et al*., 2009; Murnane, 2018; Weaver & Lewis, 2012). This interactivity takes the form of moral choices in many video games (Bartel, 2015; Deen, 2015) and these moral choices can be captivating to gamers when the choices are connected to the story and when the outcomes of moral choice have significant impact upon the game (Zoss, 2010). As defined previously, morality system gameplay refers to the design of a video game whereby the core mechanics and storytelling engine work together in

order for morality-based decisions on the player's part to have an impact upon the continuing gameplay, game world and story.

Pereira Santos, *et al*. (2018) state that a combination of a strong narrative and gameplay can create compelling ethical dilemmas that can then encourage player immersion and the feeling that players' in-game actions have meaningful consequences. The game world has to adhere to a set of rules that the player accepts in order for this immersion to be maintained (Cuttell, 2015). Moral challenges in video games may lead players to experience moral discomfort (Bartel, 2015). This discomfort may be experienced despite an awareness of a lack of real-world consequences, particularly in single-player games, such as *Dishonored*, where any violence is perpetrated against virtual beings. Debates about moral responsibility of gamers are complex, particularly when the game's design guides players towards certain moral actions (Klemm & Pieters, 2017; Wilcox, 2018). When ethical aspects of video games are discussed the issue of the effects of violent content is usually the prime topic, however the effects of game mechanics should also be considered due to their being a primary factor in the appeal of games (Klemm & Pieters, 2017). The topic of moral issues related to video games is further explored in later sections of this chapter.

2.3 ON GAMERS

In this section gamers' motivations and personality, self-perception and identity are explored as well as existing literature relating to violence, morality and gaming.

2.3.1 Motivation

In 2006, Yee furthered the study of player types in multi-user dungeons (MUDs) to consider the motivations of players of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOs) and identify differences between player personalities. Yee identified five motivations for MMO players: namely; achievement, relationship, immersion, escapism and manipulation (Yee, 2006). Yee (2006) states that the necessity of identifying motivational differences among gamers as the initial step to gaining an understanding of more complex behaviours. The achievement factor identified by Yee (2006) measures players' wish to gain power in the game world through achieving goals and accumulating items of that may increase the players in-game power. Yee's (2006) relationship

factor measures a players need to interact with other users with the aim of forming significant, supportive relationships.

A high immersion score, according to Yee (2006), is indicative of a desire to live in a fantasy world and the enjoyment of becoming someone else. This factor is closely related to, but distinct from, the escapism factor, which is indicative of a player's desire to use the game as a means of avoidance or escape from the concerns and responsibilities of their real life (Yee, 2006). Finally, Yee (2006) identifies the manipulation factor, which measures a player's inclination to use other players for their own gain and is indicative of a player who may enjoy dominating and controlling other users.

In 2012, Quick, Atkinson and Lin conducted a survey that demonstrated that personality characteristics are linked to how all players, not just avid or 'hard-core' players, perceive gaming experiences. They further state that specific design elements in games can be identified that may lead to enjoyment and that these game design elements and personality characteristics must be considered in tandem as both are core parts of the gaming experience. Quick *et. al.*'s 2012 study draws upon the five-factor model of psychological research, or O.C.E.A.N. method which explains the human psyche and personality according to five broad dimensions and considers these dimensions according to their connection to players' enjoyment of games. The five-factor model of psychological research, or O.C.E.A.N. method is comprised of a number of factors, namely: openness to new experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism - or being prone to experiencing negative emotions. (McCrae and John, 1992).

The O.C.E.A.N. factor of openness to new experience is indicative of imagination and creativity in an individual that wishes to explore and experience an adventurous life. Conscientiousness concerns how individuals control and direct impulses to shape our world in the way they wish. This factor may be characterised with ambition and self-directed drive. The factor of extraversion deals with people's tendency to source external stimulation, potentially the company of others. Agreeableness is characterised by cooperation and social harmony, caring about others and demonstrating empathy. Finally, the factor of neuroticism reflects how intensely an individual experiences negative emotions (McCrae and John, 1992; VandenBerghe, 2012).

Quick, Atkinson and Lin (2012) identified six factors that represent a changeable game design feature that impacts upon enjoyment of the game. The first factor was named 'fantasy' and symbolises the players' enjoyment of a fantasy setting and roleplaying of a character, potentially

one with different characteristics to their own real-life characteristics. The second factor identified by Quick, Atkinson and Lin (2012) was named ‘exploration’ and represents the players’ desire to search out the unknown, collect strange items or objects and find hidden places. The factor of ‘fidelity’ is identified by Quick, Atkinson and Lin (2012) as enjoyment of realistic, high definition graphics. The fourth factor is that of companionship, seen where the player enjoys playing video games with other individuals. The factor of challenge is identified by Quick, Atkinson and Lin (2012) as representing the players’ enjoyment of mastering challenging games, solving obstacles and puzzles and competing. The final factor identified by Quick, Atkinson and Lin (2012) that impacts upon gamer enjoyment is competition which represents the enjoyment that players feel in competing with others online and displaying one’s skills in front of others. The competition factor does not necessarily denote aggression or dominance and can also represent friendly competition with others.

Jason VandenBerghe (2012) delivered a lecture at the 2012 Game Developers’ Conference where he correlated five domains of play that may fulfil each of the five motivation domains of the psychological five factor model. The five-factor model, or O.C.E.A.N. method analyses the human psyche and personality according to five broad dimensions. The five personality traits of the psychological model are: openness to new experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism - or being prone to experiencing negative emotions (McCrae and John, 1992. The aspects of a game that might be sought-out by players correlated to these personality traits are as follows: novelty, challenge, stimulation, harmony, and threat (VandenBerghe, 2012).

According to VandenBerghe’s theory (2012), the domain of Novelty maps to the factor of Openness to Experience and exemplifies new, interesting or exciting in-game elements. A player who is motivated by Novelty may wish to explore every part of a game-world, or even seek out ways to exploit the programming to find new or interesting ways to “break” the game.

The domain of Challenge maps to the O.C.E.A.N. factor of Conscientiousness and indicates the part of the game that requires self-discipline, effort and achievement. In line with VandenBerghe’s domains (2012), a player who seeks out Challenge as a primary motivator may choose to play in a non-violent, stealth-based manner because this is more challenging to them then a lethal playthrough. The domain of Challenge may appeal to a player who may disregard a personally

violent or aggressive personal moral positioning in favour of the greater challenge presented by stealth gameplay.

The domain of Stimulation is mapped by VandenBerghe (2012) to The O.C.E.A.N. factor of Extraversion: the exciting part of the game. This player may seek out a violent and chaotic playthrough regardless of personal moral positioning, because being chased by the game's NPCs may be more exciting than sneaking past them.

The domain of Harmony; connected to the O.C.E.A.N. factor of Agreeableness, is the part of the game where player behaviour (either positive or negative) towards other individuals or characters is facilitated.

Finally, the domain of Threat is linked to the Neuroticism factor, the negative tone of the game that may cause the player to feel stress, addiction, anger, or other negative emotions. A player who tends to seek out negative emotions, may seek out these emotions through the play domain of threat, seeking out danger or violence in-game with no thought to a personal aversion to violence or amorality in real life (VandenBerghe, 2012).

Each of VandenBerghe's (2012) domains of play can be further subdivided into six separate facets. The various facets within each domain of play are briefly outlined as follows:

The facets within the Domain of Novelty are described as follows:

- World (W) represents what the game offers in terms of settings, the game world.
- Predictability (P) represents what is offered regarding exploration and discovery mechanics as opposed to mechanics related to repetition or base building.
- Melodrama (M) refers to the presence of emotionally impactful narratives or story.
- Artistry (A) relates to the game's offer of compelling visuals and/ or audio.
- Puzzle (Pz) relates to the offer of puzzle-solving gameplay activities.
- Message (Ms) refers to the presence of socially progressive themes.

The facets within the Domain of Challenge are described as follows:

- Difficulty (D) refers to the presence of difficult-to-accomplish goals.
- Achievement (Ac) denotes the game's offer of accomplishment recognition.

- Order (O) refers to the presence of set completion mechanics, as well as grid-based play over free-board-play.
- Obligation (Ob) relates to the existence of guilds and other social obligation structures.
- Work (Wrk) denotes the presence of labour-intensive tasks and activities, also known as ‘grinding’.
- Cautiousness (C) presents the offer of precise, calculated play over ‘run-and-gun’ gameplay.

The facets within the Domain of Stimulation are described as follows:

- Expression (Ex) is the offer of positive socialisation opportunities.
- Crowd (Cr) refers to play with large groups of people.
- Role (R) is the game’s offer of leadership roles as opposed to follower roles.
- Pace (Pa) denotes the games offer of a high volume of activities.
- Thrill (Th) relates to high-intensity and exciting action.
- Joy (J) represents an offer of strong positive emotions in the player.

The facets within the Domain of Harmony are described as follows:

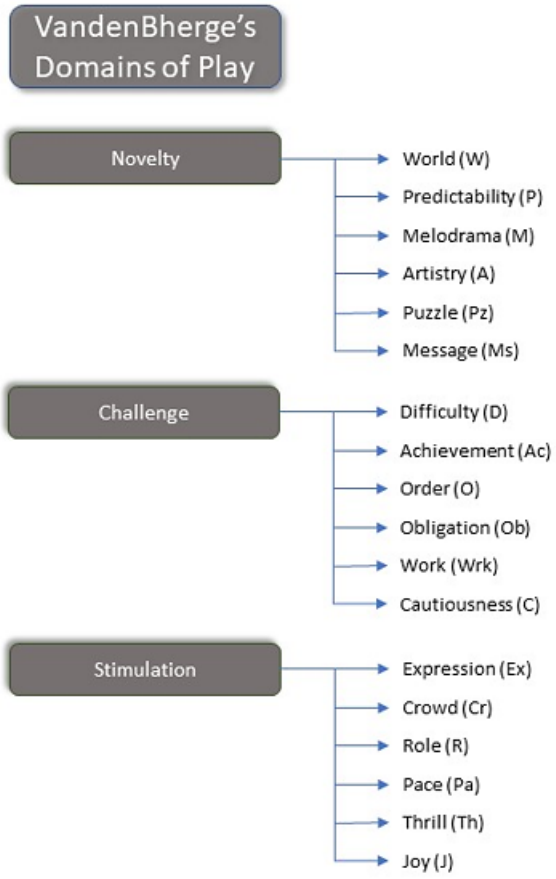
- Trust (T) means the offer of play that includes the potential to be betrayed in the game in unexpected ways.
- Integrity (I) is related to the facet of Trust as it refers to the ability, or lack thereof to betray other players.
- Help (H) denotes the offer of support roles.
- Cooperativeness (Co) refers to the potential for direct confrontation with other players. This means that pure player-versus-player (PvP) would have a low Cooperativeness score, team-based PvP would have a high one.
- Glory (G) refers to the game’s offer of publicly viewable achievements such as medals, scores, and rewards.
- Compassion (Cm) denotes the in-game presence of contexts that require an emotional understanding of characters.

The facets within the Domain of Threat are described as follows:

- Tension (Te) relates to the offering of aspects that cause fear in the player. The tension score will be high in a horror game.
- Provocation (Pr) relates to the opportunity to trigger player anger.

- Despair (De) refers to an offering of ‘hopeless’ contexts.
- Humiliation (Hu) denotes an offering that exposes player self-consciousness.
- Compulsion (Cp) relates to an offering of addictiveness in play.
- Danger (Da) refers to an offering where the game can actually hurt the player’s feelings.

(VandenBerghe, 2012).



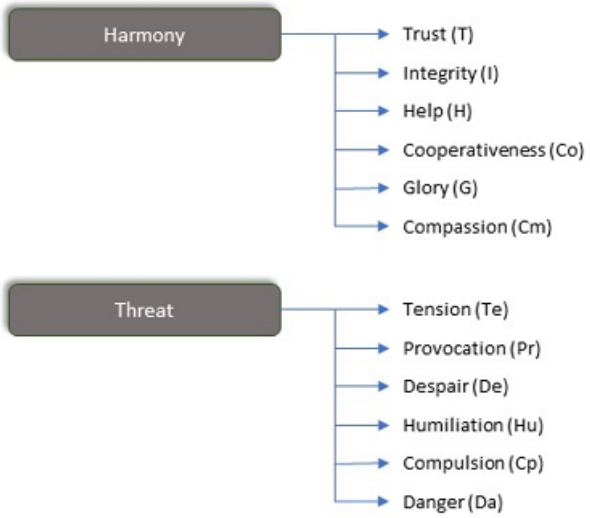


Figure 2.1. VandenBerghe's Domains of Play

In order to gain a rich understanding of how gamers' motivations impact upon their morality-based gameplay choices, it is necessary to examine the connection between morality-system gameplay and gamers' self-perception and identity construction.

2.3.2 Self-perception and identity

Self-perception is the term used to describe the way in which people come to understand their own principles and attitudes, based on their behaviour in a specific situation (Bem, 1972). For the purposes of this study, self-perception is defined as how individuals perceive themselves and their actions, specifically within the context of their own moral positioning and their morality system gameplay choices.

Shaw (2013) states that a gamer's identity is a conversation between social discourses and the individual themselves; a choice to identify as a gamer. The cultural capital of performing as a gamer and consuming gaming products, add to a gamer's identity within social contexts (De Grove, Courtois & Van Looy, 2015; Grooten & Kowert, 2015). Self-identifying as a gamer indicates a shared identity with the gaming community and culture where being a gamer is a part of a gamer's self-perception and is a declaration of involvement with a social group (Grooten & Kowert, 2015; Kowert, 2014). Grooten and Kowert (2015) further propose an integrated model of gamer identification that considers an overlap of gamer identity in the physical world and the in-game world, and consists of three levels: personal identity, group identity and virtual identity. This model

may aid efforts to understand how an individual may construct their own self-identification as a gamer within societal dimensions (Grooten & Kowert, 2015).

A number of modern game theorists argue that games shape identities because of their interactive nature and can instigate a change in the ways people construct their identities. (Aupers, 2015; Deen, Schouten & Bekker, 2015; Gergen, 2015). Video games allow gamers to experiment with their own identity, both within the game world and within the game's social context (Frissen, Lammes, De Lange, De Mul & Raessens, 2015). In terms of the social identity theory where social identity is an individual's sense of who they are based on their group memberships (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002; Tajifel &Turner, 1979), identifying with a group results in comparison with other groups. Gamers set themselves apart from those who do not play games and their shared identity as gamers helps them to concretise their developing social identities (Jansz, 2015). The work of Jansz and Tanis (2007, cited in Jansz, 2015) links social motivations to how social identity is manifested in the game context indicating that gamers may develop their social identities by categorising themselves, for example, as a 'hard-core' or 'casual' gamer.

Through the act of role-playing as the "digital representation of the player" (Aupers, 2015, p. 86) gamers can access different dimensions of themselves and gain experiences otherwise unavailable in real life. Richard Bartle's (2004) 'role-playing paradox' refers to this process as one in which the gamer 'becomes' a digital character with immersion achieved through the merging of gamer and a digital representative or avatar. Games that focus on emergent gameplay can facilitate role-play through which the gamer may explore different identities, although these identity constructive practices are contingent on a certain degree of unstructured gameplay and laxity in the rule set (Deen *et al*., 2015).

Deen, Schouten and Bekker (2015) posit that gamer's identification with gameplay is strongly related to a gamer's style of play in addition to specific game genres that in turn relate to dynamics such as the limits of the core mechanics, and aesthetics such as emotional responses stemming from gameplay, moral positioning, and cultural expression. Game design has seen an increasing trend in the inclusion of socio-cultural values and principles and this inclusion may facilitate a variety of different play styles that generate insight regarding gamer self-esteem and self-identity (Deen *et al.*, 2015). "By offering players various styles of play, players can experiment and develop various strategies and personal styles, enhancing their individuality in accordance with their personality." (Deen *et al*., 2015 p. 125). In video games; narrative and gameplay are

complementary elements that facilitate identity exploration; a further extension of the playful aspects of real life which shape identity. The nature of humans is connected to play, and digital technology such as video games have become a new means of exploring various dimensions of being human. (de Mul, 2015).

2.3.3 Violence, morality and gaming

There is no consensus in regard to morality and the content of violent video games (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010; Wonderly, 2008; Young, 2015) or the contribution of violent video games to violence in the real world (DeCamp & Ferguson, 2016). Theoretically, a shared moral attitude towards morality and violent video games could be achieved but varying interpretations of violent video game content such as reductionist, narrow or broad interpretations pose challenges to this attempt. A reductionist interpretation may present a violent video game action or scenario as simply the manipulation of pixels and thus be seen as unobjectionable (Young, 2015). Goerger (2017) takes the position; that while a game may be morally objectionable it does not contaminate gamers' real-world interactions or cause real world harm and is thus unobjectionable. A reductionist interpretation is countered by the view of these computer-generated scenarios as representational vehicles which then bear meaning (Young, 2015). A narrow interpretation may view violent video game incidents as only the virtual enactment of objectionable or immoral behaviour. The video game may have content outside of the morally objectionable material, and regardless of whether or not the player enjoys the game despite the violence or because of it, the game is about more than just the potentially morally objectionable component and thus cannot be perceived as entirely morally objectionable. The representations of violence are not intrinsically immoral within this interpretation (Young, 2015).

The question could be asked whether or not the morally objectionable content of the game is actively promoted, which would make the game itself morally problematic as opposed to simply containing morally problematic material (Young, 2015). A broader interpretation of video game content may acknowledge that an in-game taboo activity enacting a prohibited real-world activity could be interpreted as lauding what this in-game taboo represents. If it is probable that the pretend reality could be perceived as endorsing morally problematic activity, then this may be sufficient grounds to morally condemn the representation as being 'detrimental to the human condition' (Young, 2015, p. 316). Within this broad interpretation, concerns have been raised that delighting in participating in in-game representation violence may lead to a gamer delighting in

the idea of violence in the real-world (American Psychological Association, 2015; Anderson *et. al*., 2010; Markey & Markey, 2010; Waddington, 2007). Theoretical condemnation of violent videogames is dismissed by Schulzke (2010) who found that general criticisms are misguided and, Kantian, Aristotelian, and Utilitarian moral theories can be utilised to defend video games as the amount of harm potentially caused by gameplay is not outweighed by the value created. Goerger (2017) too rejects theoretical condemnation of video game violence and states that the context of the violence must be considered before declaring a violent video game to be morally objectionable.

Research indicates that violent video game play negatively affects gamers' minds and behaviour (American Psychological Association, 2015; Anderson & Dill, 1999; Anderson *et. al*., 2010), is morally objectionable (McCormick, 2001), philosophically wrong (Waddington, 2007) and causes moral harm (Wonderly, 2008). As early as 1999 researchers Anderson and Dill (1999) published studies positing that violent game play is positively correlated with aggressive behaviour and that exposure to a graphically violent video game increased aggressive thoughts and behaviour in the real world. Subsequent studies confirm these findings and suggest that exposure to violent video games is causally linked to increased aggression and decreased empathy of gamers (Anderson *et. al*., 2010; McCormick, 2001; Waddington, 2007; Wonderly, 2008), with these finding indicating that an increase in violent behaviour as a result of exposure to violent game playing is common across all cultural and gender variances of respondents. Lamb, Anetta, Hoston, Shapiro and Mathews (2017, p. 313) report results indicating that *"*The interactions of the social environment, cognitive attributes, and genetic predispositions set the conditions for increased aggressions with violent video games as a potential triggering event."

Such findings have been rebutted by research studies questioning the methodology utilised as well as the selective publishing of academic articles that play on society's emotional concerns (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2010; Goerger, 2017; Madigan, 2016). Ferguson and Kilburn (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of violent videogames and found little evidence of a causal relationship between violent videogames and real-world aggression or violence of gamers. DeCamp and Ferguson (2016) too concluded that video game violence was not a meaningful forecaster of youth violence in the real world and that family and social variables had a far greater influence.

Other theorists agree that video games cannot be empirically proven to cause harm (Goerger, 2017; Kuhn *et. al*, 2018; Madigan, 2016). Joeckel *et al*. (2012) indicate that concerns about moral

violations in-game leading to moral violations in real life may be unfounded, as such concerns assume all in-game decisions are rational and their study instead indicates that in-game decisions are either made according to moral intuition or simply in order to progress through the game. Gergen's (2015) findings similarly ameliorate these concerns as they indicate that the gamer is situationally bound by the pertinent ruleset of either the game world or the tangible world.

Hartman and Vorderer (2010) and Krcmar and Cingel (2016), Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009) conducted studies exploring players' moral choices in-game and noted that players interacted with NPCs as if they were real interpersonal interactions in accordance with their own personal moral foundations, which may lead to players' experiencing moral conflict while playing. In 2009, Zagal wrote about moral dilemmas and gameplay in the paper 'Ethically notable videogames: Moral dilemmas and gameplay'. This highlights how video games can make the player feel emotionally invested or accountable for the moral decisions they make while playing (Zagal, 2009). In contradiction to this, Ladas (2002) notes that gamers who play violent video games have themselves argued that violence against NPCs doesn't equate to violence against social entities but rather represents the elimination of obstacles impeding victory.

In line with Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009), Joeckel, Bowman, and Dogruel (2012) found that players make gut or instinctive decisions based on their moral intuition when faced with morality-based in-game scenarios. Notably, the study focused on general moral foundations and not simply violence, as well as player decision-making and not effects stemming from gameplay. Joeckel *et al*. (2012) note that players would choose to behave according to their own moral framework when confronted with a situation that threatens a salient part of their morality, however, non-salient moral infringements resulted in random decision-making patterns. In narrative-driven games players make observed decisions according to their own moral frameworks as well as according to the narrative cues of the game when they perceive in-game actions as a threat to their own moral sensibilities (Joeckel *et al*., 2012). Thus, moral intuitions may predict decisions related to moral violations in video game play, though not all scenarios may be perceived as morality-based scenarios and decisions will then be made in order to simply progress through the game (Joeckel *et al*., 2012). Gergen (2015) suggests that the gamer's 'playing self' makes choices related to the situated ethics and rule set of the game world as opposed to making choices according to moral principles held in the tangible world. Similarly, Francis, Howard, Howard, Gummerum, Ganis, Anderson and Terbeck (2016, p. 20) conducted a study examining actions taken by gamers in moral virtual reality scenarios and suggest that *"*moral action may be viewed

as an independent construct to moral judgment". Essentially, theoretical moral judgments made by gamers and their actual moral actions taken in-game may be unrelated. In contradiction to this, the findings of Pereira Santos *et al*.'s (2018, p. 932) study indicate a strong positive correlation between players' in-game choices and their self-reported ethical inclinations and moral judgment.

In 2016, Krcmar and Cingel recorded study participants' moral decisions and reasoning and results indicated an almost even split between both strategic and moral reasoning during gameplay in line with the findings of Weaver and Lewis' (2012) study. Strategic reasoning meaning making choices for reasons related to the game world, in-game actions and events, and meeting the game's victory condition. Krcmar and Cingel (2016) agree with Joeckel *et al*. (2012) that the salience of individual moral positions predicted moral reasoning in gameplay.

Another interesting finding is that increased experience of video game play was positively related to moral reasoning use. Essentially, the more time players spent playing video games, the more they based decisions on moral positioning, which Krcmar and Cingel (2016) ascribe to the experienced players' ability to draw on past experience when playing and thus requiring less effort in mental processing. This ease with play allows for other processes, such as moral reasoning to occur more easily during the familiar play experience. Conversely, players with less experience would be more focused on their gameplay and would be more cognitively stressed, thus less able to process and implement their own intuitive moral position (Krcmar & Cingel, 2016). The implication being that decision making in the unreal worlds of video games requires the same reasoning processes in individuals as are required in the real world (Krcmar & Cingel, 2016). A number of theorists support the position that video gameplay may fortify gamer's skills in negotiating the process of ethical decision making (Bogost, 2007; Delwich, 2007; Gee, 2003; Grizzard et. al, 2014; Madigan, 2016; Zagal, 2009). Murnane's (2018) findings are in line with this view of reasoning processes during gameplay and further state that destructive moral messaging in games can be detected and rejected by gamers during a conscientious play experience.

2.3.4 Moral disengagement

Bandura (1990, 1999, 2002) and Bandura *et. al.*, (1996) proposed the idea of moral disengagement as a means of explaining why 'good' people sometimes do 'bad' things. Eight separate ways were indicated for how people disengage from their immoral behaviours, namely moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement of

responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, distorting consequences, attribution of blame, and finally dehumanisation (Bandura, 1996; Bandura, 1999; Teng *et. al.*, 2019). These ways of disengaging are utilised by individuals acting immorally to convince themselves that, within the given context, moral standards do not apply to them (Gabbiadini *et. al.*, 2014).

Moral disengagement has been utilised in contemporary studies as an approach in communication research (Klimmt *et al*., 2008; Raney, 2004), based on Bandura's (2002) theory of moral disengagement, aiming to explain *"*the conditions of enjoyable versus aversive aspects of virtual violence through the study of moral disengagement in violent video games*"* (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010 p. 98). Hartmann and Vorderer's (2010) approach presumes that gamers consider NPCs to be social entities to a degree. Though aware that NPCs do not really exist, gamers are disposed to ignore this fact for the sake of immersion, and this suggests that players perceive NPCs as quasi-social. In order to enjoy a gameplay experience that contains violence, the experience must not violate the gamer's personal moral standards or cause moral cognitive dissonance (Bandura, 1990, 2002; Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007). The study of moral disengagement in video games aims to explain gamers' negotiation of "enjoyable versus aversive aspects of virtual violence" (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010, p. 98).

There are a variety of mechanisms of moral disengagement. If violent actions are justifiable to the player due to judgments about the recipient of harm then moral disengagement is facilitated (Bandura, 1990; Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010; Haslam, 2006; Klimmt, Schmid, Nosper, Hartmann & Vorderer, 2006; Opotow, 1990). As a specific example of this mechanism, violence may be justified by the judgment that the target of violence is deserving of punishment (Klimmt, *et al*., 2006).

Moral disengagement may also occur as a result of familiarity with the game being played, where players develop and use cognitive strategies to ameliorate the negative consequences of enacting virtual violence which is against their personal moral positioning (Carnagey, Anderson & Bushman, 2006; Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). Increased familiarity with the game may weaken gamers' experience of guilt and negative effects of violent gameplay and therefore increase their enjoyment of the gameplay experience. As discussed previously, Krcmar and Cingel (2016) posit that greater experience of video game play leads to increased moral reasoning use, seemingly contradicting the findings of Carnagey, Anderson and Bushman (2006) and Hartmann and Vorderer (2010). However, when personal moral positioning contradicts morality-based gameplay

choices that the player feels compelled to make, then use of moral reasoning may be disengaged as a function of familiarity in order to maintain gameplay enjoyment (Carnagey, Anderson & Bushman, 2006; Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010).

Finally, gamers may morally disengage by enacting a reflective process where they mentally disassociate from the game and remind themselves that the violent or immoral acts that they are performing are not real and not perpetrated upon real beings, and therefore are not worthy of causing feelings of guilt (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010; Klimmt, *et al*., 2006). Thus, a number of theorists support the position that moral reasoning is involved in the experience of violent video game play (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010; Klimmt, *et al*., 2006).

2.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter existing research related to play and gaming in general and video gameplay and morality system gameplay specifically is discussed. Research related to gamer personality, motivation, self-perception and identity is included. The wide-ranging topic of morality and gaming is explored in terms of theoretical indictments and justifications and consideration of the 'how' and 'why' of morality-based gameplay choices. Finally, moral disengagement is discussed as it relates to negotiation of personal moral positioning when making morality-based gameplay choices as a means of maintaining enjoyment of the gameplay experience. These existing theories have been explored in order to provide a research foundation for the deductive coding of primary data during data analysis and interpretation of this study.

CHAPTER 3 THEORIES AT PLAY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter existing research related to games, video games and gamers was explored. In this chapter the theoretical framework of this study will be outlined. The theoretical framework is a collation of concepts and thoughts that are relevant to the phenomenon under study (Bezuidenhout, 2014). For this study the theoretical framework covers social constructionism, ludology, and identification theory. Social constructionism is concerned with the study of the construction of reality, in which people construct their own world based on their individual experience (Montola, 2012). Ludology refers to the study of video games with the perspective that the focus is completely placed on the functional aspects of game design and play (Eskelinen, 2001). The consideration of both social constructionism and ludology as a theoretical foundation facilitates holistic exploration of both the tangible aspects and the constructed, imagined aspects of video games as advocated by Markus Montola in his symposium article 'Social Constructionism and Ludology: Implications for the Study of Games' (2012). Identification theory refers to the conception of the self; positing that during media exposure, people may adopt aspects of the perceived identity of the character under consideration (Klimmt, Hefner & Vorderer, 2009).

3.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Social constructionism is a perspective that examines people's joint constructed understanding of the world through varying and shared perceptions of reality (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). Social constructionism has a diverse development and application derived from, among others, phenomenological psychology, social history and hermeneutics, and cannot be ascribed to a single source (Galbin, 2014). Several of the fundamental assumptions of social constructionism are similar to Mead's (1934) explanation of 'symbolic interactionism' in the book *Mind, self and society* (Galbin, 2014). The major social constructionist contribution is usually attributed to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) book *The Social Construction of Reality*. Their typically anti-essentialist argument is that "human beings together create and sustain all social phenomena through social practices" through the processes of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation (Galbin, 2014, p. 88).

The act of externalisation involves creating and communicating some idea, artefact or practice hence, an idea entering the social realm and taking on a life of its own (Galbin, 2014, p. 88). The expression of the idea allows it to become an object or part of the consciousness of a society, thus, the objectivation of the idea which is then internalised as an understanding of reality (Galbin, 2014).

Simply put, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that all knowledge comes from social interactions, where those who interact understand that their perception of reality is related. These interactions and shared perceptions of reality then reinforce the shared understanding of reality, which then becomes the objective reality. Berger and Luckmann (1966) further explain that separate constructions of reality can be formed within the reality of every-day life, and that individuals may visit these other realities, each with their own meanings, and then return to their standard, objective reality. These aspects of social constructionism are appropriate descriptors of the nature of gaming as a subjective social process that may be rooted in reality but is only made meaningful by its participants (Montola, 2012).

Schütz (1962) provides the following premise for a constructionist view of knowledge: all knowledge of the world involves constructs, constructed by selection and structuring. Social constructionism is concerned with the study of the construction of reality, in which individuals construct their own world based on their own subjective experience (Montola, 2012). Constructionists consider how meaning is generated, sustained, and altered as well as "understanding the world of lived experience from the perspective of those who live in it" (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014, p. 232). According to Burr (2015), social constructionism accepts the possibility of many different realities constructed within different contexts, with no one way of asserting dominance or correctness of any of them. The importance of context in research is apparent, hence, the exploration of the research study participants' own perception of their reality is of vital importance when it is their constructed reality that is under study.

Material reality may not depend entirely on sentient observers in a form of universal social constructionism. In this study it is not claimed that existence is entirely reliant on being socially constructed, rather that meaning is considered to be socially constructed (Hacking, 1999; Montola, 2012). In social constructionism, social interchange as a means of generating knowledge is particularly significant and research is also considered to be part of the social construction of what can be found and utilised in social research (Flick, 2009). According to Burr (2015), concern

with social constructionist issues has led to new developments in research and a preference for qualitative methods of enquiry, since these are ideal for gathering linguistic and textual data and are also viewed as less likely to decontextualise the experience and accounts of respondents.

Social constructionism has been criticised for disregarding the influence of biology and genetics on people's behaviour and culture with critics identifying a need to ascribe both biological and cultural influences on human behaviour (Francsis & Kaufer, 2011; Pinker, 2003). This exploratory study's aim is not to concretely define the exact reasons for participants' actions and choices, but to explore their own perceptions of these actions and choices in order to gain a deeper understanding of their morality-based gameplay choices. Another criticism of social constructionism as stated by Boghossian (2006) is that, if reality is constructed according to social conventions, then it may be altered at will and individuals may subscribe to social constructionism as a theory simply because it is a desired outcome (Boghossian, 2006). However, a social constructionist lens in this research will help to gain a deeper understanding of how participants construct their own realities both in real life and in-game, and how they reconcile these constructions. Alteration of participant behaviour is not considered or sought within the scope of this study.

The implications of the social constructionist view in this study are that the researcher must have a thorough understanding of the object or game under study, in addition to a thorough understanding of gamers and their contexts along with the more formal properties of the game itself (Montola, 2012). Thus, high levels of researcher involvement, in-depth personal interviews and an autoethnography fit within this framework.

3.3 LUDOLOGY

Ludology is the study of games and play activities (Frasca, 1999) and it has come to be considered the study of video games in particular (Frasca, 2003). Authors such as Frasca (1999, 2003) and Juul (1999, 2003) contributed to the discipline of ludology as a means of studying games. Their central argument is that the way gaming is studied, guides research inquiries. Hence, different approaches will allow the consideration of different aspects with different results. In ludology, elements such as rules, game states and game worlds are considered to be formal, exact, stable, systemic and unchanging (Montola, 2012). Games are grounded in imperative rules, set in complex worlds, secured by mechanics (Frasca, 2003).

Markku Eskelinen (2001) states that in a ludological approach, the focus must be placed entirely on the functional aspects of game design and play, specifically those elements that distinguish the game from other media forms. A purely ludological approach would divorce the object under study from any narrative elements. This extreme perspective has been extensively critiqued by theorists such as Crogan, (2003) and Montfort and Moulthrop (2003) who counter-propose that interactive fiction must succeed as both literature and game at once to be effective and that the literary nature and context of the game cannot be divorced from purely ludic elements in research studies.

Juul (2003) posits a half-real nature to games, where the games, rules, players and events are real, but in-game elements such as characters are fictional. Thus the player engages with real rules while imagining a fictional, created world, both of which exist within the tangible reality of the gaming hardware and software where “the play is made meaningful by the player” (Montola, 2012, p. 303). This half-real nature is further seen by Bo Kampmann Walther (2011) as the core element of play itself, being identified as both real and not real. Effort is expended to act in-game while still being aware that the action itself is not performed in or will impact upon substantive reality. Montola (2012) views play as a temporary, fluctuating social process, which then only allows analysis as a cohesive whole. No player can accrue all of the information related to a game, both tangible and pretend. Experience of the game will also differ based on players’ preferences, abilities and experiences (Montola, 2012), and thus participants will experience the game differently from one another. Aarseth (2001) identifies the study of gameplay as challenging due to variances in gameplay options and the impact of player choice.

The use of both ludology and social constructionism allows a more holistic view of gaming, including both the tangibly ‘real’ building blocks of gaming and the constructed, in-game reality. In this study the formal, functional, unchanging elements of the game are considered as a vital aspect of the study, but unlike pure ludological study; elements such as the narrative and setting are also considered in line with the methodology recommended by Markus Montola in his symposium article ‘Social Constructionism and Ludology: Implications for the Study of Games’ (2012).

3.4 IDENTIFICATION THEORY

Identification, as explicated by Klimmt, Hefner and Vorderer (2009), has a social-psychological foundation related to the conception of the self. Identification theory proposes that during media exposure, individuals assimilate parts of the perceived identity of the character under consideration, internalising that character's perceived characteristics as part of the identification process (Cohen, 2001; Klimmt *et al.*, 2009). Identification with characters in media is a process related to imagination (Wilson, 1999) "through which an audience member assumes the identity, goals, and perspective of a character." (Cohen, 2001, p. 261).

Cohen (2001) explains that identification has a number of attributes. Firstly, identification is a process related to diminished self-awareness in temporary exchange of a connection to a character. Secondly, identification in media is a desired response, constructed by the creator of the media form. Finally, identification does not relate to the projection of an individual's own identity onto a character, but the internalisation of a character's point of view (Cohen, 2001). Essentially, the process of identification causes an individual to no longer perceive themselves as members of an audience or consumers of a media product, but to imagine themselves as being a character in the consumed media form (Cohen, 2001; Oatley, 1999). Identification in video games can be described as "a temporal shift in the player's self-perception" (Van Looy, Courtois, De Vocht & De Marez, 2012, p. 198) posited to be transitory and varying in intensity (Wilson, 1993).

Video games, unlike non-interactive entertainment media, contain mediated environments and enable players to act upon and become part of this environment as active participants (Vorderer, 2000). This interactivity overrides the distance between the game character and the player and thus players do not merely observe, but control or, in a sense, become the characters through a process of merging themselves and the game's protagonist in their own minds (Klimmt, *et. al.*, 2009). The process of identification is more likely to occur in the interactive medium of video games, where during video game exposure, users are more likely to temporarily adopt certain aspects of the perceived identity of the game protagonist than they would for a non-interactive medium (Klimmt *et al.*, 2009). It must be reiterated that this adoption is theorised to be temporary, and post-game experiences and external cues will return the players' self-concept to its original state. Players would not permanently retain the adopted properties of the game protagonist.

Identification may come to an end when the player is reminded of their physical self through external means, such as physical interruption, or a textual stimulus (Cohen, 2001) such as the completion of the game.

Klimmt *et al*. (2009) recognise that video game identification is extremely selective and does not involve a full sublimation of the self in order to identify with the game character, especially in cases of cognitive dissonance regarding morality-based choices, where developmental factors and media literacy may impact upon the degree to which undesired identification may occur (Klimmt *et al*., 2009).

The process of identification in media consumption has a role to play in the construction of self-identity (Cohen, 2001) where identifying with character representations facilitates the experience of different social realities and perspectives, and ultimately may influence development of self-identity and social attitudes (Erikson, 1968; Mead, 1934). Markus and Nurius (1986) too state that identification could affect players' sense of self, though Klimmt *et al*., (2006) recognise that players should be able to differentiate between game contexts and social reality. Thus, an exit from the game world should not result in confusion regarding the player's self-identity, though it is not impossible for some negative aspects to remain.

For the purpose of this study it is not assumed that participants will identify with the game protagonist to the point of adapting this character's perceived moral characteristics. In accordance with existing literature on the topic (Cohen, 2001; Van Looy *et al*., 2012; Wilson, 1993) it is presumed that any identification that may occur on the part of participants will be temporary and not impact upon participants' personal perception of moral development or morality-based gameplay decisions. Though unlikely, any potential impact of identification will be taken into consideration for this study's' methodology in order to mitigate any potential influence on participant response and allow for a truer reflection of participants' perceptions of their own moral development and their morality-based gameplay.

3.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter the theories and concepts that comprise the theoretical framework are clarified. Social constructionism, ludology and identification theory are explained and their relevance to this study made clear. The process of identification, and its methodological implications for this study have been explained. Additionally, the paradigm of social constructionism and the field of ludology have been detailed, with specifications on their combined consideration in research as a holistic means of approaching both the formal and socially constructed aspects of video games. In Chapter Four the research design is explicated, including the methodology, population and sampling methods, data collection methods, data analysis and interpretation methods, as well as the trustworthiness and ethical clearance of the study.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter theories within the theoretical framework were outlined and explored in context of this research study. In this chapter the methodology that was used in this research study is discussed. The rationale for the selection of this methodology is detailed and links between the usefulness of these methods are established. The selected population, sample and sampling methods, data collection, analysis and interpretation methods are deliberated. The dimensions of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study are detailed and finally, ethical issues and implications involved in completing this study are noted.

4.2 METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to procedures for gathering data and a discussion of methods and the relationships between method and theory (Flick, 2018; Nilsen, 2008; Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012). As Kaplan (1964) explains, methodology is the description and justification of methods in order to help explain the process of research. Methodologically, this study consists of an exploratory qualitative inquiry involving in-depth semi-structured interviews and an autoethnography as data collection methods. This section will include a description of the methodology that was used for sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

4.2.1 Unit of analysis

A unit of analysis is the most fundamental element in the analysis of data; “the *what* or *whom* being studied” (Babbie, 2014, p. 94; Wagner *et al*., 2012), which may include individuals, groups, organisations and social artefacts (Babbie, 2007; Gray, 2009). The unit of analysis in this study was individuals in the form of South African gamers who play or have played the game *Dishonored*.

4.2.2 Population and sampling

The term ‘population’ can be understood as the target group studied; the entire set of the studied group who could theoretically be under consideration as research subjects or participants (Keyton, 2011; Wagner *et al*., 2012). Wiid and Diggines (2013) define a population as the total group of people or artefacts from whom information is required. All people or social artefacts under study must share a specific characteristic that relates to the research question (Pascoe, 2014). In the case of this study, the population is all South African gamers who play or have played the game *Dishonored* of their own volition. The common characteristics are that they are all South African and that they have all elected to play *Dishonored.*

A sample is the segment of the population that the researcher can gain access to, who then participate in a study. (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Pascoe, 2014; Wagner *et al*., 2012). In this study where the population is all South African gamers who have played the game *Dishonored,* the sample is only those gamers within the larger population who are accessible to the researcher and who are over the age of 18 years. Non-probability sampling, which refers to a sample where each individual in the population does not have an equal chance of being included in the sample (Bryman, 2008) will be utilised to draw a sample from the larger population. Random sampling may not be practicable in social research as is the case with this study, where purposive sampling is used, signifying that the researcher does not aim to randomly sample research participants, but samples by considering the research goals (Bryman, 2008; Trochim ,2006).

The sampling method used in this study is a purposive sampling method called chain referral, also known as snowball sampling (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019; Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Maree, 2007; Trochim, 2006). This is a method of sampling where the researcher contacts individuals relevant to the research topic and then uses these connections to establish contact with others (Bryman, 2008). This sampling method is useful to obtain access to a population that is difficult to access through means such as records or databases (Pascoe, 2014). A chain referral sampling method was used in this study to make initial contact with South African *Dishonored* gamers and to use existing participants to gain referral and access to other potential study participants. Criticisms of this sampling method include the fact that it may be impossible to determine a sampling error or generalise results gained from the sample (Glen, 2014). However, since this is a qualitative study, findings will not be generalised to a larger population and a deeper

understanding is sought. The research aim is an increased knowledge and understanding of a specific social context, as opposed to data that can be broadly applied or used to solve a problem.

The sample size for this study will be limited to seven individual gamers. As the sample will be purposively selected for their uniquely conversant perspectives, a smaller sample size will allow for greater concentration of rich, in-depth information. This method is validated by Bryman (2008) who states that small, in-depth samples are appropriate for qualitative research. Findings will not be generalisable, as is appropriate in qualitative research (Pascoe, 2014).

4.2.3 Data collection method

Data collection is a series of interconnected activities aimed at gathering information that is useful for answering research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative data collection methods may facilitate access to rich and deep data "gathered from complex and multi-faceted phenomena in a specific social context" (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014, p. 173). According to Neuman (2011, p. 424), a qualitative researcher aims to capture the fine details of a social setting in order to understand subjective experiences and the 'why', 'what', and 'how' of phenomena. Qualitative data analysis, as Babbie (2014) elucidates, assesses observations not expressed with numbers and utilises tools such as in-depth interviews and ethnography, which were utilised in this study.

4.2.3.1 Semi-structured, personal, in-depth interviews

This interpretivist research study made use of semi-structured, personal, in-depth interviews as they are useful methods for "exploring and describing people's perceptions and understandings that might be unique to them…" (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, pp. 82). Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are characterised by flexibility on the part of the interviewer, rapport with the interviewee and active listening which allows the interviewee to talk freely (Noaks & Wincup, 2004; Silverman, 2014; Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Open-ended interviews should be conducted in consideration of the broader purpose of the study and aim to comprehend the linguistic and cultural paradigm of the participants (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This method is ideal within this social constructionist study, where context and participants' perception of their own reality is of prime importance when studying that reality (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Burr, 2015) and where the interviewer and interviewees are actively engaged in a shared experience of constructing

meaning (Silverman, 2014). Atkinson and Coffey (2002, p. 811) state that “interviews become equally valid ways of capturing shared cultural understandings and enactments of the social world.”. Additional advantages of interviews include the ease of response of conversation over writing responses, and facilitation of more detailed and descriptive, in-depth data as interviews facilitate the asking of probing questions as well as requests for clarification and demonstration of understanding on the interviewees’ part (Bertram & Christansen, 2014; Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

A possible disadvantage of utilising interviews as a research method include potential risks of power relations and influence in a social, interpersonal encounter (Bertram & Christansen, 2014). The risk of the impact of power dynamics was mitigated as the interviewer is not related to participants and as a fellow *Dishonored* gamer was likely to be perceived as a peer or social equal by participants. Another disadvantage to interviews is the generation of a great deal of textual data, which can be onerous to work with (Bertram & Christansen, 2014). This disadvantage was alleviated by the design and implementation of a specific, detailed data analysis and interpretation plan (See Chapter 5). Another disadvantage to interview usage relates to the self-reported results of interviews potentially leading to inconsistencies or inaccuracies (Bertram & Christansen, 2014). Every effort was made to be cognisant of these potential inaccuracies and clarification or greater detail while conducting the interview was sought. However, since this is a perceptual study exploring participants’ lived experiences, any inconsistencies were considered as findings as opposed to a concern related to data accuracy.

Specifically, Klimmt, Hefner and Vorderer’s (2009) explication of the theory of identification was considered in designing the methodology. Consequently, while playing *Dishonored*, individuals may integrate aspects of the perceived identity of the game’s protagonist, *Corvo Attano*; and internalise his perceived characteristics as part of the identification process. This adoption of characteristics is theorised to be temporary (Klimmt, Hefner, & Vorderer, 2009), and thus, conducting interviews after media exposure, as opposed to during gameplay, will alleviate any concerns related to the identification with aspects of the game. In order to avoid momentary shifts in self-perception due to the impact of identification with the avatar of the game, participants had played *Dishonored* in advance of participation in in-depth interviews.

All participants were required to confirm their willingness to participate in this study. Questions were related to participants’ personal moral positioning, their morality-based gameplay style and

decisions, and their perception of whether or not there is any connection between their personal morals and the morality-based gameplay choices they make when playing *Dishonored*. The researcher did not interfere with or coerce the participants' answers in any way, since this is a risk when conducting interviews (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Open-ended interviews were conducted in-person at a time and location chosen by participants to ensure their comfort and convenience. Participants were provided with an explanatory statement (See Appendix B) for the study in advance of the interview. Interviews were recorded for transcription purposes, transcription being the conversion of information into written form, undertaken in order to then analyse the transcribed data (Bertram & Christansen, 2014; Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). Consent for participation in the study, recording of the interviews and transcription of the interviews, were included in the consent forms (See Appendix C) which were signed by participants immediately prior to commencement of the interview.

An interview schedule, or interview guide (See Appendix A), was designed with set, open-ended questions to allow participants to express their own opinions or perceptions and open a dialogue between the interviewer and interviewees (Bertram & Christansen, 2014; Creswell, 2017; Flick, 2011). In this study it was advantageous to share contextual understanding and build rapport since the researcher herself played the game *Dishonored*. The researcher conducted the interviews and transcribed the interview recordings herself since, the researcher is considered to be the research instrument and is thus a contributing part of the context of the study and the interview process (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2014).

4.2.3.2 Autoethnography

After the in-depth, semi-structured interviews were completed, an autoethnography, or self-report, was produced. An ethnographical and biographical method is a description of the cultural association between a researcher and the individuals within the social phenomenon in a particular social context under study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Memoing was undertaken in order to allow for reflexivity in mapping research activities and extracting meaning from sourced data (Ortiz, 2018).

The primary data of an autoethnography is the autobiographical observations of the researcher about him/herself within a specific social context (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014; Henning, *et. al*., 2004). The autoethnographer, engaging in his/her own cultural analysis and interpretation

provides an insider's perspective termed the 'emic' perspective in contrast to the 'etic' perspective, which presents meaning from the perspective of outsiders (Chang, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Cuttell, 2015; Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990). Auto-ethnographies are by nature subjective, which is an acknowledged aspect of the interpretivist approach (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

The researcher played *Dishonored*, while being cognisant of instances of moral or amoral enactment that arose during instances of morality-system gameplay and took the social context into consideration. A prime advantage of an autoethnography is connecting the exploration of the researcher's mind with interview participants' experiences of the phenomenon under study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Maso, 2001; Méndez, 2013). Additionally, an autoethnography facilitates the provision of access to thick, rich data from the private world of the researcher (Pavlenko, 2002, 2007) who has freedom to represent him/herself instead of relying on mediated representation (Richards, 2008). An added benefit is the ease of access to information (Méndez, 2013), and the potential of an autoethnographic approach to encourage individuals to reflect on the realities presented, which may differ from their own and may not previously have been considered (Méndez, 2013).

Challenges related to ethnographic research include a necessity for familiarity with the context under study, an awareness of the needs of the specific study and the need for the researcher to acknowledge his/her impact on the context of the study (Creswell, 2012). Autoethnography requires exposure of the researcher's mind and emotions, and thus can be limiting when challenging, ethical questions need to be answered and the method becomes complicated for the researcher, who may not wish to acknowledge what is critically reflected about him/herself (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Megford, 2006; Méndez, 2013). In rebuttal, Ellis (2007, p. 26) considers autoethnography itself to be "an ethical practice", requiring honesty about the events, contents and expressions of all involved. In this study, the researcher acted with truthfulness and integrity in line with what is posited by Ellis (2007) in order to avoid the generation of biased data.

Additional criticism by Atkinson (1997) and Coffey (1999) relates to perceptions of autoethnography as "self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective and individualised" (Méndez, 2013, p. 283). The researcher of this study falls within the studied population, is familiar with the relevant context and used data gained from the interview process to turn the autoethnography into a process of reflecting on previous knowledge and sourced data to extract information most relevant to this study. Reflexivity is a concept and a process, concerning the researcher's self-awareness

and active involvement in the research process (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). Reflexivity during the research process is considered to be vital in qualitative data analysis (Ortiz, 2018). Data was cross checked between the in-depth interviews and the autoethnography to facilitate dependability, which as previously mentioned, is a valuable aspect to the use of this research method.

The researcher's experiences offer thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon through contextual interaction, which align with the perspective that reality is dependent on individual experiences and we should seek to gain understanding from the lived experiences of those within the studied context (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014; Maree, 2007; Neuman, 2011).

4.2.4. Data analysis and interpretation methods

Data analysis involves organising data, breaking it down into parts, co-ordinating these parts, seeking patterns, identifying key parts of the data, and then reporting on the findings (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). Data analysis entails three activities: data reduction, data display and the drawing of conclusions (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction involves selecting and refining data obtained by sorting it into codes and categories and seeking out patterns and connections between categories (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). Data display or presentation involves the organisation of information in order to allow the drawing of conclusions and will take the form of extended text, verbatim quotes derived from interviews and the autoethnographic report, as well as tables and diagrams in order to clearly illustrate data categorisation. This data analysis process will be explained in greater detail in this section.

In this study a qualitative content analysis was conducted which involves systematically analysing social artefacts to gain understanding in order to richly describe a social phenomenon within the studied context (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). It involves identifying themes and patterns in the data and is a general approach to analysing qualitative data (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Silverman, 2014; Wagner *et al*., 2012). Krippendorff (2004, p. 44) defines content analysis as *"*an unobtrusive technique that allows researchers to analyse relatively unstructured data in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents they have …*".*

Content analysis is based on categorisation derived from theoretical models (Flick, 2011). These precise categories can then be revised in consideration of the analysed texts. Qualitative content

analysis is an accepted method of textual investigation, particularly within mass communication studies (Silverman, 2014). This method is convenient in that it allows the reduction and presentation of large volumes of data, but faces criticism related to the production of "a powerful conceptual grid" which helps to organise data but may omit coverage of uncategorised data (Atkinson, 1992, p. 459). Additional criticism is that of researchers "trading off their tacit everyday knowledge in coining and applying whatever categories they do use." (Silverman, 2014, p. 118). These methodological disadvantages were mitigated through the use of both inductive and deductive coding in an iterative process, as well as the use of a second coder to ensure the trustworthiness of findings, which is of vital importance in content analysis (Silverman, 2014).

Raw data recorded from personal interviews and the autoethnography were transcribed into written text, ensuring completeness and detail of transcription. This included reflective notes taken during the interview process regarding non-verbal communication and insights gained during the interview process. Memoing was done throughout the research process to aid in connecting raw data conceptually to abstractions that will aid in exploring morality-system gameplay and gamer self-perception. Memoing allows for reflexivity during the research process and is deemed as crucial in qualitative data analysis (Ortiz, 2018). Reflexivity is both a concept and a process, involving the researcher's self-awareness and active involvement in the research process (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). Memoing is advantageous as it helps to map research activities, aids in extracting meaning from gathered data, and may encourage the researcher to keep momentum throughout the analysis and interpretation process (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008; Gardner, 2008). Finally, conclusion-drawing and verification were undertaken, involving the noting of patterns and possible explanations from the start of data collection which was then finalised upon completion of the analysis.

4.2.4.1 Coding

Scrutinising transcribed data for relevant aspects, is known as coding (Maree, 2007). A coding unit, or simply referred to as a code, is the smallest component of material that may be analysed (Flick, 2011). Saldaña (2016, p. 4) aptly defines a code in a qualitative study as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute" identified in transcribed data. According to Lopez (2013, p. 2) data analysis involves both deduction and induction which are "ways of moving between data and theory; deduction moves from theory to data, and induction moves from data to theory.". In this study, coding units

were developed both deductively, based on concepts mined from the literature review drawing on existing research and relevant theories, and inductively, based on codes emerging from the data.

Data was organised into more manageable units by defining the basic ideas or codes with either words or phrases, ensuring that each relevant theme was assigned codes. Deductive coding drew upon existing research such as Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) factors for gameplay enjoyment and VandenBerghe's domains of play (VandenBerghe, 2012) to gain further insight into gamers' reasons for making morality-based choices in-game. Data gained from in-depth, personal interviews and the autoethnography were coded inductively and interpreted in terms of relationships, similarities and differences in indications of moral development. Ultimately raw data regarding participants' moral positioning, their perceptions of their morality-based gameplay choices and any connection between the two were coded both deductively and inductively, also referred to as in vivo coding, in an iterative process. This hybrid form of coding is acceptable in thematic or qualitative content analysis and "involves a balance of deductive coding (derived from the philosophical framework) and inductive coding (themes emerging from participant's discussions) (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 91).

Different codes that are related were grouped together to form a conceptual framework, which too was developed both deductively from the theories and previously conducted studies and inductively from the raw data. A conceptual framework is the account of the integrated manner in which the research problem will be explored, how ideas in the study relate and is presented in such a way as to logically define the concepts within a study (Adom, Hussein & Agyem, 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The use of a theoretical framework allows for data that may seem irrelevant to be identified, explained, or connected to other data in meaningful ways (Maxwell, 2012). The conceptual framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 5.1 in Chapter 5.

Codes, themes and categories were defined clearly and precisely (Silverman, 2014) to ensure consistent application to the analysed text. Consistency and accuracy of category definitions and coding were tested by a secondary coder, chief investigator and research supervisor; Dr Rose-Marié Bezuidenhout, to resolve any coding-related problems, as recommended by Strydom and Bezuidenhout (2014). Identified themes and categories were interpreted with the aim of identifying any potential parallels or divergences in the moral positioning of players and their morality-based gameplay choices.

Data interpretation involves the construction of an interpretive grid, generally developed from the conceptual framework, in order to help guide the researcher in identifying what data is relevant as well as the relationships between these important items (Fisher, 2007). The conceptual framework for this study is presented as Figure 5.1 and the interpretive grid as Table 5.1 in Chapter 5.

In qualitative research data analysis and interpretation require researcher immersion in the data to identify and describe patterns of emergent data (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). Analysis and interpretation of data involves an intertwined, iterative process of successive cycles of analysis, interpretation, further analysis, and reinterpretation, in order to gain insight into and understanding of the studied context (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). As mandated by Creswell (2012), findings were interpreted in consideration of the research questions, and within the general studied context; in this study, explaining discovered relationships, noting superfluous information, and accounting for all factors relevant to morality-system gameplay in order to avoid incorrect interpretations. Significant findings were accounted for in terms of adequate and trustworthy research procedures, and implications for the studied population and future research were indicated (Creswell, 2012). Finally, a complete and truthful account of all activities undertaken during coding, analysis and interpretation were reported (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

4.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The feasibility measures of validity and reliability are more frequently utilised in quantitative research to generate measurable, numerical results (Koonin, 2014; Wagner *et al*., 2012). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not seek to find causal relationships or to generalise beyond the context of the qualitative study. Thus, the term trustworthiness is preferred in qualitative research as a measure of how reliable and valid a research study is (Koonin, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness in the interpretivist paradigm is strengthened by detailed descriptions of the data, which must be authentic, and reflect the lived experience of the participants. The use of autoethnography fortifies the trustworthiness of the study and is axiologically compatible with an interpretivist approach, indicating a value placed on the researcher's interpretation of the studied context (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014) as a reflection of the lived experience of the given context. Researchers need to show how they have analysed the data and have reached the conclusions

drawn. The researcher must allow for multiple repetitions of the study or potentially different interpretations, or that the data could lead to different or multiple conclusions. The researcher can only draw conclusions for the participants that were part of the study, findings cannot be generalised to all contexts. The subjectivity of the researcher in the research process must be acknowledged (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Trustworthiness is further divided into credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Geertz, 1973; Shenton, 2004; Koonin, 2014).

The accuracy of researcher interpretation of data provided by participants is known as credibility (Koonin, 2014). To address credibility, researchers try to show that an accurate picture of the phenomenon under study is presented (Shenton, 2004; Wagner *et al*., 2012). In order to address the issue of credibility the researcher ensured that data was interpreted in consideration of participants' context and the broader context of video game studies and morality studies.

With regards to transferability, researchers provide information regarding the context in which a phenomenon occurs in order to allow for potential use of findings in similar contexts (Shenton, 2004). Koonin (2014) defines transferability as the degree to which results, and analysis can be applied beyond a certain research project to allow for generalisation in an approach that is not designed for generalisable findings. This study provided enough detail to allow for methodology, analysis and findings to be applied to other similar research projects where relevant (Wagner *et al*., 2012). Results may not be generalisable, but this exploratory study may provide valuable information or insight for similar research studies, which is useful in under-researched areas of study such as video games and morality-based gameplay.

Dependability is challenging to achieve given the importance of context in qualitative studies. it concerns researchers' attempts to ensure that their research is conducted in a replicable manner (Shenton, 2004) with the provision of an audit trail that "attests to the accuracy of translations of information from various data sources and provides the means for ensuring the confirmability of the findings, allowing for reconstruction of events and processes that led to the conclusions in the research" (Wagner *et al*., 2012, p. 243). This research study described a detailed methodology and ensured integration of data collection, analysis and application of theories generated from the data (Koonin, 2014) in order to make replication as easy as possible.

Confirmability refers to how well the collected data supports the researcher's findings and interpretations and demonstrating that the data and findings are derivative of events and not

merely the researcher's creation (Koonin, 2014, Wagner *et al*., 2012). In order to address the issue of confirmability, the researcher ensured that findings are drawn from raw data and existing research and theories and are not entirely informed by the researcher's preconceptions.

4.4 ETHICS CLEARANCE

The definition of research ethics as it pertains to this study is as follows:

> *Research ethics addresses the question of which ethically relevant issues caused by the intervention of researchers can be expected to impact on the people with or about whom they research. It is concerned in addition with the steps taken to protect those who participate in the research, if this is necessary.* (Schnell & Heinritz, 2006, p. 17)

The following steps were taken to ensure the ethical protection of research participants in this study. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Monash University ethics committee prior to the start of primary research (See Appendix D). Explanatory letters (See Appendix B) were sent to participants once they had agreed to participate in the study before the interview session was scheduled. The explanatory statement included information detailing the nature of the study and ensuring confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms; research participants were de-identified to ensure confidentiality and no names were linked to any potentially sensitive data (Flick, 2011). The researcher assured participants of the ethical considerations of the study and provided contact details of who to contact should they have any ethical concerns with the study. Participants were informed that their participation in this research study is entirely voluntary (Silverman, 2014) and there would be no discrimination should they wish to decline to continue with participation at any point. The researcher assured all participants that their research data will be kept confidential (Fisher, 2007; Silverman, 2014) and their identities will not be revealed for any reason, and there is no risk of physical or psychological harm in participation (Flick, 2011; Louw, 2014). At no point in the research study were participants deceived (Fisher, 2007; Silverman, 2014), and no incentives were provided for participation in this research study (Louw, 2014). Signed letters of consent (See Appendix C) were obtained from participants prior to commencement of the interviews to ensure informed consent (Fisher, 2007; Henning, 2004; Louw, 2014; Silverman, 2014). Finally, all participants were notified that they will be entitled to a copy of the aggregate research findings and should contact the researcher to request a copy, should they wish.

Regarding ethics as related to autoethnographic studies, Megford's (2006) proposed ethical standard for autoethnographies was applied; that the author will take accountability for writing her own perception and experience as if all people engaged with the studied context were listening. The researcher made every effort to ensure honesty and integrity in all research activities.

4.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the selected methodology for this research study, chosen to explore the morality-based gameplay choices that South African *Dishonored* gamers make, and their perception of any connections between this gameplay and their personal moral positioning. Interview data was compiled from semi-structured, personal, in-depth interviews, where the researcher made use of an interview schedule with open-ended questions. An autoethnography was completed by the researcher to explore her own perceptions of her morality and morality-based gameplay choices when playing *Dishonored*. This research study utilised qualitative content analysis with both inductive and deductive coding in order to identify patterns in the data to allow for data interpretation and the generation of meaning related to the morality-based gameplay choices made by South African *Dishonored* players.

Qualitative research is flexible, with data collection, analysis and interpretation methodologies that are designed to gain deeper understanding and thick descriptions of complex and subjective phenomena. Chapter 5 will focus on the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the interviews and autoethnography.

5. DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 the methodology used in this research study was unpacked. The motivation for the selection of methodology was provided and the connection between the usefulness of these methods and the objectives of the study were made clear. The selected population, sample and sampling methods, data collection, analysis and interpretation methods were presented and means of ensuring the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study were noted. In Chapter 5 data collection is detailed and the iterative process of data analysis and interpretation discussed.

5.1.1 Data collection

Throughout the month of April in 2019, in-depth, semi-structured, personal interviews were conducted in-person with seven participants throughout Johannesburg, South Africa. Participants were provided with an explanatory statement (See Appendix B) for the study in advance of the interview and were required to sign consent forms (See Appendix C) before commencement of the interview. Responses were digitally recorded for transcription purposes. An interview schedule containing open-ended questions was utilised as a guide for the researcher in conducting the interviews.

The researcher played *Dishonored* and undertook a process of memoing to aid in capturing raw data, extracting meaning from the raw data, and connecting this to abstract concepts (Birks *et al*., 2008; Gardner, 2008) relevant to morality-system gameplay to generate an autoethnography. The researcher is a part of the studied population and is familiar with the studied context and thus engaged in a participatory, immersive method as recommended by Cuttell (2015, p. 55).

The interviews and autoethnography were transcribed into written text by the researcher personally in order to ensure completeness and detail of transcription as well as accurate transcription of gaming and *Dishonored* jargon and naming conventions.

5.1.2 Data analysis and interpretation

This research study utilised qualitative content analysis with both inductive and deductive thematic coding to identify patterns in the data to allow for data interpretation and the generation of meaning. The aim of this process was to explore how gamers' perceptions of their own morality are enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored* and what motivations *Dishonored* gamers provide for in-game morality-based gameplay choices.

Data analysis involves organising data, breaking it down into parts, co-ordinating these parts, seeking patterns, identifying key parts of the data, and then reporting on the findings (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). For this study a qualitative content analysis was conducted, in accordance with the procedure recommended by Bezuidenhout and Cronje (2014, pp.234-243).

Transcriptions included reflective notes taken during the interview process regarding non-verbal communication and insights gained during the interview process. Data was organised into more manageable units by defining the basic ideas or codes with either words or phrases, ensuring that each relevant theme was assigned a code. Coding the text refers to scrutinising data for relevant aspects (Bezuidenhout and Cronje, 2014; Maree, 2007). Coding units were developed both deductively, based on content from the literature review drawing on existing research as well as relevant theories, and inductively based on patterns and themes that emerged from the data.

Different codes that are related were grouped together to form a conceptual framework, which too was developed both deductively and inductively. Codes, themes and categories were clearly defined to ensure consistent application to the text during the analysis and interpretation processes. Consistency of category definitions was tested to resolve any problems related to coding categories. For this study, content analysis was used for analysis and interpretation of data. Thematic coding (also known as conceptual coding) was undertaken, which involves reducing the data by identifying themes (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Existing research and relevant theories such as VandenBerghe's (2012) domains of play and Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) factors for gameplay enjoyment were used to deductively code the text to gain deep insight into gamers' non-morality-based reasons for making morality-based choices in-game.

The individual interviews were then coded inductively and interpreted in terms of relationships, similarities and differences in indications of moral positioning and gameplay choices and

preferences. Ultimately, raw data regarding participants' perceptions of their moral position and their morality-based gameplay choices, were coded both deductively and inductively in an interconnected, iterative process of successive cycles. Consistency of coding was then rechecked by a second coder, chief investigator and research supervisor; Dr Rose-Marié Bezuidenhout, to ensure trustworthiness of data. The same coding procedure was followed for the autoethnography.

Identified themes and categories were interpreted with the aim of identifying any potential parallels or divergences in gamers' perceptions of their moral positioning and their morality-based gameplay. Existing theories and previously conducted studies were drawn upon to assist interpretation in an iterative process. Meaning gained from interpretation was considered within the general context of the study; explaining discovered relationships, noting superfluous information, and accounting for all factors relevant to morality systems gameplay in order to avoid incorrect interpretations. Finally, a complete and truthful account of all activities undertaken during coding, analysis and interpretation was reported.

5.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In qualitative research the processes of data analysis and data interpretation merge and it is difficult to present the two iterative and symbiotic processes separately (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014) as the researcher repeatedly analyses and interprets data in an attempt to identify and refine meaning and gain new insight with each iteration.

5.2.1 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is the researcher's account of how the research problem would be explored; looking at the studied problem in an integrated way to logically show how ideas in a study interrelate in a manner that specifies and defines concepts within the study (Adom, *et al*., 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The conceptual framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 5.1.

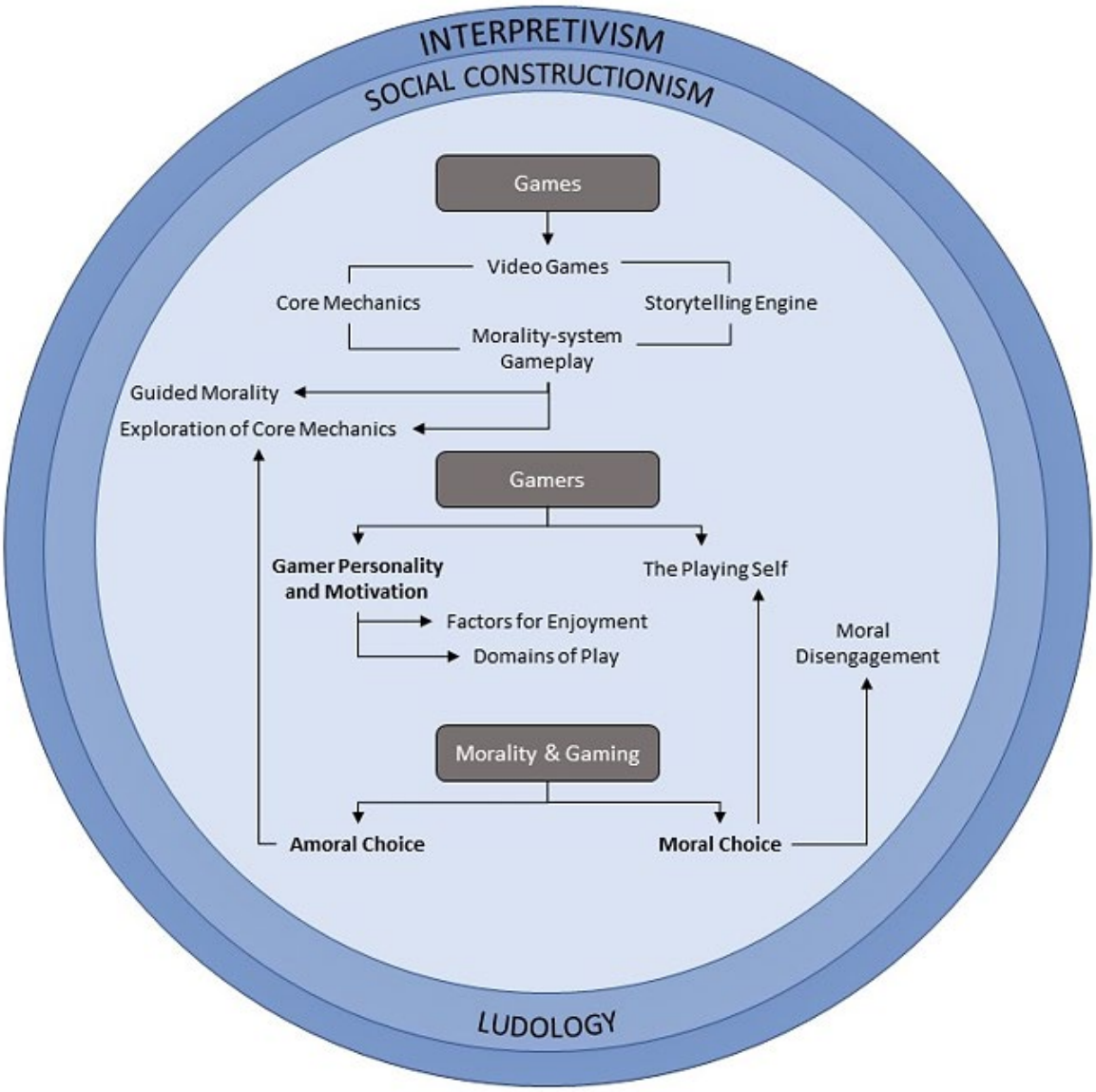


Figure 5.1 – Conceptual map

5.2.2 Codes and themes

Open coding reading was conducted through the text, thematic coding was then conducted comparing different identified codes and categories from primary research to those that emerged from existing literature and theory in order to ensure mutual exclusivity of the categories (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014; Saldaňa, 2016). Thematic coding was undertaken, guided by the research problem and questions (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014) where codes from the researcher's autoethnography, compiled from journal entries and memos (Birks *et al*., 2008; Ortiz,

2018), and codes gained from interviews were collated into a coding table, presented in Table 5.1 below. A visual representation of analysed themes and codes follows in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 – Themes and codes

Categories	Themes	Codes
Amoral Choice	Exploration of Core Mechanics	Innovation & Interest
		Playstyle Freedom
		Presence of Stealth Mechanics
		Presence of Combat Mechanics
		Comprehensive Play
	Guided Morality	Game Design Bias
		Strength of Stealth Mechanics
		Strength of Combat Mechanics
Gamer Personality and Motivation	Domains of Play	Novelty
		Challenge
		Stimulation
	Game Design Appeal Factors	Fantasy
		Exploration
		Challenge
Moral Choice	The Playing Self	Moral Conflict
		Accountability
		Salience
		Situated Ethics
	Moral Disengagement	Justification
		Punishment
		Familiarity
		Reflective Process
		Roleplay

5.2.3 Analysis and interpretation

In analysing the data, three categories emerged, each comprising of two themes, which will be discussed.

A. Amoral Choice
    - Exploration of Core Mechanics
    - Guided Morality
B. Gamer Personality and Motivation
    - Domains of Play
    - Game Design Appeal Factors
C. Moral Choice
    - The Playing Self
    - Moral Disengagement

These categories and themes were then used to explore the data gained from the autoethnography and the interviews. For the purpose of the study, in order to protect the anonymity of interview participants, individual interview participants were deidentified and were assigned an alphabetic letter and are identified in this chapter as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, Participant E, Participant F and Participant G.

5.2.3.1 In-depth personal interviews

The in-depth, personal interviews, will from here onwards, be referred to as interviews. Identified themes influenced which elements of the interviews were selected and summarised for interpretation.

5.2.3.1.1 Amoral choice

For the purpose of this research study the term ‘amoral’ denotes that which is unrelated to or unconcerned with morality. The game *Dishonored* is governed by a morality system. This is described as a system where the gamer becomes the moral actor and not merely an observer (Weaver & Lewis, 2012). The core mechanics and the narrative of *Dishonored* synchronise so that morality-based gameplay choices on the gamer’s part have an impact on the gameplay, the

continuing story and the in-game world. Amoral choices on the part of *Dishonored* gamers are those morality-based gameplay choices, for example, the choice between killing an NPC and helping them, that are made for reasons unrelated to the gamers' personal moral positions. These amoral choices will be analysed in the remainder of this chapter with the intention of answering the research question: what motivations do *Dishonored* gamers provide for in-game morality-based gameplay choices?

5.2.3.1.1.1 Exploration of core mechanics

The core mechanics of a video game are the critical, repeated play activities enacted by gamers while playing (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003). The core mechanics govern how gamers interact with the game in order to generate gameplay and manage all in-game events (Adams, 2014). In the case of *Dishonored* the rules of the game may indicate that purchasing a power with gathered Runes will allow that power to be used from that point onwards, but the core mechanics will govern the mathematical specifics (Adams, 2014), such as exactly how long the effects of that power will last and the area of effect.

Analysis revealed that some interview participants were attracted to *Dishonored* initially as they had seen press or heard feedback from others related to the game's innovation in both its combat and stealth mechanics and its multivariate approach to gameplay styles. This is in accordance with Klemm and Pieters (2017) statement that game mechanics are a primary factor in the appeal of games.

Participant F describes their reasons for choosing to play *Dishonored* as follows:

> *Well I first got Dishonored out of pure curiosity of the cover and everything I'd watched a couple of the trailer videos of it back when it first came out and it looked really cool, the new like system of like the parkour and the stealth systems and everything. So, it originally that was the reason that I got it, because I was merely interested in how the game mechanics would have worked and how everything was looking based on how the game was displayed.*

This is supported by literature highlighting the nature of play as being concerned only with the act of play itself and its lack of consideration of outcomes beyond the play activity (Kuchlich, 2004).

Additionally, from a ludological perspective the functional aspects of game design are prime (Eskelinen, 2001; Frasca, 2003; Montola, 2012). This study makes use of ludology as a part of the theoretical framework, and it is necessary to consider the impact of stable, exact elements such as the core mechanics and the role they play in morality-system gameplay.

Dishonored has an open choice design where players may choose where to go (within the obvious given game-world limits) and how they interact with NPCs. The player even has the freedom to kill *Emily*, *Corvo Attano*'s (the game's protagonist and avatar of the player) ward, though this will result in a fail state. One might expect that the NPC of *Emily* as a child and as the primary narrative motivation for the protagonist would be governed by the core mechanics to be unkillable, but *Dishonored* sets no such limits. Participant A describes the appeal of this aspect of the game's design:

> *I liked the fact that you could choose your own playstyle – there was obviously the story that you were following but there wasn't a set path that you could follow through each level, each level was pretty much build-your-own-adventure type of thing. So you could either go in and kill everyone or you could stealth your way through the level and not actually do anything like that, or you could use your powers and get through the whole level itself. I like that fact that it wasn't very linear, there was a lot of different things you could do in the game.*

The primary research question of this study is "what motivations do Dishonored gamers provide for their in-game morality-based gameplay choices?" and when questioned about the reasons for making morality-based choices a number of answers were given that were entirely separate from moral concerns. By far the most frequently and emphatically stated of these amoral bases for moral choice was the gamers' desire to explore the core mechanics. As stated by Pereira Santos, *et al*. (2018) and Zoss (2010) moral choices in-game that are tied to the narrative and the core mechanics and the impact that gamers' choices have upon the game world encourage interest. While gamers are aware that they are making a moral choice, they may elect to disregard the morality aspect entirely and make those decisions amorally (Francis *et al*., 2016; Joeckel *et al*., 2012) in order to explore the multivariate mechanics enabled by *Dishonored's* game design. *Dishonored* has a focus on systems, choices and unique pathways. (Porter, 2012)

Participant E describes their thought process whereby their playstyle in terms of violence level had more to do with exploring the gameplay mechanics that the actual moral choice itself:

> *I really enjoyed the mechanics to be honest, the gameplay mechanics were really good. The movement, everything just felt really well thought out… I did try to play around with the mechanics of the game. But you know it's so rich in the sense that if you want to fight there's an entire array of things you can do. If you want to stealth there's like so many things you can do. So, I kind of wanted to get a feel of all the mechanics of the game. So sometimes I would try and see how I could sneak around people, sometimes I would deliberately go provoke someone just to see how the fighting feels. And then I would decide OK these mechanics are more fun, let me adjust my playstyle to that.*

This seemingly concurs with existing theory related to the impact of game design that guides players in gameplay choices (Klemm & Pieters, 2017; Norman & Ortony, 2003). Participant G explained that the excellence of the combat mechanics encouraged a second, more violent play through in order to experience the full range of core mechanics that *Dishonored* had to offer.

> *That made me play the second. Wanting to play it again specifically for that reason because I did feel like after my first playthrough doing the stealthy thing I felt like I didn't feel the whole game. That made me play a second time. Actually using all the tools you have, and the battle mechanics in that sense. So that, yes. The battle mechanics initiated my second playthrough in a sense.*

This supports the propositions of Klemm and Pieters (2017), Norman and Ortony (2003) and Wilcox (2018) related to the impact of game design on in-game moral actions. This also concurs with Eskelinen (2001) statement that from a ludological approach, the focus should be on the functional aspects of game design and play.

Participant A too was encouraged to play a second, violent playthrough having already played a non-violent playthrough and feeling somewhat limited in their exploration of the core mechanics and use of available powers in their initial playthrough.

> *There were a couple of times during the non-lethal playthrough where a few of Corvo's powers like Devouring Swarm would have come in really handy so I just liked the fact that*

during my lethal playthrough I could pretty much use whatever power I wanted because it was a case of get to the end no matter what you do.

Participant C described the primacy of this motivation even over the motivations of immersion and narrative.

Um, I wouldn't say just roleplaying cause, um, I'm definitely more of a gameplay mechanics kind of a guy, I like seeing what I can do with the game… seeing ways I can break it if possible. So there definitely are times when I enjoy immersing myself in the role, um, but generally I go for gameplay options.

A number of participants indicated that they had made amoral choices in order to fully explore both the stealth and combat mechanics of *Dishonored*. Another reason for amoral decision-making on the part of participants was their perception that they were being guided towards morality by the game's design. This echoes existing literature (Klemm & Pieters, 2017; Norman & Ortony, 2003; Wilcox, 2018) related to the impact that a game's design can have upon morality-based gameplay choices.

5.2.3.1.1.2 Guided Morality

Many participants indicated that they elected to play stealthily and non-lethally, at least initially, because they believed that this was the intention of the game design. *Dishonored* facilitates stealth gameplay (Purchese, 2012a), something different from the majority of run-and-gun games. As Participant B explains:

The very first time I tried to stick to more stealthy low chaos way, purely because you're figuring out the game, trying to play it how it's supposed to be played, I guess.

Participant E echoes this sentiment by explaining why they elected to play for the first time in a stealthy, entirely non-violent playstyle:

…I kind of got the feeling that the game was kind of designed for that kind of player.

IGN Editor Charles Onyett (2012) praised the stealth system in *Dishonored* as being extremely well developed. *Dishonored*'s stealth mechanics are also positively perceived by interview participants as being well designed and this entices them to play in this style. As Participant A explains:

> *I mean I'm a big Assassin's Creed fan as well. But for me, Assassin's Creed gameplay is also very good, but they didn't really get the stealth gameplay down. No matter what you did you were gonna find yourself in confrontation. But with Dishonored, if you really want to do this stealthily there's a … you can go through each level without triggering a single alarm, or without anybody actually seeing you. So, it was interesting to see how it all worked.*

Interviewees indicated that there was a sense that the game was designed to guide players towards a more moral and non-violent playthrough in order to achieve the more positive story ending. *Dishonored* was perceived by participants to penalise immoral or violent playthroughs in a number of ways. This concurs with the previously outlined findings of Klemm and Pieters (2017), Norman and Ortony (2003) and Wilcox (2018).

As articulated by Participant C regarding their secondary, violent playthrough:

> *I went full chaotic, just to see how it would end up. I must admit the game doesn't really want you to go full chaotic. It puts extra enemies and extra rats and things like this (laughs) it was a little bit annoying.*

Co-creative director of *Dishonored*, Raphael Colantonio, revealed to the media prior to the game's release that there are negative consequences to a violent playthrough (Purchese, 2012a). Furthermore, *Dishonored* gamers are informed via a load screen in the first mission of the game that "Using stealth and the nonlethal approach has benefits: Fewer rats and weepers, some people react favourably, and the final outcome is not as dark".

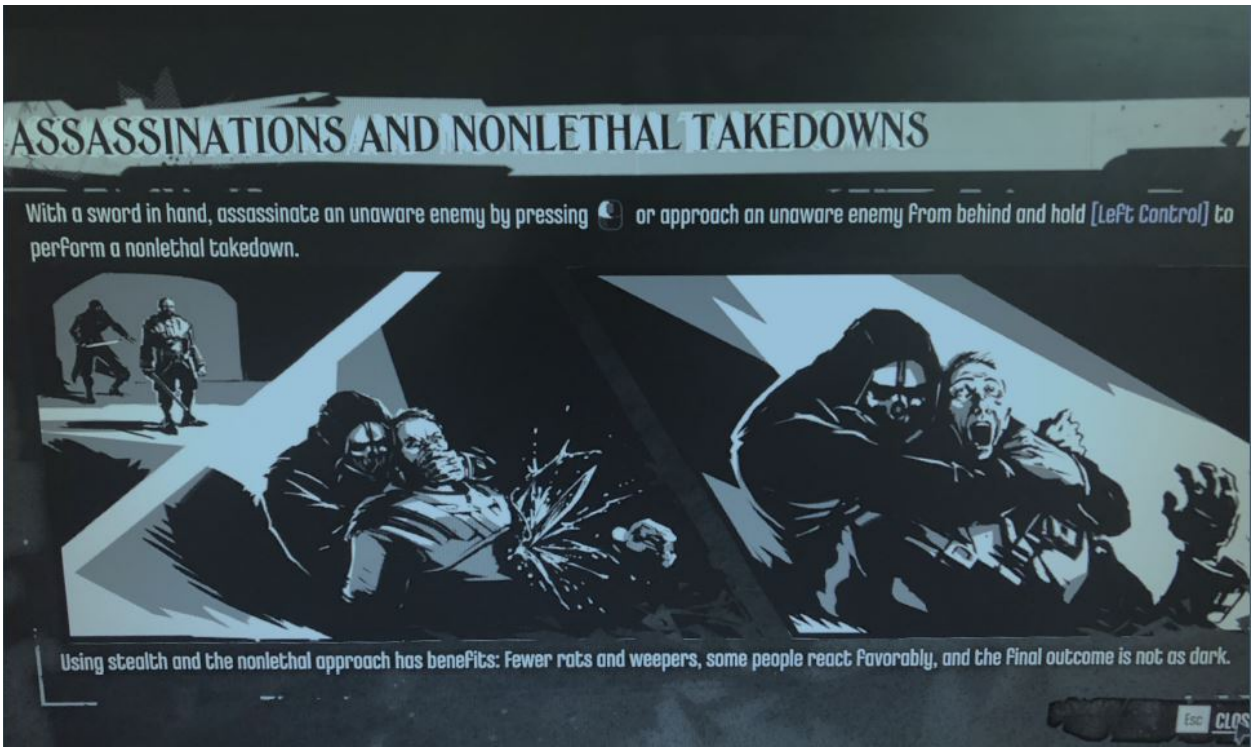


Figure 5.2 Screen capture of loading screen *Dishonored* (2012)

Most participants were aware of the impact of chaotic and violent choices upon the continuing gameplay and narrative and many indicated that they altered their morality-based gameplay choices accordingly. As stated by Participant A:

> *Yeah, I knew that not leaving behind a trail of bodies and not creating a mess basically would unlock what would necessarily be the 'good' ending of the game. Because the main objective is to get Emily back on the throne. That's kind of what I was aiming at with my first playthrough.*

Upon analysis, many participants revealed that their choice to play low-chaos and low violence was made because the game itself was designed around using the stealth mechanics and would 'punish' the player both narratively and in gameplay for playing chaotically and violently. This agrees with existing research related to the influence that game design can have in directing players towards certain moral choices (Wilcox, 2018). Additionally, Participant A's statement echoes the work of Gergen (2015) who indicates that a gamer may make choices in accordance with the situated ethics of the game instead of in accordance with their own personal moral position.

Further motivations for making morality-based gameplay choices include gamer personality and motivation as specifically related to the theories of Quick, Atkinson and Lin (2012) and VandenBerghe (2012). These motivations are clarified in the following section.

5.2.3.1.2 Gamer Personality and Motivation

As outlined in the literature review of this study, a number of research studies have been conducted relating to gamer personality characteristics (Bartle, 1996; 2006; Salen & Zimmerman, 2003; Yee, 2006), how gamers perceive gaming experiences (Quick, Atkinson & Lin, 2012) and the game design elements and motivations that lead to enjoyment (Quick, Atkinson & Lin, 2012; VandenBerghe, 2012; Yee, 2006). A number of the findings from such studies were represented in the analysis of participants' interviews.

5.2.3.1.2.1 Domains of Play

VandenBerghe's (2012) Domains of Play and their subdivided facets were unpacked in Chapter 2 – Games and Gamers. Jason VandenBerghe (2012) drew upon the five-factor model of psychological research (McCrae & John, 1992) to inform further ludological study, linking the five motivation domains of the psychological five factor model to five domains of play, or the aspects of a game that a particular gamer personality type might seek out.

The following figure illustrates the various facets that fall within each domain of play and act as motivating elements for gameplay.

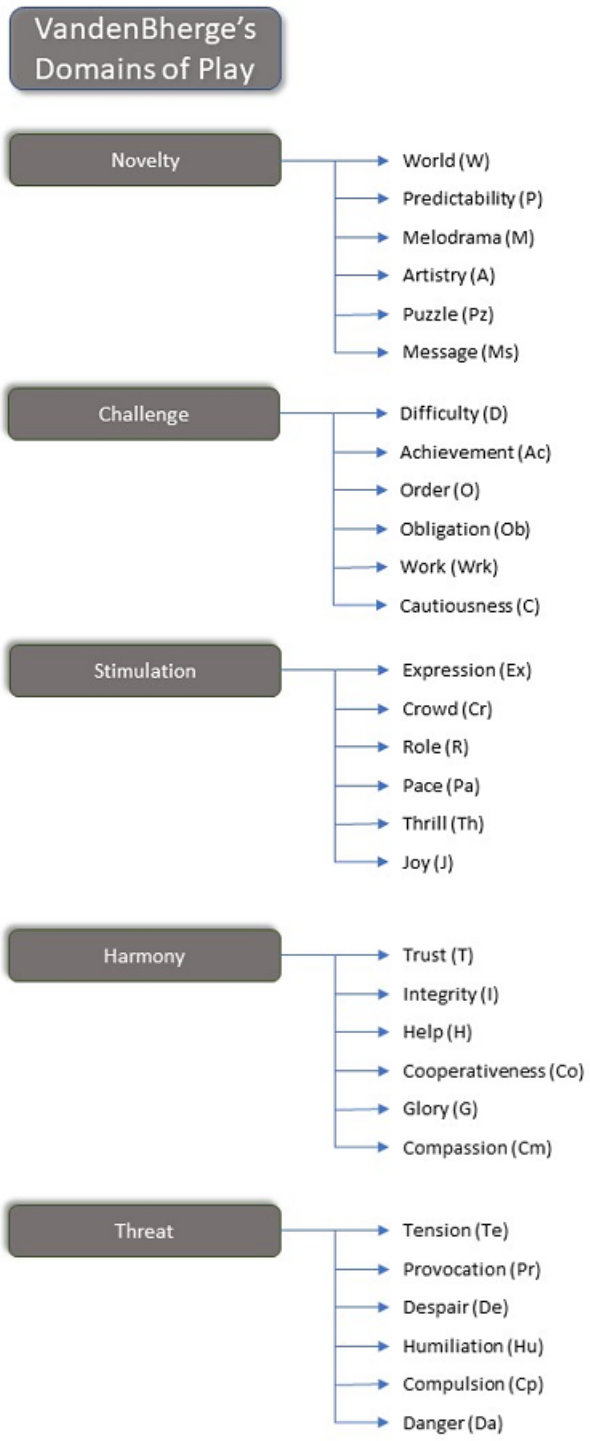


Figure 5.3. VandenBerghe's Domains of Play

Analysis of interview data revealed the following motivating domains of play among South African participants in line with VandenBerghe's (2012) identified domains of play. Table 5.2 below indicates a spread of motivating facets predominantly within the domains of Novelty, Challenge and Stimulation.

Table 5.2 – Participants' motivating domains of play

	Novelty						Challenge						Stimulation					Harmony						Threat					
	W	P	M	A	Pz	Ms	D	Ac	O	Ob	Wr	C	Ex	Cr	R	Pa	Th	J	T	I	H	Co	G	Cm	Te	Pr	De	Hu	Cp	Da
A	■	■	■	■			■	■				■				■	■													
B		■																												
C		■	■	■					■			■				■	■													
D	■	■	■	■			■	■	■			■																		
E	■	■	■	■			■	■				■																		
F	■	■	■				■	■								■	■					■								
G	■		■	■				■								■														

Analysing the respective domains of play of participants reveals a pattern of commonalities occurring in the domains of Novelty (specifically facets of World, Predictability, Melodrama and Artistry), Challenge (specifically facets of Difficulty, Achievement, Cautiousness), and Stimulation (specifically facets of Pace and Thrill).

The general commonality of indicated motivating facets among participants is reflective of the nature of the game *Dishonored* itself. The population of this study was gamers who had elected to play the game, *Dishonored*, of their own volition prior to involvement with this research study. The domains of play articulated by participants as their motivating factors to engaging with a video game are all present within the *Dishonored* gameplay experience and thus they elected to play the game.

As an example, for Participant E, the in-game world is a motivating factor in electing to play a video game.

> *I guess it's nice to kind of lose yourself in a world where the laws are kind of different… and the art was absolutely amazing. I like to research a video game before I buy it and one of the art designers is crazy good, I was watching some of his concept art. I also quite*

like that it's in a fictional city but they basically loosely based it off of London, I don't know if you saw that? It's kind of a loosely based London feel to it. But it somehow a combination between old technology and new technology and I just felt it was a really interesting way to bring all of these concepts together.

This maps to the facet of World (W) which relates to the game's offer of setting and the facet of Artistry (A), the offer of captivating visuals or audio (VandenBerghe, 2012).

Building the game-world of *Dishonored's* city of Dunwall was a key design focus for the game development team. In the words of Viktor Antonov, visual design director for *Dishonored*: *"*For me … Dunwall is far superior by quantity of design, quality of design and precision… For me, it's absolutely up there to the level of craftsmanship and love that a gaming world can get.*"* (Purchese, 2012b, p. 1).

When analysed in terms of VandenBerghe's (2012) domains of play, the game *Dishonored*, incorporates a number of design elements that fall within the domains of Novelty, Challenge and Stimulation and thus appealed to participants' whose motivating facets fell within those domains.

5.2.3.1.2.2 Game Design Appeal Factors

Quick, Atkinson and Lin (2012) indicate that the gaming experience is comprised of a combination of specific design elements leading to enjoyment, and gamer personality characteristics. Like VandenBerghe (2012), Quick *et al*. (2012) drew upon the five-factor model of psychological research, or O.C.E.A.N. method (McCrae & John, 1992) to identify factors that represent a changeable game design feature that impacts upon gaming experience enjoyment. Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) factors impacting enjoyment were outlined in Chapter 2 and are summarised as follows: Fantasy, Exploration, Fidelity, Companionship, Challenge, and Competition.

Analysis of participants' interviews indicated the following gameplay aspects impacting enjoyment among South African participants in line with Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) identified factors.

Table 5.3 Participants' factors impacting gameplay enjoyment.

	Fantasy	Exploration	Fidelity	Companionship	Challenge	Competition
A	■	■	■		■	
B		■				
C	■		■			
D	■	■			■	
E	■	■	■		■	
F	■			■		
G	■	■	■		■	

Analysis of interviews reveals an overlap among participants' perceptions of factors impacting their enjoyment of video gameplay related to Fantasy, Exploration, Fidelity and Challenge. This too is reflective of the factors inherent to *Dishonored* itself, which initially attracted the attention and engagement of interview participants.

As an example, for Participant E exploration has a core impact upon gameplay enjoyment.

> *The thing is I'm really paranoid in the sense that they've put us in this area, this world and someone spent a lot of time crafting it so obviously every part is there for a reason. So I quite like if there's a room over there that's locked and I don't know how to get into it, I will go onto Google and I'll spend an hour trying to research how the hell I open that door so I can see what that guy made. (laughs) Ya, I do that. Sometimes I'll obviously miss stuff, but I do try and get in everywhere.*

Participant E described Quick *et al*.'s (2012) factor of Exploration which relates to gamers' desire to look for the unknown, collect all available items and discover hidden areas.

The game *Dishonored*, includes a number of Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) factors for game enjoyment, which appealed to participants' of this research study who enjoy those game design elements, elected to play *Dishonored,* and thus formed part of this study's population. *Dishonored* contains a morality system whereby the core mechanics and storytelling engine work in tandem with opportunities for the gamer to make moral choices. As described previously, these moral choices are not always made for reasons tied to morality. Participants indicated a wide range of

motivations for making morality-based gameplay decisions for reasons unrelated to morality, or phrased differently, making morality-based choices for amoral reasons.

Upon analysis of participants' interviews it appears that gamers' amoral choices may reflect their individual personality and gameplay motivation factors. The sentiments expressed by participants may also relate to identification, albeit subconsciously, with in-game characters since some participants may at times project into characters and internalise their points of view as explained by Cohen (2001). This was evident in Participants F's statement:

> *…so I've been playing games for years so I've kind of become like, I know when if the villain is coming at me, I'm supposed to react to that.*

As indicated previously in this chapter, the Table 5.2 reproduced below represents the participants' domains of play (VandenBerghe, 2012) indicated as motivating factors in their selection of video games in general and *Dishonored* specifically.

Table 5.2 – Participants' motivating domains of play

	Novelty						Challenge						Stimulation						Harmony						Threat					
	W	P	M	A	Pz	Ms	D	Ac	O	Ob	Wr	C	Ex	Cr	R	Pa	Th	J	T	I	H	Co	G	Cm	Te	Pr	De	Hu	Cp	Da
A	■	■	■	■			■	■				■				■	■													
B		■																												
C		■	■	■					■			■				■	■													
D	■	■	■	■			■	■	■			■																		
E	■	■	■	■			■	■				■																		
F	■	■	■				■	■								■	■					■								
G	■		■	■				■								■														

The following table represents the amoral motivations provided by participants for making morality-based gameplay decisions in *Dishonored* as aligned to VandenBerghe's (2012) identified domains of play.

Table 5.4 Participants' motivations for amoral decision-making aligned to domains of play

	Novelty						Challenge						Stimulation						Harmony						Threat					
	W	P	M	A	Pz	Ms	D	Ac	O	Ob	Wr	C	Ex	Cr	R	Pa	Th	J	T	I	H	Co	G	Cm	Te	Pr	De	Hu	Cp	Da
A	■	■	■				■	■				■					■							■						
B	■	■					■		■			■				■														
C	■	■	■				■									■	■													
D	■	■	■				■					■																		
E	■	■	■				■	■				■					■							■						
F	■		■				■	■	■			■				■	■													
G	■		■	■			■	■				■					■													

When comparing table 5.2 and table 5.4 the many common areas of overlap between participants' indicated domains of play and their provided reasons for amoral gameplay choices are apparent. Participants make morality-based gameplay choices for non-morality-based, or amoral reasons (Francis *et al*., 2016; Joeckel *et al*., 2012), and those reasons may correspond to the relevant domains of play (VandenBerghe, 2012) for that individual.

Participant D indicated *Dishonored's* story, or Melodrama (M) within the Domain of Novelty, as a personal facet of their domains of play. Melodrama referring to the presence of emotionally impactful narratives or stories (VandenBerghe, 2012).

> *So, in general about video games I prefer a more storyline-based game.*

For Participant D's second playthrough they played in a high-chaos, ultra-violent manner. When discussing reasons for choosing to play lethal violence, Participant D indicates that the storyline of the game was known to change depending on whether or not the player had completed a high-chaos or a low-chaos playthrough, and that they wanted to see the difference in storyline between their first non-violent playthrough and their subsequent lethal-violent playthrough.

> *So, for a second try they said if you play more chao… chao … that word (laughs) then your ending would change a bit. And (laughs) the ending changes quite a lot (laughs) if you play like that so it was one of those – I just wanted to see how it would change.*

Participant D played a secondary playthrough in a violent manner in order to explore the various narratives the game facilitates, which holds true to this participant's indication of Melodrama as one of their domains of play (VandenBerghe, 2012).

Participant A describes themselves in line with VandenBerghe's (2012) facet of Achievement (Ac) within the Domain of Challenge. The facet of Achievement denotes the game's offer of recognition for accomplishments. Participant A played multiple playthroughs with different morality bases in each playthrough in order to unlock the different achievements granted for each ending. Participant A expressed the desire for achievement as a motivation for violent gameplay.

> *I also wanted to unlock the trophies, because I think you unlock trophies for unlocking the good and bad ending. I'm a bit of a trophy hunter.*

Participant F described themselves as an impatient person who initially played the game when very young and who enjoyed having the option to aggressively make their way through the game. The facets of Pace (Pa) and Thrill (Th) within the Domain of Stimulation are relevant to this participant, with Pace relating to the game's offer of a high volume of activities and Thrill representing high-intensity and exciting action (VandenBerghe, 2012). When questioned why they chose a high chaos playthrough of the game and why they elected not to avoid violence, Participant F indicated that this gameplay style was faster and more exciting and described making morality-based decisions for amoral reasons of a desire for fast-paced and thrilling gameplay.

> *Well I suppose for speeds sake … I find I enjoyed the combat I enjoyed the chances of ending up in a large conflict with multiple enemies at the same time where having to deal with them at quick rates can affect how everything turns out and I find, like I don't know, like sometimes the stealth gameplay is more non-eventful. I enjoy a reaction base.*

Note that the Factor of Difficulty (D) within the Domain of Challenge was indicated by all participants as a reason for making morality-based gameplay choices for amoral reasons; regardless of whether the facet of Difficulty is present within their own personal domain framework or not. The facet of Difficulty referring to the presence of difficult-to-accomplish goals (VandenBerghe, 2012). As stated by Participant E:

I felt like the main part of the game was to try and be the good guy, which is what I tried to do. But I found after redoing a mission three or four times that it's just not gonna be possible for me not to kill this guy so… I guess sometimes I went between doing high-chaos, low-chaos.

A connection between gamers' domains of play (VandenBerghe, 2012) and their reasons for amoral decision-making is echoed in factors impacting on participant's enjoyment of gameplay (Quick *et al*., 2012) and their impetus for amoral decision-making. The reproduced table below represents the factors impacting upon participants' enjoyment of video games in general and *Dishonored* specifically as aligned to Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) factors.

Table 5.3. Participants' factors impacting gameplay enjoyment.

	Fantasy	Exploration	Fidelity	Companionship	Challenge	Competition
A	■	■	■		■	
B		■				
C	■		■			
D	■	■			■	
E	■	■	■		■	
F	■			■		
G	■	■	■		■	

The below table represents the amoral motivations provided for making morality-based gameplay decisions as aligned to Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) factors.

Table 5.5 Participants' motivations for amoral decision-making aligned to factors of enjoyment.

	Fantasy	Exploration	Fidelity	Companionship	Challenge	Competition
A						
B						
C						
D						
E						
F						
G						

When comparing Table 5.3. and Table 5.5 similarities between initially indicated factors impacting enjoyment and some of the provided reasons for amoral gameplay choices for each participant are apparent. Some of the reasoning for making morality-based gameplay choices for amoral reasons corresponds to the relevant factors that impact upon that individual's enjoyment of *Dishonored*.

Participant A indicated that roleplay was important for gameplay enjoyment in line with Quick *et al*.'s (2012) factor of Fantasy, which represents enjoyment of a fantasy setting and the opportunity to roleplay a character, potentially different from one's self. Participant A further stated that gameplay decisions related to morality were made as if they were *Dishonored's* protagonist, and not on their own behalf.

> *I try to put myself in his place and in his shoes because then you can really immerse yourself in that game. I'm a big gamer so I like to immerse myself as much as I can.*

Note the absence of Fidelity as a basis for making choices amorally regardless of whether or not it was indicated as a factor for gameplay enjoyment. Fidelity relates to enjoyment of graphics (Quick *et al*., 2012) and no participants indicated that they made amoral choices specifically in order to experience or explore the game's graphics. As *Dishonored* is a single-player-game, the factors of Competition and Companionship, which relate to gameplay with other individuals (Quick *et al*., 2012), are irrelevant to this research study.

Additionally, it is notable that the factor of Challenge was indicated by all participants as an explanation for making morality-based decisions on an amoral basis. Challenge representing gamers' enjoyment of mastering difficult games and solving trials (Quick *et al*., 2012). When the non-violent gameplay became too difficult or too frustrating for participants then gameplay transitioned towards increased violence, regardless of whether or not Challenge was a factor for gameplay enjoyment for that participant. Participant A described how they attempted to ghost through the game (an entirely non-violent gameplay approach where the player must avoid being seen by any NPCs) but resorted to increasingly violent gameplay due to the difficulty of this playstyle.

> *(laughs) Because I remember watching a YouTube video where someone did it and it was like "pssht – that looks pretty easy" and then I gave it a go and I was like 'never mind'. … Up until like the last level and then after that I just couldn't do it (laughs) I had to switch to a more aggressive playstyle after that... Ya, there were certain levels where it was actually impossible to get away from everything, so you would either have to start killing everybody or mix up your playstyle …*

Upon analysis a connection may be present between both gamers' personal domains of play (VandenBerghe, 2012) and the factors that impact upon their enjoyment of games (Quick *et al*., 2012), and the motivations they provide for making morality-based gameplay choices that are not predicated upon their own personal moral positioning. However, not all morality-based decisions were described by participants as having been made for amoral reasons. Some of the morality-based decisions made by participants in *Dishonored* were indicated to have been made for reasons related to morality, both in line with, and against, personal moral positioning.

5.2.3.1.3 Moral choice

For the purpose of this research study the term 'moral' refers to the principles of that which is right or good. Moral choice on the part of *Dishonored* gamers are those morality-based gameplay choices that are made for reasons related to the gamers' personal moral positions. These moral choices will be analysed in this chapter in order to explore the research questions "what motivations do *Dishonored* gamers provide for their in-game morality-based gameplay choices?" and "in what ways are gamer's perceptions of their own morality enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored*?"

The previous sections of this study revealed that *Dishonored* gamers may make morality-based gameplay choices for reasons unrelated to their own personal moral positioning and that these amoral choices may be related to their individual personality and motivation. In this section interview data is analysed to illuminate the morality-based gameplay choices that gamers make which are tied to their own personal moral positioning through their perception of their playing self and how gamers' utilise moral disengagement in order to avoid moral concerns in order to maintain their enjoyment of the gameplay experience.

5.2.3.1.3.1 The Playing Self

The 'playing self' refers to participants' perception of their own morality and how this personal moral positioning is manifested in the morality-based gameplay choices that they make while playing *Dishonored*. Data analysis revealed participants' perceptions that relate to existing research in the field of morality and gaming related to moral conflict experienced when interacting with NPCs in video games (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010; Krcmar & Cingel, 2016; Weaver & Lewis, 2012), personal accountability for in-game moral choices (Zagal, 2009), the impact of moral salience on the degree to which participants feel moral accountability or guilt (Joeckel *et al*., 2012) and how participants experience ethics as situated within the construct of video games (Gergen, 2015).

The intent of this section is to explore the research question: "In what ways are gamer's perceptions of their own morality enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored*?" and in order to answer this it was necessary to first question "How do *Dishonored* gamers in South Africa perceive their own morality?".

Analysis of interview data revealed that participants' perception of their own moral positions varies, but the majority of participants indicated that they perceive themselves as generally morally good. Participant A stated that they would like to think that they are a good person:

> *I'd like to say I'm not selfish, I don't really make decisions that would put other people in jeopardy or other people at risk or something.*

Participant C too perceives themselves as tending to:

> *…lean heavily towards the good side.*

Participant E indicated that they had reflected on their own morals and felt that their approach to morality could be summed up as follows:

> *Try to do the most good. Or the least harm. I don't really see them as being the same: the most good and least harm. But, for the most part, most good.*

Participants B, D, F and G all indicated that though they are not naturally inclined to violence for the sake of it, they perceive themselves as being capable of violence if they or their loved ones were threatened. As stated by Participant F:

> *well, umm. I see myself as a person that doesn't look for any form of aggression or violence in a normal state. Umm but I feel that if the situation where I had to harm someone in order to protect myself or someone that I care for, came and it was either a life and death situation where it was me or them, I would react in kind. I would not… at least I would like to say that I would try and protect myself and people that I care about. Whether I would actually do it, that's more on the situation and time. But I would like to believe that I have a fairly good moral compass and that umm I would not go out of my way to hurt other people when in a normal situation.*

There was some variance in answers on personal moral positioning. *"*Chaotic neutral*"* was the descriptive term given by Participant G, who identified themselves as being generally morally neutral in contrast with most answers that indicated participants' perceived themselves as somewhat morally good. Participant B described their moral position as harsh but fair and made no mention of being morally good:

> *Like, brutal at times but honest and like justifiable almost.*

Direct questioning relating to participants' perception of any link between their personal moral positioning and their morality-based gameplay in *Dishonored* indicates divergence of opinion. Those participants who felt there was a link between their personal morality and their *Dishonored*

gameplay choices include Participant B who perceived somewhat of a link in a limited fashion, stating:

> *I guess what you're comfortable with psychologically you'll put through to the game, I guess. I don't know how to answer that really. Umm ya it's also a very difficult question… I think it's difficult to try and link the two when you haven't really been in some of the situations.*

This sentiment was echoed by Participant C, who indicated a link on a situational basis; sometimes present, sometimes not. This seems to support Joeckel *et al.*'s (2012) supposition that not all in-game scenarios may be perceived by players to be morality-based scenarios, and decisions may then be made in order to progress through the game as opposed to being made in accordance with personal moral positioning.

> *Ya, look if you look at my first playthrough I probably like to play it as though I would – I like to make good decisions, logical decisions, even if a decision is inherently bad, if it's logical I'll probably still go for it. So, there is definitely a connect there. In terms of the violent playthrough that's more of an escape really - because I'm not really a violent person.*

Participant G perceived a strong link in accordance with the findings of Santos *et al.*'s (2018) study which indicates a strong positive correlation between gamers' personal moral positioning and their morality-based gameplay choices.

> *So yeah it is quite immersive (laughs) and morality-based type decisions so where I could kill, I would rather be ok, ya he didn't deserve it so morality-based I'll be like no, let's not kill him, let's save him like rather leave him in jail or locked up, in that type of sense.*

Those participants who felt there was no link whatsoever between their personal moral position and their morality based *Dishonored* gameplay choices include Participant A who, when questioned if they perceived a link or not stated:

So, I don't agree with the notion that people's decisions in video games reflect how they would actually make those decisions in real life. In video games there's no real consequences to your actions so you can pretty much do whatever you want. That's kind of the whole point.

Participant D too indicated their perception of a complete lack of a link*:*

Like, how I play the games and my personal morals they don't – there's no correlation between them.

Participant F explains why the moral decisions that they made had no link to their personal moral position:

…so I've been playing games for years so I've kind of become like, I know when if the villain is coming at me, I'm supposed to react to that, so umm, I don't think that it's effectively on my moral compass and standard that ya, umm aggression is the number one way to go because obviously it isn't.

Participant responses related to their perception on whether or not their morality-based gameplay choices are connected with their own personal moral positioning would at times contradict with information they themselves gave during the interview process. As an example, as previously stated, Participant A indicated that they perceive no link whatsoever:

I don't agree with the notion that people's decisions in video games reflect how they would actually make those decisions in real life.

However, when discussing their playstyle, indicated that in both their initial non-violent and their subsequent violent playthroughs they did no harm to innocents:

Ya, through my playthroughs, both of them, I didn't really kill any innocent people. The ones that were infected by that like zombie virus, those I killed. But I didn't really feel bad because they were trying to kill me as well. But in terms of like actual civilians, even through my lethal playthrough, I'd try and save them as much as I could. 'Cause I don't

really, I'm not one of those people who will go into a game and just start killing everything in sight.

Participant A defined their own moral position as *"*neutral good*"* and made mention of experiencing moral conflict in line with what was theorised by Hartmann and Vorderer (2006), Krcmar and Cingel (2016), Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009). When presented with the moral dilemma of killing a female target or neutralising her by sedating her and sending her away with a stranger to an unknown fate, Participant A shared their discomfort with this situation as follows:

I think for me the hardest in terms of like moral choice was the Boyle party level, because you could either kill lady Boyle or you could trick her into coming down to the cellar with you, knock her out and give her to that random guy that takes her away and does god knows what with her. So, for me that was the hardest one because, you (laughs) you're stuck in a bit of a dilemma where you're just like: "ok cool you can either have the blood on your hands or you can not kill her and feel great about that but then give her to some dude who's gonna pretty much keep her prisoner for the rest of her life. So that for me was probably the hardest part of the game in terms of morality choices.

A number of participants declared strongly that they perceived no link between their own personal moral position and the morality-based choices they made in *Dishonored* but contradicted this by revealing in-game actions and choices predicated on empathy for NPCs as well as experiencing moral conflict during in-game, morality-based decision making. This supports the research of Francis *et al*. (2016) who indicate that moral judgments made by gamers and their actual moral actions taken in-game may be unrelated.

Participants' perceptions related to gamer interaction with NPCs and the experience of moral conflict (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010; Krcmar & Cingel, 2016; Weaver & Lewis, 2012), and accountability (Zagal, 2009) varied.

Participant A described how they felt an emotional connection to certain NPCs as if those NPCs were real people, in line with the findings of Hartmann & Vorderer (2006), Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009). Participant A indicated that they felt conflict and accountability when those NPCs they were emotionally connected with were at risk of being harmed:

> *I think Emily and Sam are probably the only ones that I did feel any sort of connection – cause Emily's obviously the main focus of your game and Sam you pretty much see the most throughout the game besides her. So those two characters I felt quite connected to. And yeah, the last level where the guy is dangling Emily off a bridge, I was (laughs) a little bit nervous to say the least because I thought it might be one of those games where they make you get to the end and then kind of hit you with a curveball you know?*

In contrast to this, Participant C indicated that their interactions with NPCs did not cause moral conflict and that they did not feel accountable for their violent actions. This corresponds to Ladas' (2002) work that reports that gamers who play violent video games do not equate violence against NPCs with violence against social entities, rather it equates to the elimination of obstacles preventing a victory condition. Participant C reports on their secondary, violent playthrough:

> *I did feel like a god almost because I was quite good at the gameplay and I was just massacring through swarms, so it was very fun, but the effects of that happened very quickly because I was massacring everyone. I mean even people that weren't a threat I was just killing because it was a reflex at that point. I walked around the corner, saw a maid and slit her throat (laughs).*

When questioned about how they felt when killing NPCs indiscriminately, Participant C stated:

> *Ya look the civilian, I knew that I didn't have to do that, but it didn't really affect me that much… Because that was the character that I was in in that playthrough.*

Participant C was roleplaying as a violent character and thus did not feel conflict with their own personal morals (Aupers, 2015; Bartle, 2004; Deen *et al*., 2015). Participant C further described how, on their initial, non-violent playthrough, NPCs were treated as if they were real people in accordance with the work of Hartman and Vorderer (2010) and Krcmar and Cingel (2016), Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009). Their interactions with these NPCs were aligned with the participant's own moral position, which as indicated earlier for this participant, leaned "heavily towards the good side" and their intentions towards these NPCs were non-threatening. However, this participant stated that their reason for this playstyle was because that is what the character that they were roleplaying in that scenario would do:

> *So, in my first playthrough, if I killed the maid, I probably would have felt bad about it 'cause that's not what I intended on doing. But in the second playthrough I didn't really care.*

Data analysis also revealed that participants' morality-based gameplay was at times linked to their own personal moral positioning when a moral choice threatens a salient part of their personal moral positioning. This is in line with the findings of Joeckel, Bowman, and Dogruel (2012) who stated that in narrative-based games, players make decisions according to their own moral position (as well as the narrative cues of the game) when they perceive gameplay actions as threats to their moral sensibilities (Joeckel *et al*., 2012). Participant E described their experience of moral salience as follows:

> *Yeah. So maybe when, perhaps there's like a cushion in between you and a game. If it's not, if it doesn't object your morals enough, you would do it. But if it's like way overboard it's almost like it breaks the barrier between the game and you and then …ok, now it's unacceptable.*

Participant F described their experience of morality-based gameplay in *Dishonored* as having chosen their ethical approach situationally, in line with the research of Gergen (2015), who posits that a gamers' 'playing-self' makes decisions in accordance with the rules and situated ethics of the in-game world as opposed to with moral principles held in real life. When questioned if the game world and the story that's built into it affects the morality-based choices that they made, Participant F responded as follows:

> *Yes, I do. 'Cause based on the world around a, let's say, dystopian, old century, so it levels more on a, as a fantasy, so it's, it creates a different type of umm morality aspect where there's the thugs that go around extorting people, to the guards that are just throwing dead bodies off the cliff, it's just sommer. So, it creates a sense of almost desensitisation on it when it comes down to actually killing the guards and the thugs when like dealing with them due to the environment that you find yourself in.*

Participant F indicated that their moral choices in the game were made to suit the given environment; this agrees with Gergen's (2015) findings on situated ethics in video game play.

Gamers may gain insight into their own personality and identity through emergent and somewhat unstructured gameplay (Deen *et al.,* 2015) and video games have become a new avenue for exploring dimensions of the self (de Mul, 2015). Participant G describes their process of self-reflection and exploration as follows:

> *So when you like save the Emperor from… ugh the Empress from the Brothel… it was that relief feeling, like OK cool we have something to work towards and then realising as well that it's, you can use it as a metaphor in that sense. You can save yourself from certain things or aspects in your own life where you can portray as a metaphor, so. I'm saving myself from my own imprisonment in a sense. Um, using that as an example, where you like save the Empress, you get that relief feeling OK, yes I did this, let's get out of here and if you use it on yourself you can see ok, the way that you um choose your own decisions has a good and a bad for like what I would choose in real life and what I would choose in a game actually like made sense in a way that it balanced out in a way. Like my moral in the real life affected my choices in game and the choices I made in-game made me reflect on stuff I did on real life.*

Worth noting is that upon analysis, a number of participant responses differed from one another, to a greater or lesser degree, across all given areas within this theme. This is indicative of the fact that morality-based gameplay is a complex and multi-layered activity that is predicated on a multivariate web of gamer self-perception and identity, reasoning, and motivations. Sweeping statements and generalisations related to gamers' reasons for making morality-based gameplay decisions are unreliable, as this is a deeply personal and highly complex process that varies among individuals and within different contexts.

In this section we have explored participants' perceptions of their own morals and in what ways these morals are enacted in their morality-based gameplay. Participants' experience of their moral choices have been explored in terms of moral conflict and accountability felt, and their experience of whether or not their moral choices are situated ethically within the framework of the game under study, and if only those ethical issues that are salient to the individual participant come into play or not. Participants further described their experiences with moral disengagement when making morality-based gameplay decisions that contradict their own moral positions.

5.2.3.1.3.2 Moral Disengagement

For the purpose of this study 'moral disengagement' is defined as the process in which gamers try to avoid moral concerns of virtual moral issues that contradict their own moral position in order to continue enjoying the game. As defined by Hartmann & Vorderer (2010 p.98) moral disengagement argues that "players try to avoid moral concern and related aversive feelings to maintain their entertainment experience.". Participants of this study indicated that at times they had made morality-based gameplay choices on a moral basis, even though these decisions contradicted their personal moral positioning. When questioned why they had made this choice against their own morals, a number of reasons were given in order to distance themselves from the cognitive dissonance experienced between their gameplay choice and their own morality. The following reasons were given for this moral disengagement and each will be unpacked in order to explore the motivations that *Dishonored* gamers provide for their in-game morality-based gameplay choices.

Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) explain that if a video game is contextualised by its design as being justified, it leads to less guilt and negative emotions on the part of the player than if those actions are framed by the game as being unjustified. Interestingly justification was not identified as having an effect on player enjoyment (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). This position was supported upon analysis of participants' interviews in this study, where a number of *Dishonored* gamers stated that they did not feel guilty in high-chaos or high-violence playthroughs because they were supposed to behave this way within the role they have been given by the game. Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) assert that justification is a core basis for moral disengagement (Bandura, 2002) and explain that fighting for a just cause or with the moral high ground contextualises violence and doing harm as appropriate, thus negating any cognitive dissonance that may be experienced in relation to the players own moral framework (Klimmt, *et. al*., 2006; Opotow, 1990; Raney, 2004). To quote Hartmann and Vorderer (2010, p.106): "fighting for a just purpose or for a moral authority frames harm-doing as appropriate and thus suppresses dissonance." Participant C explains how in a non-violent playthrough, they felt justified in killing an NPC:

> *Like there was the situation where you found the assassin that killed the Empress in the beginning, and you can decide whether to leave him there or not. While he was still talking, I slit his throat because I was like, this is the whole point (laughs) … it was a revenge story.*

Klimmt *et. al*. (2006, p.313) describe how the opponent NPCs in a video game are typically positioned as having unacceptable moral positions and "thus deserve punishment" and are "worth killing", which creates a narrative context for the attribution of blame, which Bandura (2002) defined as the claim that victims are responsible for the violence enacted upon them. This statement also corresponds with Klimmt, *et. al.*'s. (2009) notion that the interactivity of a game overrides the distance between the game character and the player, and subsequently, they merge through the process of identification and the gamer temporarily adopts certain aspects of the perceived identity of the game characters. It is evident in this case that identification was selective and did not involve a full sublimation of the self of the gamer. During immersive play, the gamer selected to become the killer and thus suspended an initial moral decision to be 'the good guy'.

Punishment as a motive for moral disengagement from violent actions was described by participant G who stated:

> *I felt that they deserved it in the game sense. In that, moment of standing or like the guards and stuff. Yes, the guard wasn't brought over but I still felt that if he did more he could have helped the situation better or help save the people against the rats but they didn't so, I felt that like sometimes they deserved it.*

Participant B echoed this motivation as follows:

> *So, to me certain characters from the game would be… I perceived them to be bad people… and they needed to be eliminated.*

Participant G's response to whether or not they killed non-threatening NPCs was similar:

> *I don't want to sound like a psycho, but ya, I did. Yes, even if they were just bystanding. I would target them because obviously there are guards, the guards are the bad guys I need to take the bad guys out and then deal with them.*

Another basis for moral disengagement is familiarity. As described by Hartmann and Vorderer (2010) the greater the familiarity with the game, the lower the guilt and negative effects experienced by the player and thus the greater their enjoyment. In analysis; participants who

played non-violently initially and then subsequently as violent, indicated that they felt some guilt if accidental violence occurred in their first playthrough. However, in their subsequent, violent playthrough where they intentionally committed, sometimes unjustified, violent acts, they felt diminished or no guilt. Participant C:

> *Yes. So, in my first playthrough, if I killed the maid, I probably would have felt bad about it 'cause that's not what I intended on doing. But in the second playthrough I didn't really care… if you look at my first playthrough I probably like to play it as though I would – I like to make good decisions… In terms of the violent playthrough that's more of an escape really - because I'm not really a violent person.*

Participant G describes the move towards violence in a secondary gameplay as being disengaged from moral concerns as follows:

> *Because I was trying to, the second playthrough I wasn't as immersed as I was in the first playthrough. The first playthrough I was trying to get understand the story, trying to immerse myself into the character where the second playthrough it was more or less like, how can we kill them? Or how can we make this fun? How can we make this enjoyable? type of thing. Using the tools available, not immersing myself in the story at that depth in a sense.*

Another aspect of moral disengagement mentioned by participants relates to the gamers' reflective process; where they engage with an elaborate reflective process, actively removing their mental state from the game in order to remind themselves that they are merely playing a game or are fighting for a good cause.

> *Cause in the end we are playing a game to entertain*

The above quote is Participant E's reflection of their lack of concern with their decision to undertake a mixed playstyle involving both stealthy non-violence and lethal violence. Participant C too reflected on their lack of discomfort or guilt when killing NPCs by stating:

> *It's a game… not real*.

Participant A highlights the framing of their in-game actions within the virtual, non-real nature of video games:

> *I don't really tie decisions that I make in video games based on what I would do in real life. I mean (laughs) in real life I don't have the ability to phase jump from one place to another or summon those form of rats or take over a person's body and take him into a forcefield and disintegrate him or something like that. So, I don't agree with the notion that people's decisions in video games reflect how they would actually make those decisions in real life. In video games there's no real consequences to your actions so you can pretty much do whatever you want. That's kind of the whole point.*

These participant accounts support the assertion of Hartmann and Vorderer (2010, p. 113) that "users awareness of the situation as 'just a game' … reduced guilt and negative effect" and Klimmt *et al*.'s (2006) finding that many participants did not feel moral concern when they performed violent acts and do not feel pressured to morally justify those actions due to their perception and understanding of the virtuality of the game-world being incomparable to real life.

The final, and most frequent means of moral disengagement mentioned by participants is roleplay, which is related to the previously analysed areas of justification and reflective process (Hartmann and Vorderer, 2010; Klimmt *et al*., 2006), but was mentioned with such frequency and consistency by participants that it merits separate analysis. Richard Bartle's (2004) 'roleplaying paradox' refers to a process in which the gamer and their digital representative are merged as one and thus achieve immersion (Deen *et al.*, 2015). Aupers (2015) states that through roleplaying as a game character, gamers can explore different aspects of themselves and have experiences otherwise unobtainable to them in real life.

Participant G describes this use of roleplay as a base for moral disengagement:

> *…the first playthrough I made a lot of choices to help, to play the good guy that they needed, to assist the Empress and all of that, so, umm, my moral standing, the view of what I had, Corvo to be was this good guy so I made choices based on the view of his moral standing.*

Participant D similarly identified the primacy of roleplaying as a reason for disengaging from moral dissonance:

> *Like I said, when I play RPG games I try to live as the character, now if the character is a violent person, I will be violent. Where if the character is kind and I do something violent, I will feel bad.*

These quotes illustrate the use of roleplay as a basis for moral disengagement utilised by participants in order to intercede with the cognitive dissonance they experience when their in-game morality-based gameplay contradicts their personal moral position in line with the findings of Hartmann and Vorderer (2010), Klimmt, *et. al*. (2006), Opotow (1990) and Raney (2004).

Thus, data analysis has indicated that research participants who made morality-based gameplay decisions for moral reasons, when those decisions conflicted with their personal moral positions, underwent moral disengagement in order to continue to enjoy their gameplay experience.

In summary, the first category that emerged from the in-depth personal interviews relates to amoral choice in terms of gamer exploration of core mechanics, and how gamers perceived *Dishonored* as guiding them towards making 'good' moral choices. The second category relates to gamer personality and motivation and its influence on morality-based gameplay decisions. The final category that developed was moral choice, specifically participants' perception of their own morality, their 'playing self' and the process of moral disengagement that they go through in order to reconcile themselves with making morality-based gameplay decisions that contradict their personal moral positioning. These themes were related back to existing research and literature on the topic to aid exploration of research questions relating to gamers' motivations for and enactment of their morality-based gameplay choices both within and without the context of their personal moral positioning.

5.2.3.1.4 Reflection on theory

In this study social constructionism, ludology, and identification theory were integral to the interpretation and analysis of participants' interviews. Consideration of the stable, tangible aspects of gameplay relevant to ludology (Eskelinen, 2001; Montola, 2012), specifically the motivation to explore core mechanics, was identified by most participants as amoral motivation

for making moral choices. The inclusion of social constructionism allowed for the identification of intangible elements of narrative and game world as moral impetuses for making moral choices. Through the externalisation process of interviewing participants, a 'reality' of the gameplay and morality choices was constructed. Participants' own descriptions of their morality and immersive gameplay correspond to objectivation and internalisation. Finally, it is evident that the process of identification (Cohen, 2001; Klimmt *et al*., 2009) was experienced by a number of participants during their gameplay as they described the experience of identifying with and roleplaying as *Dishonored*'s protagonist.

In addition to in-depth, personal interviews, an autoethnography was conducted by the researcher in order to explore motivations for in-game morality-based gameplay choices as well as in what way the researcher's perceptions of her own morality are enacted in her morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored*.

5.2.3.2 Autoethnography

Guided by the research purpose, questions and aims of the study, themes were identified during the autoethnographic analysis. These themes match those identified from conducted interviews, perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the researcher is a part of the study population in the same way as interview participants. These themes influenced which parts of the autoethnography were selected and summarised for interpretation. Only information deemed to be most relevant to the study has been selected for discussion.

The analysis of the autoethnographic report offers further insight into *Dishonored* gamers' motivations for in-game morality-based gameplay choices, and in what ways their perception of their own morality is enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored*. The researcher elected to play the game *Dishonored* of her own volition prior to involvement with this research study and thus fits within the stated population. All excerpts from the autoethnography have been italicised and indented when referred to in this section. The researcher drew upon content from the interviews during the compilation of the autoethnographic report to deductively identify common themes. Themes were also generated inductively from the researcher's own experience with *Dishonored* gameplay.

5.2.3.2.1 Amoral Choice

As stated previously 'amoral choice' denotes a gameplay decision that is disparate from morality, that is, making a choice that appears to be related to morals for a reason entirely unrelated to one's own moral position. Amoral choice was identified as a motivation for morality-based gameplay choices made by the researcher within the theme of guided morality.

5.2.3.2.1.1 Exploration of core mechanics and guided morality

As illustrated previously in this chapter, a low violence, low chaos playthrough in *Dishonored* results in a less-dark ending, which was communicated prior to the game's release.

> *The game indicated right at the start in a loading screen that a low chaos playthrough would have a less dark story outcome. I knew going into it that moral choice would affect the narrative of the story, the plot, NPC interactions and behaviour, as well as the core mechanics, the powers, items chosen, and gameplay approach that become available to me. I wanted the peaceful, positive story and ending.*

The game under study, *Dishonored*, enables stealth gameplay that is well developed (Onyett, 2012). The researcher has a particular affinity for stealth games, starting with *Thief: The Dark Project*, a 1998, first person stealth game published by Eidos Interactive and developed by Looking Glass Studios (Leonard, 1999) and continuing with 2011's The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim, an action roleplaying game developed by Bethesda Game Studios and published by Bethesda Softworks (Onyett, 2011). *Dishonored* was selected initially by the researcher in order to experience the reportedly excellent stealth gameplay mechanics.

> *I wanted to play stealthily, that is my preferred playstyle whenever possible in a game, and Dishonored delivered very well-designed stealth gameplay mechanics. I knew going into the game that I wanted to sneak around and go unseen wherever possible, like I used to do when playing 'Thief', and 'Dishonored' allowed me to do that. If I'm stopping to kill random NPCs… that would interfere with my preferred gameplay style.*

Dishonored was designed with a heavy focus on stealth gameplay (Onyett, 2012), that in combination with the advertised positive narrative outcome of lower chaos, low-violence

gameplay creates a sense that a low chaos, high stealth gameplay approach is what the game guides the player towards.

5.2.3.2.2 Gamer Personality and Motivation

Analysis of the autoethnographic report reveals common themes with those explored through the research interviews, most notably findings related to Jason VandenBerghe's (2012) domains of play and Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) game design appeal factors.

5.2.3.2.2.1 Domains of Play

VandenBerghe's (2012) Domains of Play and their subdivided facets were unpacked in Chapter 3 – Theories at Play, see Figure 5.2 at the start of this chapter for illustrated detail. Analysis of autoethnographic data revealed the following motivating domains of play for the researcher in line with VandenBerghe's (2012) identified domains of play. Table 5.5 below indicates a spread of motivating facets predominantly within the domains of Novelty and Challenge.

Table 5.6 Researcher's motivating domains of play

Novelty						Challenge						Stimulation						Harmony						Threat					
W	P	M	A	Pz	Ms	D	Ac	O	Ob	Wr	C	Ex	Cr	R	Pa	Th	J	T	I	H	Co	G	Cm	Te	Pr	De	Hu	Cp	Da

Analysing the respective domains of play of the researcher and interview participants reveals commonalities occurring in the domains of Novelty (specifically facets of World, Predictability, Melodrama), and Challenge (specifically facets of Difficulty, Achievement, Cautiousness).

For the researcher, the facet of Cautiousness within the Domain of Challenge is of prime importance. Cautiousness being related to the game's offer of exact, calculated gameplay as opposed to straightforward, rushed, shooter style gameplay (VandenBerghe, 2012).

> *Stealth and strategic gameplay is what appeals to me, it takes much longer than confrontational and aggressive play, and is frequently much more difficult, but it also feels more rewarding.*

As in the interviews, upon analysis it appears that the researcher's amoral choices reflect her gameplay motivation to some degree, as is outlined in Table 5.6 below.

Table 5.7 - Researcher's motivations for amoral decision-making aligned to domains of play

Novelty						Challenge						Stimulation						Harmony						Threat					
W	P	M	A	Pz	Ms	D	Ac	O	Ob	Wr	C	Ex	Cr	R	Pa	Th	J	T	I	H	Co	G	Cm	Te	Pr	De	Hu	Cp	Da

Answering to why the researcher elected to avoid lethal violence on her initial playthrough, the responses indicate reasons tied to the environment of the game (World), the story of the game (Melodrama), the increased challenge of stealth gameplay (Difficulty), and a desire to explore the stealth mechanics (Cautiousness) (VandenBerghe, 2012).

> *The game states in a loading screen that high-chaos, lethal gameplay will lead to a darker ending. I want the positive ending. I do like to play like a story with consistent character motivations and actions. Also killing seems much easier, it's not challenging.*

When comparing Table 5.5 and Table 5.6 the areas of overlap in the researcher's articulated domains of play and her reasons for amoral gameplay choices within the facets of World, Melodrama, Difficulty, Achievement, and Cautiousness are evident. The researcher made some morality-based gameplay choices for non-morality-based, or amoral reasons, and those reasons may correspond to the personal domains of play as presented by VandenBerghe (2012).

5.2.3.2.2.2 Game Design Appeal Factors

Quick, Atkinson and Lin's (2012) study indicated that the gaming experience contained a combination of specific design elements leading to enjoyment, and gamer personality characteristics. Factors were identified that represent a changeable game design feature that impacts upon gaming experience enjoyment (Quick *et al*., 2012). Analysis of autoethnographic reporting identified the following game design aspects that impact upon enjoyment for the researcher.

Table 5.8 Factors impacting researcher's' gameplay enjoyment.

	Fantasy	Exploration	Fidelity	Companionship	Challenge	Competition
A						

Analysis indicates common areas with interview participants in the factors of Fantasy, Exploration and Challenge.

Table 5.9 Researcher's motivations for amoral decision-making aligned to factors of enjoyment.

	Fantasy	Exploration	Fidelity	Companionship	Challenge	Competition
A						

When comparing Table 5.7. and Table 5.8 we can identify commonalities in initially indicated factors impacting enjoyment and some of the provided reasons for amoral gameplay choices. Some of the researcher's reasons for making morality-based gameplay choices for amoral reasons correspond to the relevant factors that impact upon the researcher's enjoyment of *Dishonored*. As previously indicated, the factor of Challenge was deemed as an important factor for gameplay enjoyment by the researcher. Challenge being defined as the players' enjoyment of mastering challenging games, overcoming obstacles and puzzles (Quick *et al*., 2012).

> *I chose to continue playing stealthily even when it became clear that this was going to make the game much more difficult and time-consuming. I really wanted to see if I could finish the game in a low-chaos way, and when I did, I really felt like I had achieved something worthwhile. It wasn't so much about being good for the sake of it, it's more that I enjoyed winning without taking the easy way out.*

This indicates that the researcher made certain morality-based decisions on the amoral basis of wanting to beat the challenge provided by the game. Upon analysis, the researcher's personal domains of play (VandenBerghe, 2012) as well as the factors that impact upon her enjoyment of games (Quick *et al*., 2012) may be connected somewhat to her amoral motivations for making morality-based gameplay choices.

5.2.3.2.3 Moral Choice

In this section autoethnographic data is analysed to explore the morality-based gameplay choices that the researcher made which are tied to her own personal moral positioning through the researcher's perception of her playing self and how she utilised mechanisms of moral disengagement in order to avoid moral concerns and continue to enjoy the gameplay experience.

5.2.3.2.3.1 The Playing Self

The 'playing self' refers to the researcher's perception of her own morality and how this personal moral positioning is manifested in the morality-based gameplay choices made while playing *Dishonored*. The researcher's perception of her own morality was described as follows:

> *Generally good. I'm not a pacifist but I'm not unnecessarily cruel or violent either. I try to live according to the philosophy of do as you wish as long as you cause no avoidable harm to yourself or others.*

Regarding perception of a connection between personal moral positioning and morality-based gameplay choices, the researcher responded as follows:

> *There is somewhat of a connection for me at times. I don't think of myself as overtly evil or violent and I don't instinctively play as overtly evil. And with certain NPCs like dogs and innocents I instinctively don't want to harm them and will want to help them where possible. Similarly, with darker, cruel or evil characters who betray me or try to hurt me or others, I feel justified in doing violence to them. This is true of me in real life – I am not a pacifist. I find when there is a moral choice that would limit my progress through the game or my attaining loot or powers or optional objectives, I tend to be less concerned with morality and more concerned with completing my goals. So, I seem to play according to my own moral position as long as it doesn't limit my gameplay experience.*

The researcher described having an emotional connection with certain NPCs, notably *Emily*, the child ward of the game's protagonist and treated that NPC as if she were a real child in alignment with the findings of Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009).

I felt strongly motivated to save and protect Emily. She's a small child and she obviously considers Corvo to be a father figure. I really enjoyed watching her grow and develop in a positive way as my non-lethal playthrough story unfolded. And when I played a high chaos playthrough, it made me really uncomfortable to see how that impacted upon Emily. The pictures she draws became darker. On my first playthrough she was drawing flowers and on my second she was drawing corpses. I didn't like that at all, I felt like I was letting her down.

Autoethnographic data supports the findings of Joeckel, Bowman and Dogruel (2012) who state that gamers may make decisions in accordance with their own morality when they perceive gameplay actions to be threatening their own moral sensibilities. The researcher is a parent and acknowledges that protecting babies and children is a salient part of her personal moral framework. Certain decisions were made while playing *Dishonored* that were counterproductive to the style of gameplay being enacted, but the researcher felt compelled to make those decisions for reasons of moral salience.

I was in the middle of my initial low-chaos, stealth playthrough and trying to Ghost the entire level. I was near the end and had been successful so far when I came across two guards arguing with a woman. The dialogue revealed that the guards were trying to steal 'Elixir' or plague medicine from the woman, and she was fighting with them because she needed it for her baby who was sick. They started to attack her and I instinctively intervened, knocking the guards out and saving the mother and baby. I was quite frustrated because it meant that I failed in my attempt to 'Ghost', but I couldn't stop myself. Maybe it's because I'm a mother, but at that moment I was more concerned with the baby getting its medicine than I was in beating the challenge I had set for myself.

The researcher, in these instances, records the experience of identification with in-game characters in line with what is proposed by Cohen (2001) and Klimmt *et al*. (2009). While playing the game, the researcher adopted characteristics, goals and perspectives of both *Corvo Attano* in his role as surrogate parent as well as of the mother NPC.

This analysis of autoethnographic data supports the themes identified from participant interviews relating to enactment of morality-based decisions for moral reasons related to empathy for in-game characters (Krcmar & Cingel, 2016; Weaver & Lewis, 2012) and moral salience (Joeckel *et*

al., 2012). The researcher has been identified as having made in-game decisions on a moral bases, the mechanisms for moral disengagement used when those decisions contradicted the researcher's personal moral position will be analysed in the following section.

5.2,3.2.3.2 Moral Disengagement

As was previously defined, moral disengagement refers to the process in which gamers try to mitigate moral concerns of virtual moral issues that are contrary to their own moral position in order to continue enjoying the game (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). The researcher explains how on occasion when making decisions on a moral basis, she experienced cognitive dissonance with her personal moral position and the means through which these decisions were cognitively accommodated to allow for continued enjoyment of the gameplay experience. Means of moral disengagement identified upon autoethnographic analysis include justification and punishment as outlined by Bandura (2002) Hartmann and Vorderer (2010), and Klimmt, *et. al.* (2006) as well as roleplay, a theme identified upon analysis of interview transcripts.

> *On my first, non-violent playthrough I was at the level in Dunwall tower when an additional objective, to kill the man who had tortured me after I was framed for murdering the Empress, became available. I hadn't killed anyone up till that point, but I went out of my way to find and kill the torturer. And not in a stealthy way either, I used the full, grisly arsenal available to me. From a narrative perspective I felt compelled to do it. The character Corvo is positioned as being a 'good guy', and I consider myself to be a mostly good person, but I felt that Corvo needed vengeance for what had been done to him. The torturer is portrayed as a truly evil and cruel person, the story to that point seemed geared towards some sort of climax or catharsis of violence and I went for it. After that I went back to my non-violent playthrough, but the torturer deserved to die.*

Thus, data analysis indicates that when the morality-based gameplay decisions of the researcher conflicted with her personal moral position, moral disengagement in the form of justification, punishment and roleplay occurred in order to continue to enjoy the gameplay experience (Bandura, 2002; Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010; and Klimmt, *et. al*., 2006). Additionally, the researcher's morality-based decisions were made in accordance with the situated ethics of the game world in agreement with Gergen's (2015) position.

Themes that emerged in common between interview participants and the researcher include amoral choice as related to exploration of core mechanics and guided morality, gamer personality and motivation and their influence on morality-based gameplay decisions and finally moral choice as related to the playing-self and moral disengagement.

5.2.3.2.4 Reflection on theory

In this study the theoretical framework comprises social constructionism, ludology, and identification theory. These theories were of particular significance in the interpretation and analysis of the autoethnographic account. Consideration of the functional, tangible aspects of gameplay relevant to ludology (Eskelinen, 2001; Montola, 2012), specifically the motivating desire to explore core mechanics, was identified as amoral motivation for making moral choices. Consideration of social constructionism in tandem with ludology (Montola, 2012) facilitated a holistic view of the researcher's gameplay experience, where intangible elements such as the story and setting were identified as moral motivations for making moral choices. Finally, it is evident that the researcher underwent a process of identification (Cohen, 2001; Klimmt *et al*., 2009) with certain characters during her gameplay, a process that was particularly intense (Wilson, 1993) when those characters were experiencing or representing a moral conflict that is salient for the researcher (Joeckel *et al*., 2012).

5.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Credibility of this study was ensured as data was interpreted in consideration of participants' context and the broader context of video game studies and morality studies. Transferability was ensured by having provided sufficient detail to allow for methodology, analysis and findings to be applied to similar research projects where relevant. Dependability was ensured by having provided a detailed methodology and having ensured integration of data collection, analysis and application of theories generated from the data in order to make replication possible. Additionally, more than one method was used to collect data, this triangulation of data being a means of assuring the validity of the data. Confirmability was ensured by drawing findings from the raw data and existing research and theories and not entirely from the researcher's preconceptions.

5.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter described how data gathered through interviews and an autoethnography were analysed and interpreted and explained concepts of ‘amoral choice’ and ‘moral choice’ within the context of morality-based gameplay. The chapter provided insight into *Dishonored* gamers’ perception of their own morality, the ways in which their perceptions of their own morality are enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored,* and the motivations provided by these gamers for their morality-based gameplay choices. Using content analysis, the following themes were identified: exploration of core mechanics, guided morality, domains of play, game design appeal factors, the playing self, and moral disengagement.

Data analysis and interpretation in this chapter was conducted with every effort to ensure trustworthiness through provision of detailed, authentic descriptions of data that accurately reflects the lived experience of participants. An accurate picture of the phenomenon of morality-system gameplay by South Africans in the game *Dishonored* has been given. Content analysis utilised a second coder to ensure credibility and confirmability (Koonin, 2014; Shenton, 2004) and all data was interpreted within the context of participants as well as within the contexts of ludology and morality studies. A full and complete account has been given of the methodological undertakings of this study to aid transferability and dependability.

Chapter Six concludes this study with a discussion of the findings and insights gained, and also offers recommendations for potential future research related to video game studies and morality system gameplay. Finally, the limitations of this study are discussed.

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6 FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5 data gathered through interviews and an autoethnography was analysed and interpreted in an iterative process. Categories of 'amoral choice', 'gamer personality and motivation' and 'moral choice' were explored within the context of morality-system gameplay using content analysis. In this chapter findings are stated in context of the research questions, limitations of the study are acknowledged, and recommendations are made for future research.

6.2 FINDINGS

The research questions for this study explore what motivations *Dishonored* gamers provide for their in-game morality-based gameplay choices as well as the ways in which gamers' perceptions of their own morality are enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored*. In order to answer the latter question, it was necessary to first ask how *Dishonored* gamers in South Africa perceive their own morality.

The first finding of this research study is that morality-based gameplay choices may be made for reasons entirely unrelated to morality. These decisions are referred to as 'amoral decisions' within the context of this study and are described in detail as follows.

By far the most frequently stated reason for making morality-based gameplay decisions on an amoral basis is the desire to fully explore the core mechanics of the game. Participants were aware of the morality system inherent to the design of *Dishonored,* but many elected to disregard considerations of morality entirely in order to fully explore both the combat and the stealth mechanics of the game. Exploration of the different mechanics was most frequently undertaken in separate playthroughs, with one playthrough being conducted in a low-chaos, non-lethal manner in order to explore stealth mechanics, and one playthrough being conducted in a high-chaos, lethally violent manner in order to explore combat mechanics. All but one participant indicated that they had played the game through more than once. Some participants would mix playstyles utilising both stealth and combat mechanics situationally in the same playthrough, but these were in the minority. A potential reason articulated for the desire for multiple playthroughs

using different playstyles was that the morality system impacted upon the narrative and ending of the game; participants were aware that their moral choices would impact upon the story and environment. Participants indicated a wish to explore the different endings available dependent on playstyle as well as the impact that their playstyles would have on the game world.

A number of participants indicated that their initial playthrough of *Dishonored* was deliberately undertaken in a stealthy, low-violence playstyle. The reason given for this choice was the general perception that the game, *Dishonored*, was designed in such a way as to encourage stealth and non-lethally violent, low chaos gameplay. Participants stated that they felt that they were guided towards stealth gameplay due to the fact that the stealth mechanics were a core focus of the game's design. Additionally, *Dishonored* made clear in both pre-release marketing and in an in-game loading screen that a low chaos, low-violence playthrough would lead to a less-dark ending, and many participants felt guided towards earning the 'good' ending by the game's design. Some participants indicated that they made moral choices in accordance with the way the game was 'supposed to be played', as opposed to in accordance with their own moral positions.

Other provided amoral bases for making morality-based gameplay choices were related to participants' personal domains of play (VandenBerghe, 2012), or the aspects of a game that particular personality types might be drawn to, as well as their gaming experience enjoyment factors (Quick *et al.*, 2012), being overriding motivations for in-game decisions. Players indicated that concerns of morality were not relevant to making a particular choice when weighed against the option to choose actions that appeal to their general gaming preferences or afford them greatest enjoyment of the gameplay experience.

Thus, it was found that the amoral choices made by *Dishonored* gamers may be guided by the design focus inherent to *Dishonored.* Furthermore, participants' own personalities, diverse motivations and preferences for play may have an active role in leading towards amoral decision-making. Thus, answering the question "what motivations do *Dishonored* gamers provide for their in-game morality-based gameplay choices?". *Dishonored* gamers are at times motivated by entirely amoral reasons when making morality-based gameplay decisions.

Another finding is that *Dishonored* gamers do, at times, make morality-based gameplay choices for moral reasons, experiencing moral conflict with, and accountability for, those moral experiences that are most salient for them. This echoes the findings of Hartmann and Vorderer

(2006), Joeckel *et al*. (2012), Krcmar and Cingel (2016), Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009) as outlined in Chapter 2. This answers the research question related to exploring the ways in which *Dishonored* gamers' perceptions of their own morality are enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices. *Dishonored* gamers' perceptions of their own morality are at times enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices. Related to this finding; *Dishonored* gamers make morality-based gameplay choices for moral reasons both when these choices align with their personal moral positioning and when they conflict. When moral choice conflicts with moral positioning, gamers undergo a process of moral disengagement in order to mitigate the negative consequences of the conflicting moral choice and to allow them to continue to enjoy the game (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). The following mechanisms of moral disengagement were articulated by participants.

Participants indicated that they undertook certain actions even though they considered these actions to be immoral. These choices were justified by giving reasons related to the narrative or story of the game, or the context in which that choice was made (Bandura, 2002; Hartmann and Vorderer,2010; Zillmann, 2000). In a similar fashion, many violent or lethal actions were justified by participants as a form of punishment (Klimmt *et al*., 2006) where the NPC upon whom they enact this violent is positioned in their minds as being evil, or a villain, or as having committed such actions or crimes as to be deserving of the violence enacted upon them. Another mechanism for moral disengagement revealed by participants related to familiarity with the game (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). Repeated playthroughs, mastering of gameplay mechanics, familiarity with the game world, maps and characters all led to participants' feeling diminished guilt and negative effects related to making moral choices that conflict with personal moral positioning. Participants indicated that in an initial non-violent playthrough they treated NPCs as human in line with the findings of Hartmann and Vorderer (2006), Krcmar and Cingel (2016), Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009). However, upon subsequent playthroughs, any negative effects of making immoral choices in direct contradiction to their initial playthroughs were diminished due to familiarity.

Roleplay was a frequently mentioned means of assuaging moral concerns when playing *Dishonored*. Bartle's (2004) 'roleplaying paradox' indicates a process in which the gamer and avatar (in *Dishonored*'s case the avatar is *Corvo Attano*) are amalgamated in the mind of the player in order to achieve immersion (Deen *et al.,* 2015). Moral responsibility for immoral actions, or those actions that contradict participants' personal moral position, is abrogated onto the game's

protagonist or avatar, through reasoning of roleplay. Participants indicated that they do not feel morally responsible for killing an NPC because they were acting as *Corvo Attano.* Choices were indicated to have been made as if the player were *Corvo* himself, in accordance with how *Corvo* would reasonably act within the current situation and story of the game. Therefore, participants indicated that they do not feel guilt for gameplay choices that contradicts their own perceived morals, as they do not feel as if they themselves are the ones specifically enacting these choices.

The final, commonly stated mechanism for moral disengagement is frequently stated by participants when other mechanisms have not been sufficient to allow for gameplay enjoyment in the face of moral cognitive dissonance. This involves the use of a deliberate, reflective process in order to disassociate the self from in-game moral conflict. This process occurs when gamers deliberately remind themselves that what they are experiencing and choosing to do is 'only a game' and that the situation is not real (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). Gameplay immersion is deliberately broken in order to assuage moral concerns and facilitate continued enjoyment.

Thus, we have found that *Dishonored* gamers' morality-based gameplay choices conflict at times with their own personal moral positions. *Dishonored* gamers undergo a process of moral disengagement in order to avoid moral concerns and allow them to continue playing the game and enjoying it as an entertainment experience.

Another finding was that gamers may undergo a process of self-reflection and personality and identity exploration instigated by their gameplay as was posited by Deen *et al.* (2015) and de Mul (2015). Participants reflected on how in-game events and moral challenges mirrored their own lived experiences and how this further caused them to reflect on the choices that they had made in their offline lives. This echoes the findings of Krcmar and Cingel (2016) who state that decision making in video games requires the same reasoning processes as are required in the real world. This finding also supports a number of theorists who take the position that playing video games may strengthen gamer's skills in navigating the process of ethical decision making (Bogost, 2007; Delwich, 2007; Gee, 2003; Grizzard *et. al*., 2014; Madigan, 2016; Zagal, 2009). Additionally, it supports the argument that games shape our identities because of their interactive nature and that games can cause a change in the ways people build their identities (Aupers, 2015; Deen, Schouten & Bekker*,* 2015; Gergen, 2015) and allow gamers to explore their own identity, both within the game world and within the game's social context (Frisson, Lammes, De Lange, De Mul & Raessens, 2015).

South African *Dishonored* gamers' perception of their own morality varies among participants; from stated moral alignments of chaotic neutral to perception of leaning heavily towards good. Similarly, participants' perception of any connection between their personal moral position and the morality-based gameplay choices they make are varied. Some participants indicated a certainty that there was no link at all, and others acknowledged a situational connection.

The final finding of this study is that participant responses related to perception of connection between morality-based gameplay choices and personal moral positioning would at times contradict with other statements made during the interview process. A number of participants stated that there was no connection whatsoever between their personal morals and the morality-based gameplay choices made and described violent playthroughs where their intention was to play in a chaotic manner. Despite this high-chaos, lethally violent playstyle, these participants made a conscious decision to avoid killing innocent or non-threatening NPCs and revealed experiences of moral conflict while playing in line with what was theorised by Hartmann and Vorderer (2006), Krcmar and Cingel (2016), Weaver and Lewis (2012) and Zagal (2009). A number of participants described gameplay motivations predicated on experiencing empathy for NPCs and situational moral conflict and salience, despite stating their perception of a complete detachment between their personal moral positioning and their morality-based gameplay choices. This study finds that gamers may contradict themselves when articulating their perceptions of links between their own morality and the morality-based gameplay choices made when playing *Dishonored.*

Thus, it is found that *Dishonored* may be played without interrogating or reflecting upon personal moral position or morality-based gameplay choices; which is notable as *Dishonored* contains a morality-system as an integral part of the core mechanics, storytelling engine and general game design.

The findings of this study have explored answers to research questions related to *Dishonored* gamers' perception of their own morality, the ways in which *Dishonored* gamers' perceptions of their own morality are enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices, and the motivations provided by *Dishonored* gamers for their in-game morality-based gameplay choices.

6.3 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of South African gamers' perception of their own morality, and the morality-based choices they make during gameplay in *Dishonored*. No previous research of this type appears to have been conducted in Communication Studies in South Africa. Thus morality-based gameplay and exploration of morality-based decision-making by South African gamers remains an under-researched area that merits further exploration.

This study had an exploratory focus. The population from which the sample was drawn does not offer conclusive results as age, gender identity, ethnicity and race were not accounted for and were considered outside the scope of this study. This is recognised as a limitation and an opportunity for further research. The sequel to the game under study*: Dishonored 2,* allows the selection of one of two protagonists; either *Corvo Attano*, a male avatar or *Emily Kaldwin*, a female avatar. As a continuance to this research, an exploratory study into the impact of roleplayed gender identity upon morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored 2* may be a source of rich data.

From a ludological perspective, this study did not differentiate between *Dishonored* gamers playing on a personal computer or a console gaming system. The game *Dishonored* is available on multiple platforms, with variable input devices such as mouse and keyboard or console controller. The technical differences and specifications of different gaming devices as well as the physiological impact of different input devices on gameplay style and choices was outside the scope of this study but may merit additional research.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, qualitative data collection methods utilised include in-depth interviews and an autoethnography as a means of gaining an in depth understanding of the studied context. A limitation of this approach is the utilisation of a small sample size, limited by country. Additionally, interviews and autoethnography as data collection methods are limited by self-reported results, which may lead to inconsistencies. It is recommended that future studies make use of a mixed-method approach utilising both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The scale of future studies of this nature should be conducted in such a way so as to allow both informed exploration of the studied context and generalisation to a larger population.

6.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research study aimed to explore South African *Dishonored* gamers perceptions of their own morality as a means of exploring the ways in which gamers' own moral positions are enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored.* Additionally, this study aimed to explore the motivations for in-game morality-based gameplay choices provided by *Dishonored* gamers themselves.

Findings indicate that *Dishonored* gamers make in-game decisions, that are related to a moral choice, for reasons that are both connected to personal morals and for entirely amoral reasons unrelated to personal moral position. When decisions are made on a moral basis and those decisions conflicted with the gamer's personal moral position, a process of moral disengagement may be undertaken in order for the gamer to overcome moral cognitive dissonance and continue enjoying gameplay. Morality-based choices may also be made for reasons unrelated to gamers' own moral position and these amorality-based choices relate to navigating through the core mechanics and the narrative of the game as well as gamers' own personalities and motivations.

Dishonored gamers' perceptions of their own moral position as well as their perception of connections between this personal moral position and the morality-based gameplay choices they make, vary among participants. What is fairly consistent among participants is that contradictory statements related to their morality-based gameplay choices are made, and personal moral positioning and considerations of ethical issues related to morality-based gameplay may be unconsidered or uninterrogated by gamers when playing *Dishonored*.

In closing, this study has shed light on aspects of moral choice in morality-system gameplay in South Africa by providing insight into gamers' perceptions of their own moral positioning and the morality-based gameplay choices they make in *Dishonored*.

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APPENDIX A – Interview Schedule

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to gain an in-depth understanding of gamers' perception of their own morality, and the morality-based choices they make during gameplay in Dishonored, a stealth action-adventure video game.

Research Questions

- What motivations do *Dishonored* gamers provide for their in-game morality-based gameplay choices?
- In what ways are gamers' perceptions of their own morality enacted in their morality-based gameplay choices in *Dishonored*?

Opening

- What appeals to you about playing video games?

About *Dishonored*:

- Why did you choose Dishonored to play?
- What do you most like about the game?
- What did you like least about the game?

About *Dishonored* Gameplay:

- When it comes to the 3 major playstyles (non-violent, non-lethal violence, lethal violence) which is most similar to your playstyle?
- Do you stick to one of these playstyles throughout or do you change between them? If changed then why? How?
- Did you play more than one playthrough? If so, why?

About their morality-based gameplay:

Non-Violent/ low chaos

- What appeals to you about this playstyle?
- Why do you avoid the violent gameplay options?
- Did you ever end up doing violence despite your playstyle? If so, how did it make you feel?
- What is the main appeal of this playstyle for you?
- Do you think there is any connection between your playstyle and your own moral position in real life?

Non-Lethal Violent/ low chaos (sleep darts/ choke- hold)

- Why do you choose this playstyle?
- Why don't you kill?
- Why don't you avoid violence entirely?
- What is the main appeal of this playstyle for you?
- Do you think there is any connection between your playstyle and your own moral position in real life?

Lethal-Violent/ high chaos

- Why do you choose this playstyle?
- How do you feel when you kill? When you use violent options (devouring swarm, blood thirsty)
- Why don't you avoid violence entirely/ play stealth?
- What is the main appeal of this playstyle for you?
- Do you think there is any connection between your playstyle and your own moral position in real life?

Mix

- Why mixed? Is your playstyle situational?
- When would you play nonviolently? How do you feel while playing like this?
- When would you play violently? How do you feel while playing like this?
- What is the main appeal of this playstyle for you?
- Do you think there is any connection between your playstyle and your own moral position in real life?

About their perspective on the link between:

- How do you perceive your own personal moral position? If you were to look at your gameplay from a moral position, do you think it accurately reflects your personal morals in the real world?
- Do you think your own personal morals and moral position play any part in the morality-based decisions you make when playing Dishonored? (examples? Helping Granny Rags by poisoning the gang's drug/ Killing targets instead of eliminating them through non-violent means)
- Can you think of any examples of your gameplay where you struggled with a moral choice? What and why?
- Did you ever feel uncomfortable with a moral decision you made in game? Why did you do it? Why do you think it made you feel uncomfortable?

Close:

- Is there anything else related to your experience of *Dishonored* or morality-system gameplay that you'd like to share?

APPENDIX B – Explanatory Statement

(Dishonored gamers in South Africa)

Gamer self-perception in Dishonored: a study of morality system gameplay in South Africa (12901)

Chief Investigator's name: Dr Rose-Marié Bezuidenhout **Faculty of Social and Health Sciences** **Phone:** +27 (11) 950 4182; +27 (81) 043-2926 **email:** rosemarie.bezuidenhout@monash.edu	**Student's name***:* Tammy Oppenheim **Student number:** 27223019 **Phone:** +27 (83) 443 3591 **email:** tammy.oppenheim@monash.edu

You are invited to take part in this study entitled: Gamer self-perception in *Dishonored*: a study of morality system gameplay in South Africa, which is an MPhil research project at Monash University South Africa. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What is the purpose of the study and what does the research involve?

The aim of this research study is to explore gamers' perception of their own moral positioning, and the morality-based choices they make when playing *Dishonored*. This study will provide an in-depth understanding of gamers' own moral positioning and the morality-based decisions they make in-game, thus, when playing the game.

Researchers conducting this research

The interviews will be conducted by the student researcher.

Description of participation

After reading this statement and signing the consent form, you will be asked a few short questions about how you view the morality-based choices you make when playing *Dishonored*. I will use an audio recorder to assist me in capturing what you say and will actively take notes while you are talking. The interview will be conducted in English.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You were chosen for this research as you are a South African *Dishonored* game player. Your participation will assist the researchers to understand the morality-based choices you make when playing the game.

Duration of participation

The interview should take approximately one hour.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from further participation at any time and your data will not be included in any future publications about the study.

Possible benefits and risks to participants
This research is beneficial to the communication discipline as it will provide a rich description of a phenomenon. Participants will assist in exploring an under-researched phenomenon which may lead to a greater understanding of the moral positioning and morality-based gameplay. Participants will not face physical or psychological stress and discomfort or inconvenience aside from the time committed to the interview. There is no risk to participants as responses will be de-identified in the research report.

Confidentiality
Confidentiality is assured as all data will be de-identified and codes will be used in place of participant names in the final research report. Data from the interviews will be recorded on an audio device and notes will be taken. A transcribing service may be used, but all data will be deidentified. Every effort will be made to protect your identity.

Storage of data

The data collected during this research project will be stored on a password protected computer and hard copy data will be stored in a store room at Monash South Africa for a period of five (5) years. After this time, hard copy data will be shredded and electronic data will be deleted. After this research has been submitted for marking, the information will be shredded and deleted from the computers.

Results

Upon the completion of this research project, it will be submitted to Monash South Africa in fulfilment of an MPhil dissertation. Results from the project can be requested from the researchers and will be shared in de-identified format.

Ethics Approval and Complaints

This study has been approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC).

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact:

Ms Hester Stols
Research Coordinator
Research and Development Office Monash South Africa,
Office of the Academic President,
144 Peter Road, Ruimsig. 1725.
Tel : +27 11 950 4143 E-mail (hester.stols@monash.edu)

Thank you,

_____
Chief Investigator's name
Dr Rose-Marié Bezuidenhout

APPENDIX C – Consent Form

(*Dishonored* gamers in South Africa)

Gamer self-perception of moral choices in *Dishonored*: a study of morality system gameplay in South Africa (12901)

Chief Investigator: Dr Rose-Marié Bezuidenhout

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	**Yes**	**No**
Participation in an in-depth interview	☐	☐
Audio recording during the interview	☐	☐
Transcription of recordings of the interview in deidentified form by a transcription service	☐	☐
The data that I provide during this research may be used by Tammy Oppenheim in future research projects**.**	☐	☐

Name of Participant _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D – Ethics Approval Certificate

Monash University Human

Research Ethics Committee

Approval Certificate

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

Project Number: 12901
Project Title: Gamer self-perception in Dishonored: A study of morality-based system gameplay in South Africa
Chief Investigator: Dr Rose-Marie Bezuidenhout
Approval Date: 24/04/2018
Expiry Date: 24/04/2023

Terms of approval - failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. Amendments to approved projects including changes to personnel must not commence without written approval from MHUREC.
7. Annual Report - continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report.
8. Final Report - should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected completion date.
9. Monitoring - project may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
10. Retention and storage of data - The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

Thank you for your assistance.
Professor Nip Thomson Chair,
MUHREC
CC: Mrs Tammy Oppenheim

List of approved documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Supporting Documentation	Final Interview questions T Oppenheim	05/04/2018	V1
Consent Form	Final CONSENT FORM T Oppenheim	05/04/2018	V1
Explanatory Statement	F EXPLANATORY STATEMENT T Oppenheim	05/04/2018	V1
Supporting Documentation	R Bezuidenhout and T Oppenheim	19/04/2018	V1