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”LET’S JUST TAKE THE L AND MOVE ON”:
Exploring players’ experiences of losing in Overwatch 2

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study is to explore and discuss the various factors that can influence the players’ experiences in relation to losing in the video game Overwatch 2. The research questions of this thesis are “*what factors influence the experiences with losing in Overwatch 2”* (RQ1) and “*how do players experience loss based on these factors”* (RQ2). The data for this thesis was collected through semi-structured interviews with ten players. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and the participants were between the ages of 19-28. Majority of the participants were in their mid-twenties and eight identified themselves as men, and two as women. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed by using reflexive thematic analysis.

Participants described factors related to *difference between game modes*, *social context*, *performance, match specific context* and *impact of loss* which all influenced the way they experienced losing in Overwatch 2. For example, participants described that the stakes of game mode affected their experiences of losing. Most participants had given significance to their competitive ranking which made losing in competitive mode more frustrating. Participants also described how team composition and toxic players affected their experiences. For example, if participants were playing with their friends, they felt more motivated to try if their team was losing, however this was the complete opposite with strangers. The way both participants and their teammates performed seemed to have an effect on their experiences. The results of this thesis also indicate that players experienced loss in relation to the type of the loss that occurred: whether participants got completely overrun or if they barely lost the match. Participants explained that losing multiple times in a row most of the times resulted in wanting to either take a break or quit gaming altogether. Further, the results also show that the participants had also come up with different ways to deal with situations in relation to losing.

It would be important for future research to explore this topic more in detail by including a bigger group of participants. It may also be fruitful for future research to examine whether players share similar experiences across different competitive multiplayer games. As losing is a very central theme in competitive video games, it is important to do research about both the positive and negative experiences players may encounter.

Keywords: competitive games, failure, losing, Overwatch 2, players, video games

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

Preface

I want to thank the people from my personal network for being so supportive and willing to participate in this study because without you, there would be no thesis at all. I also owe the biggest thank you to my fiancé, who made me fall in love with video games again. I do not think I would have been able to find my spark for gaming or pick up my controller again without you. A special thanks goes out to my friends, who welcomed me with open arms to our gaming group which we now call "*Nakkipaketti*". To get to play with you guys is the highlight of most of my evenings, and all of you mean more to me than you could ever imagine.

Thank you to my supervisor Matilda Ståhl, who kindly guided me through the process of writing a master's thesis. Thank you for all the articles and revisions you suggested, and most of all thank you for encouraging me to keep going when I was struggling to find motivation to write. I also want to thank my friends and peers for their thoughtful feedback which helped me improve and refine this thesis – you know who you are.

Finally, thank you mom and dad for buying me and my brother new PlayStation games all those years ago. Who would have thought that little old me would end up studying video games let alone write a thesis about one.

A wise woman once told me that doing little is always better than nothing, so that is what I am going to keep in mind as I find my way through life.

Maybe you should too.

Turku, 28.04.2025

Nelli Nurmio

Table of Contents

VOCABULARY

Assist	An elimination, which is finished off by another player, but in which a player "assists" by dealing damage (OW Wiki, n.d. h).
Competitive	The ranked game mode of Overwatch 2 where players receive a rank representing their skill level, ranging from Bronze to Top 500 (OW Wiki, n.d. b).
DPS	Role. Short for 'Damage per second'. Used to refer to DPS (Damage) heroes are responsible for seeking out, engaging and defeating the enemy by using different abilities (OW Wiki, n.d. a).
Hero	Playable character in Overwatch 2 (OW Wiki, n.d. e).
Healing	Healing restores a hero's health. Many heroes have healing abilities, but support heroes focus on healing allies (OW Wiki, n.d. d)
Meta	Short for 'most effective tactics available'. Refers to the most effective strategies, tactics and characters currently available in the game (British Esports Federation, 2022).
Mitigation	A statistic in Overwatch 2 that tracks the total damage a player prevents (mitigates) during a match (OW Wiki, n.d. h).
PvP	Player versus Player. Players compete against other human players (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d).
Quick Play (QP)	The unranked game mode of Overwatch 2 (OW Wiki, n.d. j)
Ranked	Synonym for Competitive (OW Wiki, n.d. b)
Role	Heroes are categorized by roles (DPS, Support and Tank). A role describes the general characteristics of the hero and their purpose on the team (Ow Wiki, n.d. e).

Smurfing	For example, players of competitive games might create ‘smurf accounts’ (secondary accounts) to be able to play with other players at lower ranks which would be otherwise prevented due differences in rankings (McCauley, 2023).
Stomping	A stomp occurs when one team dominates the other throughout the match, leaving the losing team with little to no opportunity to compete. Players might even struggle to leave their spawn before being repeatedly eliminated (OGgiraffrey, 2023).
Support	Role. Support heroes empower their allies by healing, boosting damage and providing vital utility to help the team survive (Blizzard, n.d.)
Tank	Role. Tank heroes soak up damage and create space for the team (Blizzard, n.d.).
T-bagging	Refers to a situation where players stand over an opponent’s dead body and repeatedly crouch their character over the corpse (Oxford English Dictionary n.d.).
Taking the L	To take the loss: A slang expression where ‘L’ stands for ‘Loss’ which is often used – sarcastically – when a player or a team loses a match (Vicente, 2021).

1 INTRODUCTION

To play a game is to take an emotional gamble. (Juul, 2013, p.57)

It must have been back in 2023 before the 9th season starting in February 2024 (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. i) when I was solo queuing (searching a match alone) support to play competitive. I had four wins and zero losses and at this point I was only one win away from getting a new rank. After the first loss I remember I was feeling hopeful, as I only still needed that one win to find out how my rank would progress. Little did I know the first loss would be the beginning of a nerve-racking loss streak. After losing five matches in a row, what kept me going was that I only needed one win which sounded more achievable than ten more losses. Eventually I reached a point where I had lost fourteen matches in a row. It is worth noting that through all of these losses all I would have needed was that one win! Now I was at a point where I had to either win or lose the next match to get a new rank, and the stakes were high because losing would most definitely put my rank on the line. 'Grinding' for that one win turned out to be quite the emotional gamble, as I eventually lost fifteen matches in a row and got demoted from a higher skill tier to a lower one (from Platinum to Gold).

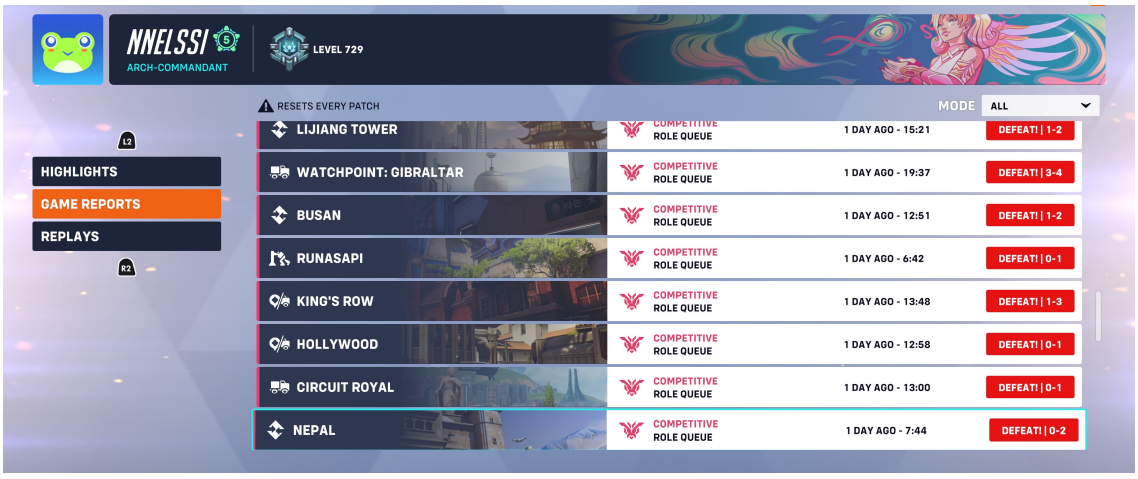
As the idea for this thesis stems from my own experiences of losing in Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022) it makes sense to begin by sharing personal experiences with losing. Before the ranking system was updated in the beginning of season 9 (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. i) you needed either five wins or fifteen losses to see how your rank progressed, whereas now the progress is visible after every match. During my more recent experience while writing this thesis, I was queuing support duos with my friend (we were in the same team queuing for a competitive match as support), and we lost ten matches in a row. I got demoted from Diamond 3 to Diamond 5, almost dropping to Platinum 1 (for a discussion of the ranks in Overwatch 2, see section 2). These matches varied from six minutes to twenty minutes in total as can be seen in Figure 1. Accordingly, we spent approximately two hours playing competitive matches that we ended up losing. After the fifth loss I kind of just became numb to the feeling of failure, and I was sailing through the matches on autopilot. It felt like we were in this never-ending loop of either getting 'stomped' or having one bad teammate whose performance ended up costing us the match. Getting stomped means that the opposing team dominates the other team

throughout the entire match which leaves the losing team with little to no opportunity to compete (OGgiraffrey, 2023). It felt like the game was against us and did not want to sprinkle us with even an ounce of good luck. Not every player can take ten losses in a row, and neither could I. As I reached my limit after ten competitive losses, I switched to Quick Play instead.

In relation to my own experiences, it is safe to say that queuing up for a competitive match is always an emotional gamble as mentioned by Juul (2013) at the start of this introduction: you will never know whether you will come out of the match as a winner or a loser. If you win you want to play more and if you lose you cannot quit because you want to win. During both of these experiences I kept trying to grind for a victory although losing competitive progress after each match did not feel rewarding. We all experience losing differently, and there are different factors that might affect our experiences. Generally speaking, no one really likes losing yet we still subject ourselves to it by playing video games that are very competitive in nature (Juul, 2013).

Figure 1.

Match history (game reports) from Overwatch 2.



Note. Screenshot captured by the author on March 17, 2025 from the game Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022).

As mentioned, the inspiration behind the topic of this thesis stems from my own experiences with competitive video games, a type of game which is consistently popular among Finnish players (Kinnunen, Prykäri & Mäyrä, 2024). As I have played Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022) actively since its release in late 2022, experiencing

losses myself but also seeing how players in my immediate circle reacted to losing made me realize there is potential to dive deeper into the topic by exploring the factors that affect players' experiences of losing. For this thesis I interviewed ten active players of Overwatch 2 (eight men and two women from ages of 19 to 28). Seven of the participants were recruited through my personal network, meaning that I have in fact played Overwatch 2 with them. While this thesis is not an autoethnography, neither am I far removed from the experiences detailed within (which I further discuss in section 3.6).

The aim of this study is to explore and discuss the various factors that ca influence players' experiences in relation to losing. The research questions of this study are "*What factors influence experiences with losing in Overwatch 2?"* (RQ1) and *"How do players experience loss based on these factors?"* (RQ2). These questions allowed me to explore the social, and game-related factors that influence how players experience losing, and by interviewing the players I got valuable insights into player behaviour and emotions. I chose player-centric approach to failure and losing, because their experiences, thoughts, and feelings towards losing are at the centre of this study.

This thesis will explore factors that influence how players experience losing and it has the following structure: in the second chapter I will introduce an overview to competitive gaming (see section 2.1) and discuss competitive gaming in the context of Overwatch 2. In section 2.2 I will introduce how playing Overwatch 2 is organised and in the following section, I present previous research on players of competitive games, including Overwatch 2, and address the possible different mindsets in relation to competitive gameplay (see section 2.3). As losing can be interpreted as failure, in the section 2.4 I will also touch upon the subject of failure in video games, and how it has been described in previous research. In the third chapter I will outline semi-structured interviews as methodology, by first re-introducing the research questions and the participants of this study. From section 3.3 onwards I will describe semi-structured interviews as the data collection method in detail and in section 3.4 I will address the relevant research ethical perspectives of the thesis. In section 3.5 I will discuss reflexive thematic analysis as the analysis method of this study and finally in section 3.6 I will touch upon my positionality as I knew the context of this thesis very well in advance. In chapter four I will present the results of this study and in chapter five the findings are discussed in relation to existing research and literature. Finally, chapter six concludes this thesis by summarizing the main

insights, addressing the limitations of this study and suggesting directions for future research.

2 BACKGROUND

In this chapter I present some relevant background information and touch upon topics that are relevant for this study. In the first section I will describe competitive gaming more broadly and in relation to Overwatch 2, and in section 2.2 I provide insight into the structure of Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022). In section 2.3 I will discuss the player demographic of competitive games and Overwatch 2 to provide a better understanding of the participants of this study. Finally in section 2.4 I will discuss failure more generally in video games and situate what failure means in the context of Overwatch 2.

2.1 Competitive Gaming

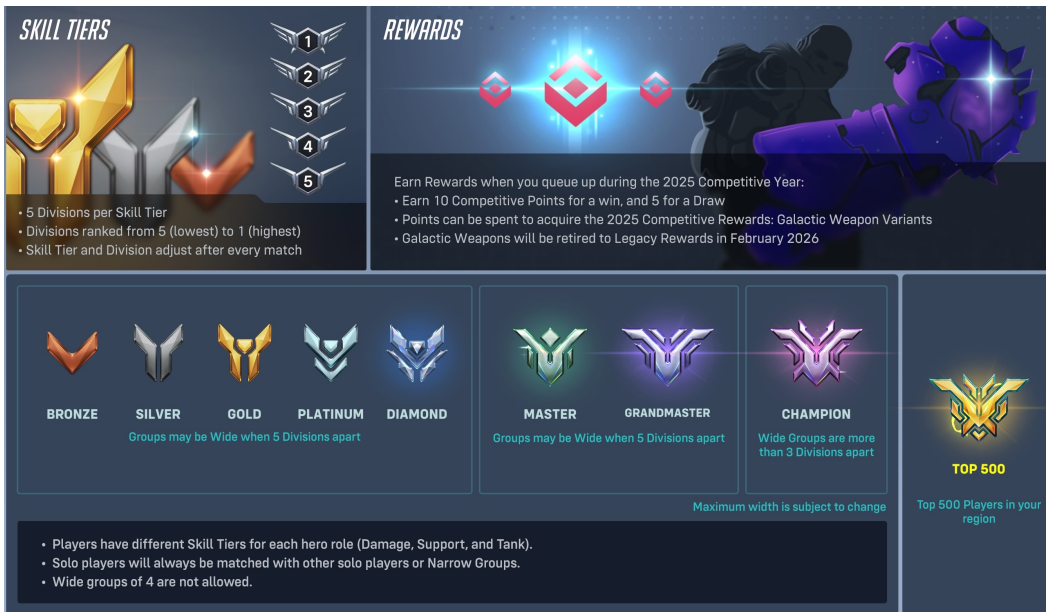
Competition refers to a situation in which players try to maximize their own success in relation to the success of their rival (Epstein & Harackiewicz, 1992), and competitive multiplayer games like Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022) are built around the tension between victory and defeat. While winning in a video game often brings players satisfaction and triumph, the experience of loss can cause a range of different emotional responses, from frustration to motivation especially in a competitive setting where winning and losing can feel more intense.

It is important to note that in this thesis I am not researching esports, short for electronic sports, but factors that influence how players' experience failure in competitive video games. Esports refer to electronically mediated sports and leagues where players and professionals compete either individually or as teams in organized tournaments (Jin, 2021). Competitive gaming is broader as it includes casual competitive modes like Overwatch 2's ranked mode, not only referring to professional tournaments. In practice, this means that you do not need to be a professional player to be able to play competitive modes in multiplayer online games. The only prerequisite for playing competitive in Overwatch 2 is to have reached 50 Quick Play victories beforehand. (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. b). Competitive gaming is goal-driven play where winning and competitive ranking systems are very central, usually resulting in the stakes being perceived as higher. In comparison, in Quick Play players can focus more on practicing new heroes, socializing and even having fun, whereas competitive is often more skill-focused, and centres on the pursuit of victory.

The competitive mode in Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022) features different skill tiers and divisions which are adjusted after every match. As shown in Figure 2, there are eight skill tiers: *Bronze*, *Silver*, *Gold*, *Platinum*, *Diamond*, *Master*, *Grandmaster* and *Champion*, and in each skill tier there are five divisions ranked from 5 (lowest) to 1 (highest). For example, from *Platinum 1* a player would rank up to *Diamond 5*, then *to Diamond 4* and so on. There is also the *Top 500* leaderboard which displays the highest ranked players in every region (in Europe, the US, and Asia). Overwatch 2 is organized in a way that winning a competitive match and performing well grants skill rating (SR) points that help the player progress through the different skill tiers. Losing on the other hand deducts these points which can then lead to de-ranking to a lower division (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. b). As players can see their competitive progress after each match, winning and losing can feel more intense in a competitive setting.

Figure 2.

Competitive rankings in Overwatch 2.



Note. Screenshot captured by the author on March 17, 2025 from the game Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022).

In competitive games players perform in-high pressure circumstances against other players with their rank on the line which is a way for players to challenge themselves and put their skills to the test. Usually most competitive modes have skill-based matchmaking through which the idea is to put players of relatively similar skill levels against each other,

creating more high staked environments (McCauley, 2023; Overwatch Wiki, n.d. g). In competitive multiplayer games skill is the major match determinant (Harper, 2014) and although the skill-based system is designed to form balanced teams, it is difficult to make sure that the opposing teams are always exactly of the same skill-levels. While skill-based matchmaking tries to put teams with similar skills together, there still exist winning and losing team compositions (Cheng, Yang, Tan, Cheng, Cheng & Zhuang, 2019).

Especially in team-based games like Overwatch 2, competitive modes require players to cooperate and communicate with each other to overcome obstacles and improve their gameplay by working together. In Overwatch 2 the scoreboard that displays in-game metrics such as kills, assists, deaths, damage, heals and mitigation (see vocabulary list), is accessible to players throughout the entire match. These metrics are used to measure player performance in video games (Brock, 2021). Real-time metrics tell the players how well they themselves, their teammates and the opposing team are performing which means that metrics are used to compare and evaluate players and their performance (Brock, 2021).

Metrics can help players keep track of in-game events and activities but also help players to acquire a sense of game mastery and skill. Metrics can help players understand in-game strategies and the meta (Brock, 2021) which refers to the most effective team compositions and hero choices that are currently available in that patch version of the game (British Esports Federation, 2022). In the context of Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022) one of the most popular meta in the game is called dive meta (also known as dive comp) which means that it is based on "diving" and getting past the opponent's frontline and ideally first taking out their support heroes, and second their damage dealers (DPS) (Paul, 2024). The heroes picked for a dive comp are usually agile and have movement abilities that allow them to push the enemy's backline. As mentioned by Paul (2024) the reason why players pursue the meta is because they would rather win than lose and by optimizing their gameplay, they are closer to being successful in a game.

Video games and especially competitive video games that display in-game metrics can create environments that can provoke different emotions (Brock, 2021) depending on what value players give to the metrics, and how valuable they consider them. If players have given value to the metrics, they might check the scoreboard more often to see how they are doing in a match, and compare their statistics (damage, kills or heals) and according to these decide whether they are doing well or not. By looking at these metrics,

players can maximize their effectiveness in each match by switching heroes and playstyles (Brock, 2021).

2.2 Overwatch 2

This study focuses on the experiences of losing in the context of Blizzard Entertainment's team-based online shooter game Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022), and next, I will provide an overview of the game. The gameplay of Overwatch 2 centres around two five-person teams competing against each other with time-limited goals in different modes and maps in either Ranked or Unranked, also known as Competitive (mode) or Quick Play (QP). The game also offers an 'Arcade playlist', which offers a rotating variety of different game modes (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. c) but as it was not mentioned by the participants in the interviews, it is thereby not relevant for this thesis. At the beginning of each match in either Competitive or QP, players are randomly matched with and against others of similar skill level. Players can also queue Competitive and QP in a group with up to four other players. Overwatch 2 is a player versus player (PvP) game which means that players must work together and find a playstyle that takes them closer to victory while playing against other players (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

All five players may choose from one of the 43 heroes (at the time of this thesis, 35 in 2022 when launched) divided into three classes, each possessing different abilities. Damage heroes, also known as DPS, seek out, engage, and obliterate the enemy team. Tank heroes both soak up and deal damage and are also utilized as protection for their teammates. The third role is support which empowers their allies by healing, shielding, and boosting damage (Blizzard, 2024). Each player may choose any hero they wish, as long as it has not already been selected by someone in their own team.

The most relevant game modes of Overwatch 2 for this thesis are QP and Competitive. In QP, players can search for a match through different queues: "Role Queue", "Open Queue" and "Mystery Heroes". In Role Queue, the teams always consist of one tank, two DPS, and two support heroes. In Role Queue you can either "All Queue" as all roles (Tank, DPS, or Support) if you do not have a preference on as which role you would want to play the or alternatively, you can either queue as one or two of the roles if you would rather play only a certain role. According to you decision the game will then match you up with other players to fill up your team. In Open Queue the team also consists of five heroes, but there can be two heroes from the same class – such as two tanks, one DPS and

two supports. So called ‘hero stacking’ is not allowed in either Role or Open Queue, meaning that there cannot be two identical heroes in a team (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. j). In Mystery Heroes the game will assign you with any character from the 41 heroes, and the team line-up is randomly generated (hence the ‘mystery’), so it does not need to follow the “one tank, two DPS and two support” structure. The game will randomly assign you with another hero upon death, and in the Mystery game mode hero stacking is allowed, so there could be two identical heroes in a team (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. j). At the time of this thesis, the way players can search for a match in Competitive queue is either through Role or Open Queue. In competitive Role Queue you get an individual rank for each role whereas in Open Queue you receive one universal rank (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. b).

Overwatch 2 features different maps based on both fictional and real locations around the world. All the maps in which the matches are played, for escorting a payload, capturing a flashpoint, or pushing a barricade, are available for both QP and Competitive play (Overwatch Wiki, n.d. f). QP matches are more fast paced as the result of the match is decided in one round and there is no need for changing the attacking and defending role for the two teams like in Competitive. QP is considered to be the more casual mode between the two where you can practice new heroes and warm up for competitive without the commitment for ranked.

2.3 Players of Competitive Games and Overwatch 2

While some players enjoy online multiplayer games as a social activity, a significant number of players play with clear competitive goals (Vahlo & Karhulahti, 2022). In his research, Hedlund (2023) identified that majority of players who play esports games play for casual reasons such as socializing, having fun and casually competing (71,8%) and the remainder (28,2%) engage for competitive reasons. Likewise, the Overwatch community also consists of players who play the game with various mindsets and goals. According to Blamey (2022) the audience of Overwatch is strongly divided between two groups: casual and competitive players. In competitive gameplay in general, Harper (2014) noted that the division between players is related to the player’s level of investment. In the context of Overwatch, Blamey (2022) described casual players as those who play for fun and enjoyment, and while they also have a focus on winning, they are not as interested in optimizing their play performance as competitive players who try to mirror professional players such as streamers and league gamers by practicing meta

play (see vocabulary) and focus on advancing higher in the competitive ranks. In his study on competitive gaming, Harper (2014) described that for competitive players winning and performing well is the primary source of enjoyment. In relation to the division of the two player groups, Friman (2019) defines casual playing as something where the casual player is not as committed and does not take advancing in the game as seriously as an "hardcore" player. These "hardcore" players on the other hand are generally seen as the players who are not only more talented and committed to the game but also the ones who try to put in more effort in order to improve (Friman, 2019).

Although both of these player groups are visible in the Overwtach 2 community, Vahlo and Karhulahti (2022) noted that it might not be ideal to categorize players so harshly into either casual or competitive players, especially because of the different game modes that Overwatch 2 has to offer. It must be taken into account that casual players might also play to compete, and competitive players might also want to enjoy non-competitive features from time to time. Thereby, it is possible that players might want both competitive and casual experiences (Vahlo & Karhulahti, 2022). According to Harper (2014) playstyles can change according to what the players think the match is for: players might view casual matches as a way to improve and practice whereas in competitive mode the aim is to obtain a victory.

As Overwatch 2 is very competitive in nature the differences between these casual and competitive mindsets can easily create conflicts between players. Ideas of how the game should be played by competitive players can seep over to QP and through casual players to the competitive space. In relation to competitive play, Harper (2014) differentiated between three different categories of play: *play practice*, *normative play* and *social play*. Play practice is about how games are actually played, normative play is how players think games should be played and social play is about how players play together. The major difference with these mindsets is that players view how the game should be played in different ways (Harper, 2014). Some players are more competitive in nature and some play to have fun so losing is very personal and contextualised to the goals that are being pursued but also to the players playstyle and mindset (Anderson, 2020). Thereby, players can choose how they want to play which can affect what failure means to them in that situation.

Player attitudes and playstyles might even change between different matches and game modes, so the key conflict of Overwatch 2 can be the mixing of these diverse, even

opposite motivations (Blamey, 2022). Within the same team, players can have different mindsets: competitive players might get paired with teammates with more casual mindsets and the other way around. In the occurrence of a loss (defeat) competitive players might react more intensely because the time spent playing the game and their skill level (how good they are at the game) does not resonate with the result of the match. Players assign different outcomes with different values, and they try to put in a considerable amount of effort in order to influence the preferred outcome, an outcome they are most often emotionally attached to (Juul, 2003). Therefore, how a player reacts to failure depends on how meaningful winning is to them, and how much time they have spent on trying to achieve a certain goal.

2.4 Failure in Video Games

Depending on the goal given by a game, one could consider character death or failing to complete a mission to be failure in a single-player game. However, in a competitive multiplayer game like Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022), failure is tied to the outcome of the match. In this thesis I am researching failure in the context of Overwatch 2: in a competitive video game like Overwatch 2 when you have lost a match, you have failed to win. In his essay, Juul (2013) stated that even though most of us find failure an unpleasant feeling, we still choose to subject ourselves to it by playing video games. This is also the case with Overwatch 2, as by design there is always a winner and a loser regardless of the game mode. Juul (2013) also described that video games motivate us to play more to escape both the feeling of being inadequate but also failure itself: players want a chance to redeem themselves by improving their skills and by winning.

When we play video games, we are all aware that at some point we might fail, one way or another. Juul (2013, p.12) highlighted that for something to be a game at all we expect there to be a possibility of failure. Similarly to Juul (2013) Anable (2018) also pointed out that when we play video games, we meaningfully set ourselves up for the possibility of failure. As competitive video games are built around the tension between winning and losing, they can be an experience of repeated frustration because there is always the chance that you can lose, even multiple times in a row. According to Anable (2018) the reason we bother to keep trying after failing, is because we want to improve and eventually not fail at all. However, not to fail at all in a competitive multiplayer game is

highly unlikely hence competitive games can elicit multiple different emotions, including frustration which can impact the gaming experience.

As video games are affective systems, they have always been able to affect our emotions (Anable, 2018). When we fail in a video game, we might get upset, because we have put in a considerable amount of effort to not to fail, and accordingly, mood and time investment can also influence how we feel about failure (Juul, 2013). Everyone perceives failure differently and something one player considers as failure might not be the same for someone else, and these attitudes and opinions can differ especially between players with casual and competitive mindsets. According to Anderson (2020) the way players experience failure is heavily influenced by the goals the player has in the game. These goals a player has can differ within a single game, but especially between different game modes.

There are many factors that can affect whether the match ends in a preferred way. As Juul (2013) discussed the reason we usually feel upset about failing is because if we notice that we have performed poorly, we as players feel like it was somehow our fault that we failed. In relation to performance, Hudson and Cairns (2016) described that the outcome of a team-based online video game is central to the cooperative social experience. In multiplayer video games that rely on team-coordination players might assume that if their team lost, their teammates were not working together. In addition to the fact that players believe their performance can contribute to a loss, the performance of their teammates can also affect how they experience losing in competitive video games (Hudson & Carins, 2016). Along with Juul (2013), Anderson (2020) also stated that there are different factors that can influence how we experience failure, and these factors can change depending on what type of a game is in question. When we fail in a team-based video game we might try to look for other "*who and what*" factors to blame other than ourselves. In this thesis, I am exploring the different factors within Overwatch 2 that can influence the players' experiences with losing.

3 METHOD

In this chapter, I describe semi-structured interviews as the method used in this thesis and how the research was conducted. First in section 3.1 I will introduce the research question, then in section 3.2 I will provide an overview of the participants and how they were recruited. In section 3.3 I discuss how I employed semi-structured interviews as a method and in section 3.4 address the research ethical aspects of this thesis. In section 3.5 I will present, reflexive thematic analysis which was used to identify themes from the research material. Finally in section 3.6 I will elaborate on my position as a player-researcher.

3.1 Research Questions

The research questions of this thesis are:

What factors influence experiences with losing in Overwatch 2? (RQ1)

How do players experience loss based on these factors? (RQ2)

These research questions explore subjective experiences of losing in Overwatch 2 and try to understand the various factors that can influence the players' perceptions and reactions to losing. To get an answer to these questions I conducted semi-structured interviews with the players of Overwatch 2 and asked questions in relation to how losing affected them, made them feel, and if there were any factors that affected their experiences of losing. The complete list of interview questions can be found in the Appendix 1.

3.2 Participants

Being an avid Overwatch 2 player myself, I had both insight into the context as well as an established network within the game. In addition to those networks I also used the snowballing method (Cote & Raz, 2015; Rogo, 2024) to ask the interview participants if they knew anyone who would be interested in this study to recruit more participants. Through this method two additional participants were recruited. Initially, I recruited players through my personal network, meaning that I know seven of the participants personally and have played Overwatch 2 (and other games) with them. However, for the sake of this study I have treated all of the participants fairly as equals (see section 3.4), and the participants from my immediate circle did not have any special benefits during

the interviews or the analysis. The only requirement to be able to participate in this study was that the participant must have played Overwatch 2 before and have experiences of both Quick Play and Competitive because I wanted to take both game modes and participant experiences in these modes into consideration.

Eight of the participants identified themselves as men, and two of the participants identified themselves as women (see Table 1 for an overview of the participants). The participants were in between the ages of 19 to 28 but the majority were in their mid-twenties at the time of the interviews. As the gaming community itself is very masculine and men are perhaps the most visible and largest group of gamers (Arnold-Ferencz & Tarkó, 2021; Friman & Ruotsalainen, 2022) it felt relevant to include the perspectives of participants identifying as men in the interviews. As Overwatch 2 was designed to be inclusive with its large variety of different heroes with fairly diverse representation and the relatively equal division between male and female heroes (Välisalo & Ruotsalainen, 2019), the game is also very popular among women players. As a woman player myself, I wanted to include women's voices as well because their presence in the gaming community is increasing and they continue to play an active role in shaping the community (Arnold-Ferencz & Tarkó, 2021).

Three of the participants had played Overwatch 2 since its launch in August 2022 and rest of the participants had played the game from half a year to up to two years (see Table 1). Only P10 played on PC and the rest of the participants played Overwatch 2 on console (PlayStation). In the table presented below, I have also listed the participants, their age, gender, their favourite role(s) to play and their competitive ranking at the time of the interview. The competitive ranking is for the role in bold and the season that was currently active when the interviews were conducted is indicated within brackets. The ranks vary between season 9, 12 and 13 as the interviews were conducted on three different iterations (in March, September and October 2024 respectively, see Table 1).

Table 1.

Background information of the participants at the time of the interviews. The competitive ranking is for the role in bold and the active season during which the interview was conducted is indicated within brackets.

Participant	**Age**	**Gender**	**Favourite Role(s)**	**Competitive Ranking**	**Time played**
Player 1 (P1)	24	Male	DPS & **Support**	Master 5 (season 9)	1 year
Player 2 (P2)	24	Male	**Support**	Gold 5 (season 9)	0,5 years
Player 3 (P3)	24	Male	**Tank**	Platinum 3 (season 9)	Since launch (8/2022)
Player 4 (P4)	24	Male	DPS & **Support**	Platinum 3 (season 9)	2 years
Player 5 (P5)	24	Male	**DPS**	Gold 4 (season 9)	1,5 years
Player 6 (P6)	25	Male	**DPS** & Support	Master 5 (season 12)	1 year
Player 7 (P7)	26	Male	**Support**	Master 4 (season 13)	2 years
Player 8 (P8)	19	Male	**DPS**	Master 5 (season 13)	2 years
Player 9 (P9)	27	Female	**Support**	Diamond 5 (season 13)	Since launch (8/2022)
Player 10 (P10)	28	Female	**Support**	Diamond 4 (season 13)	Since launch (8/2022)

3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative interviews are useful when researchers want to collect in-depth information about topics that require personal opinions and experiences (Cote & Raz, 2015). The aim of qualitative research is not to generalize the results, but rather portray a specific phenomenon or event, understand specific behaviour, or give theoretically meaningful interpretations to a certain phenomenon (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). When doing qualitative interviews, the researcher has the possibility to recruit participants who already have opinions and knowledge or even experiences related to the topic they are doing research about (Cote & Raz, 2015; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018). In their work employing semi-structured interviews in game studies, Cote and Raz (2015) described that researchers can recruit participants based on specific games they wish to explore. In order to find out more about how players experience failure in Overwatch 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022) I decided the best way to do so would be by interviewing the players of this specific game.

The data for this thesis was gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews online via Zoom. In semi-structured interviews, the pre-defined questions can be the same across all interviews, but they do not need to be asked in the same order, as semi-structured interviews also offer space for further discussion (Cote & Raz, 2015). The interviews lasted between 10 to 39 minutes (4 hours 4 minutes in total), depending on the participant and how extensively they wanted to reflect on their experiences. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, as it is the native language of all of the participants and also the language we use to communicate in-game. In the beginning of the interview, I asked about background information (such as the age and gender of the participant) and a warm-up question related to their overall experience and their favourite roles in Overwatch 2.

The interview consisted of nine open-ended questions that were employed to spark conversation related to feelings resulting from a loss, different scenarios, and various factors that could affect their experiences with losing so the participants could provide detailed responses about their own experiences (for the full list of interview questions, see Appendix 1). For the interviews I used the pre-defined questions I wanted to ask each participant, but the order of the questions could change according to the flow of the conversation, which aligns with the semi-structured interview approach (Cote & Raz, 2015). For example, if a participant mentioned something that I had planned to ask at the

end of the interview I covered those questions sooner to help the conversation flow more effectively (Cote & Raz, 2015). This offered space for additional questions and to be able to discuss their thoughts and experiences more freely without having a clear structure that should have been followed with every participant. At the end of the interview, I gave the participant the possibility to freely add to their answers and gave them an opportunity to tell me if there were any questions they thought I would ask but did not do so. Interviews were conducted in three iterations: in March 2024 (players 1,2,3,4 and 5), in September 2024 (player 6) and in October 2024 (players 7,8,9 and 10).

3.4 Research Ethical Perspectives

This study follows the ethical principles of research with human participants in human sciences as defined in the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines (2019). Before participating to the interview's all of the participants who volunteered to participate in this study were provided with an information sheet and a privacy notice to help them better understand what this research was about and how the data gathered from the interviews would be handled. The participants were also informed that they had the possibility to discontinue their participation at any given time without suffering any negative consequences. The informed consent to participate was documented verbally at the start of each interview. The data gathered from the interviews were protected by username, password and two-step authentication and stored in the One Drive cloud-service provided by Tampere University. To both protect the personal data and to maintain anonymity of the participants, in this study I will refer to the participants through pseudonyms from Player 1 (P1) to Player 10 (P10).

3.5 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a very versatile and flexible research method that is used to develop different themes across the research data that addresses a research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexive thematic analysis can be used with various theoretical frameworks and research questions and here it is used to understand players' experiences and factors that can influence how players experience losing in Overwatch 2. In reflexive thematic analysis the themes are generated by the researcher through a process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development and revision (Braun & Clarke, n.d.). The focus of this thesis was to develop themes from the qualitative interview data, through

a more inductive approach of reflexive thematic analysis, as the coding and theme development are guided by the content of the research data rather than through the lens of a theory (Braun & Clarke, n.d.). It is also important to note that my own experiences both as a player and researcher might affect how I interpret and present the results of this study and being transparent about this potential impact on the results is a central part of qualitative research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

The first step of my analysis process was to transcribe the interviews, conducted in Finnish, in their entirety. After I had written the transcripts, I re-familiarised myself with the interview transcripts by re-reading them multiple times while also highlighting any factors and experiences players mentioned in relation to their experiences with losing and that way to my research questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) familiarising oneself with their research data is one of the firsts steps of thematic analysis.

Following this, I collected and translated the excerpts that were relevant to my research questions to English. When the translation process was done and the transcripts had been organized and numbered according to how many excerpts each player had (for example P1.1-P1.31, however these numbers were to help organise and understand the material and are thereby not included in this thesis), I started to come up with preliminary codes for the excerpts, and grouped all the excerpts that were under the same codes together. Coding and grouping relevant data extracts together was described to be the second step of thematic analysis. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The third and fourth steps of thematic analysis usually revolve around potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) so once I had listed all the supporting excerpts under the codes that were related to each other, I started to divide the several factors that form the different experiences into initial themes and during this process I further developed my themes by combining and splitting them up. After finalizing the themes, it was time to refine, define and to name them (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Sub-themes ‘Team composition’, ‘Toxic players’ and ‘Loss streak’ have remained the same since the initial coding (for an overview of the final themes and sub-themes, see Table 2). However, multiple sub-themes were refined throughout the entire analysis and writing process as some were separated or moved under different main themes, which is a common practice in reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the initial sub-themes ‘Quick Play’ and ‘Competitive’ were redefined through the analysis process as ‘Stakes of game mode’ (see section 4.1.1) and ‘Investment to ranked’ (see

section 4.1.2) as they allowed me to explore the experiences between game modes more in detail. Additionally, to these changes, initial sub-theme 'Own vs. others' performance' was separated into two sub-themes: 'Own performance' (see section 4.3.1) and 'Teammates' performance' (see section 4.3.2). The two themes, 'Reflections after loss' was redefined into 'Dealing with loss' (see section 4.5.2) and moved from theme 'Performance' to theme 'Impact of loss'. Initially 'Emotional limit' was also initially a sub-theme under theme 'Impact of loss' but was later combined with the sub-theme 'Loss streak' (see section 4.5.1) as there was a clear overlap between these based on the interview material. Furthermore, some minor changes were made in terms of both theme and sub-theme name formulation as the theme 'Impact of repeated losses' was reworked into 'Impact of loss' (see section 4.5). The sub-themes under 'Match specific context' were also re-named from 'Nature of loss' and 'Match quality' into 'Type of loss' (see section 4.4.1) and 'Matchmaking' (see section 4.4.2). Reflexive thematic analysis allows the codes to evolve during the analysis process, and Braun and Clarke (2021) state that coding often requires a reflexive researcher who strives to reflect and continuously analyze the data to develop it even further.

Thematic analysis is a very subjective process that is shaped by the researcher, their data and interpretation. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the steps of reflexive analysis are not a strict process but rather a tool to guide a researcher through their data analysis. It is common to move back and forth between the different phases and sometimes the phases can even blur together. Initially reflexive thematic analysis was selected as the analytic approach because I wanted to code the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a researcher with limited experience of qualitative research, reflexive thematic analysis felt the most comfortable to me due to its flexible nature. In addition to being data-driven, flexible and relatively easy to learn, as I wanted to report the experiences of participants the analysis method fit the purpose of this thesis and aligned with my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.6 My Positionality

The starting point of this study was personal. I joined the gaming group of which seven participants of this study are also part of in early 2022. However, I already knew six of these gaming group members prior joining the group as we had been friends since primary school. Since joining the group, we have spent countless hours playing video games, such

as Overwatch 2, together. As Reunanen (2017) states in his doctoral thesis, a personal connection to both the participants and the topic of this thesis must be taken into account and the possible benefits and disadvantages of a researcher's personal involvement with their subject should be considered. I will continue to discuss my closeness to the topic in the discussion section of this thesis (see section 5).

MacRae (2007) defines three approaches to define researcher-subculture relationships: *outsider-in*, *outsider-out*, and *insider-in*. The outsider-in refers to an approach where an outsider participates and observes a social group. In the outsider-out approach the researcher is not directly involved with the subject and the approach is based on theoretically grounded reading of subcultural texts instead. Finally, the insider-in approach is where the researcher is or becomes a member of a community. Being an insider researcher can enable a possibility for the researcher to participate fully, communicate more confidently and freely which then may provide the ability to get more quality in-depth data (MacRae, 2007, pp. 54–56).

Following Macrae's (2007) model, my own position would then be the insider-in researcher, as I have knowledge and experiences with Overwatch 2 as a player myself but also have shared experiences, with the members of the gaming group who participated in this study. Similarly to Hodkinson (2005), who researched methodological issues as an insider in the goth subculture, I went from an insider to an insider researcher, but primarily for the duration of the interviews during which the participants clearly positioned me as a researcher rather than a friend. It is worth mentioning that although I am partly researching the members of my so-called gaming group, I did not participate in our gaming sessions in the role of a researcher. Since I chose semi-structured interviews as the research method for this thesis, I did not conduct any observations of the players during our play sessions but participated as a friend and a player.

4 RESULTS

The multiple themes that were identified based on the interview data suggested that there are various different factors that can affect the way players experience losing in Overwatch 2 (see table 2). In this section the main findings are discussed in relation to the research questions. The aim of this study is to explore and discuss the various factors that can influence the players' experiences in relation to losing in the video game Overwatch 2. The research questions of this study were "*what factors influence experiences with losing in Overwatch 2"* (RQ1) and "*how do players experience loss based on these factors*" (RQ2). I have categorized the interview data into five main themes: difference between game modes (see section 4.1), social context (see section 4.4), performance (see section 4.3), match specific context (see section 4.4) and impact of repeated losses (see section 4.5). Each main theme is discussed through two subthemes, and they are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Factors that affect players' experiences of losing in Overwatch 2.

Difference between game modes (section 4.1)	**Social context** (section 4.2)	**Performance** (section 4.3)	**Match specific context** (section 4.4)	**Impact of loss** (section 4.5)
Stakes of game mode	Team composition	Own performance	Type of loss	Loss streak
Investment to ranked	Toxic players	Teammates' performance	Matchmaking	Dealing with loss

4.1 Difference Between Game Modes

In terms of player experience of loss 'Difference between game modes' was identified as one factor affecting players' experiences of losing in Overwatch 2. In the following section I will discuss the players' experiences in relation to difference between game modes through two subthemes: stakes of game mode (section 4.1.1) and investment to ranked (section 4.1.2).

4.1.1 Stakes of Game Mode

Stakes of game mode was identified as one of the factors that influence the way players experience losing in Overwatch 2. As participants described differences between their experiences in Quick Play (QP) and Competitive, these game modes were made relevant by the participants and thereby, how their experiences differed based on game mode is discussed in this section. All of the participants described that QP was the more casual game mode out of the two, where one is able to have fun, practice new heroes without the pressure of a ranked game and even warm up before queuing for a competitive match. All of the participants claimed that there was nothing at stake in QP as losing would not affect anything or take away progress they had made. For example, P3 (age 24) framed this as there being no reward in QP.

> Losing in QP does not matter as much, you might get a little more XP for the battle pass, but you won't lose anything, when you go into QP you know you're not trying to get a "reward", like in comp you gain or lose your rank. (P3, age 24)

Almost all (9 out of 10) participants had given significance to their competitive ranking, and they described that in a competitive match they would always try their best to play to win and see how high they could climb in the ranks. The participants experienced that competitive mode came with higher stakes. For example, P7 (age 26) described that, losing a match would affect his rank progress negatively, which then would make him feel more frustrated than when losing in QP.

> […] . Also, your rank, that you've done a lot of work to make progress but then the loss takes back the progress. You've taken a step forward and when you lose you take two back so it's frustrating. (P7, age 26)

In summary, the results showed that players' experiences with losing were different depending on the game mode in which they were playing. All of the participants expressed that it was easier to lose in QP as there was nothing at stake, whereas in competitive mode participants' competitive rank and progress would be affected if they lost a match. Almost all of the participants had given significance to their competitive ranking and mentioned that they were always playing to win in competitive mode. As such, being invested in the ranked game mode (competitive) and their competitive ranking creates an atmosphere with much higher stakes than in QP, as will be explored in the following section.

4.1.2 Investment to Ranked

As described earlier, investment to the ranked game mode (competitive) was another factor that impacted the experience of loss, presumably due to their competitive ranking being of significance to most. The participants competitive rankings ranged from Gold to Master (see Table 1). Participants described feeling that losing a match felt frustrating in the competitive setting because losing would take back the progress they had previously made, which can be seen as investment to the ranked game mode. Only P2 (age 24) expressed feeling thar losing in both QP and Competitive were very similar experiences as he was not that invested in the ranked game mode and had given very little significance to his competitive ranking. In contrast P3 (age 24) exemplified this by describing how ambition in terms of rank were connected to his experience of loss. As losing in a way can be seen as erasing the progress the player has made, he described that not progressing to the rank you desire is "just a negative outcome":

> It annoys me because I put time into it, especially if I'm not in the rank where I want to be because I assume I win the matches and I invest time into it, and if I lose the match, it's just a negative outcome. (P3, age 24)

In addition to setbacks and losing progress because of match loss, participants explained that losing in competitive mode caused negative feelings also because they had invested time into the match. Some of the participants (5 out of 10) mentioned that losing in a competitive match felt like a waste of time, that they had put up a lot of effort in order to win but ended up losing anyway. For example, P6 (age 25) described if one loses a competitive match, the player might start to question what it was even for because they did not make any progress because of the loss.

> It also feels like a waste of time, that you go and try, and you want to win but lose, so then you think what was that game even for. (P6, age 25)

P6 (age 25), backed up by P1 (age 24) and P10 (age 28), also noted that competitive mode is not the place where players should practice and try out new things, like new heroes, as it is a competition to which he added that "losing in a competition never feels nice". Five of the participants also described how frustrating de-ranking felt as a consequence of a loss. De-ranking means that a player can get demoted either from a higher division to a lower one, or from a higher skill tier to a lower skill tier depending on the division the player is currently ranked in (see Figure 2 for the rank overview). For example, P9 (age

27) described that if she was in the middle of her rank and lost a competitive match, losing did not feel as upsetting as when she was going to de-rank.

In summary, the results showed that participants described losing in competitive to be more frustrating as losses affected their competitive progress. Five of the participants explained that losing in a competitive match felt like all the time and effort they had put into it had gone to waste because in the occurrence of a loss their progress would only be affected negatively. Some participants clearly had a higher rank in mind to which they thought they belonged to, so losing would only take them further away from their target rank they wanted to achieve.

4.2 Social Context

In terms of players' experiences of loss 'Social context' was identified as another factor affecting players experiences of losing in Overwatch 2. In the following sections I will discuss the players' experiences in relation to social context through two subthemes: team composition (section 4.2.1) and toxic players (section 4.2.2).

4.2.1 Team Composition

All of the participants highlighted that team composition mattered in relation to losing a match, and the participants mentioned experiencing losing differently whether or not they were playing with their friends or with strangers. Three participants, including P2 (age 24), P4 (age 24) and P5 (age 24) mentioned feeling that it was easier to give up when they noticed that they were losing in a team full of strangers. On the contrary, they mentioned feeling more motivated to try when they were playing with their friends.

> If we're close to losing with friends I'm more motivated but with randoms if the game has not gone so well, I might feel like giving up and not trying. (P2, age 24)

Three participants (P2, P4, and P5) described how they cared not only for their own but also for their friends rank and how losing with a friend who cared about their competitive ranking felt worse. Four participants (P2, P4, P5 and P7) also mentioned that playing with friends who might care more about winning and losing than they themselves do can impact the situation. They mentioned that on the occurrence of a loss these friends who cared more about their competitive ranking and winning might want to stop playing with

them. For example, P4 exemplified this by explaining how multiple losses might result in his friends taking a break.

> […] Losing with friends irritates me cause you know the more you lose, the more likely your friends will quit and take a break. (P4, age 24)

In summary, the results showed that three participants pointed out that if their team was clearly losing, they expressed feeling more motivated to try and gain control of the game if they were playing with friends. This was the opposite with strangers, as the participants expressed feeling de-motivated if they noticed they were close to losing when playing with strangers. Some of the participants (P2, P4 and P5) also mentioned feeling worse about losing with a friend, if they knew their friend cared about their rank and were very keen on winning. Four of the participants (P2, P4, P5 and P7) also stated that losing with friends was more annoying because the more they lost, the more likely their friends might quit and take a break, thereby temporarily losing their friends as team members.

4.2.2 Toxic Players

Toxic players were identified as another social factor impacting players experiences of losing. Most of the participants (8 out of 10) mentioned that when they encountered toxic players, who were either being toxic by sending mean, insulting or in otherwise inappropriate messages in the game chat or by targeting the participant by shooting or T-bagging their body (see vocabulary list), they wanted to try and win them. P10 (age 28) explained that losing to toxic players feels worse because in a way you would want to prove that you are not bad at the game and can actually play. P6 (age 25) on the other hand described that losing to toxic players would be more annoying because you would not want them to make progress.

> If there are toxic players it's more annoying to lose, because you wouldn't want them to win and make progress. If someone is being toxic and they win, it's really annoying. (P6, age 25)

The participants also described situations where toxic players had attacked their friends and in these situations the outcome remained the same as if the toxic players had targeted the player directly, as P9 (age 27) noted that if toxic players attacked her friends, she mentioned thinking that they had to win them. As for how the participants experienced loss in relation to toxic players, six of the participants described feeling discouraged and

annoyed after losing to toxic players because they felt like players who behaved that way would not have deserved to win. P1 (age 24) exemplified this by noting that losing a competitive game to toxic players would be a negative "icing on the cake".

> When you lose to someone racist or sexist and they can send stuff in the chat and continue to trash talk it's icing on the cake that you lost to that type of a person. (P1, age 24)

In summary, the participants described it was annoying and frustrating to lose to toxic players who either sent unnecessary comments to the game chat or targeted them by T-bagging and shooting their body. The participants explained that having toxic players in the enemy team made them want to try hard. Most of the participants pointed out that in a way they did not want to see the toxic players succeed and win after behaving in such way. Furthermore, the participants expressed feeling like their motivation towards playing lowered if they lost to toxic people.

4.3 Performance

In terms of players' experiences of loss, 'Performance' was identified as another factor affecting players' experiences of losing in Overwatch 2. In the following sections I will discuss the players' experiences in relation to 'Own performance' (section 4.3.1) and 'Teammates' performance' (section 4.3.2)

4.3.1 Own Performance

In relation to their own performance, nine participants highlighted that they felt frustrated if they had not performed well and lost. For example, P5 (age 24) noted that if one is not doing well despite trying their best it feels frustrating to lose. Based on the interviews, it seemed that not performing well usually resulted in thinking that their individual performance might have contributed to the fact that their team had lost. Participants acknowledged the fact that if they were occasionally not performing well and took accountability by reflecting back on the situations. For example, P6 (age 25) exemplified this by describing how losing annoyed him because he knew he could have done better and if he would have done better, it could potentially have changed the outcome of the match. P1 (age 24) described that he was quite hard on himself if he noticed he had been underperforming.

> It feels worse when you're not doing good and then you lose if you feel like you lost because you did not play well. I'm quite hard on myself if I notice my performance was one of the factors that contributed to losing. (P1, age 24)

P3 (age 24) on the other hand described how one could still try and do something about it if one is not playing well themself. He also added it is a more difficult situation if one's team is not performing well. P8 (age 19) mentioned something similar as he explained in which situations he thought he had deserved to win or not:

> If I play good myself and everyone else plays badly it annoys me more because I'm like I didn't deserve to lose, but if I play badly, I'm like I deserved to lose because I should have played better. (P8, age 19)

Two of the participants also shared feelings how losing felt worse with friends especially if they had performed badly. P5 noted that after performing badly while playing with a friend he caught himself thinking "shit I should have played better". P4 (age 24) described how performing badly in a competitive match felt like he was letting his friend down. These feelings were only visible while playing in the competitive mode as it has the ranked aspect.

> If I play competitive with my friends an lose and I know I played badly, then I feel even more embarrassed cause my friend has trusted me to play with them and then I go there and play badly. (P4, age 24)

In summary, the participants expressed feeling frustrated in the occurrence of a loss if they had performed badly themselves. They also shared thoughts of thinking that their 'bad' performance might have contributed to the fact their team had lost. Participants also explained how their teammates' performances affected the way they experienced losing, which I will discuss further in the next section.

4.3.2 Teammates' Performance

In combination to players' own performance, teammates' performance was identified as another factor that impacted the way players experienced losing. Similarly to feeling frustrated when the participants had performed badly themselves (see section 4.3.1), nine of the participants stated that they found it frustrating when they noticed that their teammates were not performing well, because they thought it was something they could not really have an effect on.

For example, P8 explained that if his teammates had performed badly, he thought that he would have deserved to win, especially if he thought that he had performed well himself. Three participants explained that if they noticed their friend was performing badly, they might have suggested their friend to switch heroes and try a different playstyle. P4 thought that with friends it is easier to "give and receive feedback" if someone is not performing well. However, P9 (age 27) explained that if she noticed her friends were not playing well, she might play alone next because she knew "they could do better, but they are not just playing good right now".

P10 (age 28) also described that one might easily start to look for someone to blame if one's own team is losing and how easy it is for players to see the scoreboard throughout the entire match. She explained that when you see that your teammate has not performed well you might easily think that "they did not do enough, and they are the reason we lost". If a stranger had performed badly some of the participants (5 out of 10) described that it was easier to question how they had played and even accuse the stranger that it was their fault that the team had lost. For example, P3 (age 24) explained "I don't want to rage to my friends and say they're bad, but randoms are randoms". Some of the participants (3 out of 10) mentioned that they would use the "avoid as teammate" feature so that they would not get matched up again with the bad players in the future:

> If I'm playing with friends and the fifth member of our team is a random, and if they play badly, I might blame them very easily, that I might tell them in the chat that you've been quite useless, which doesn't really help anyone, and I also avoid them. (P7, age 26)

In summary, in relation to participants experiences of loss in relation to teammates' performance, participants described it being annoying if your team was not performing well and lost because of that. If the participants noticed like their teammates were performing badly, especially if they were strangers, they would occasionally send comments to the team-chat questioning what the teammate was doing. Most of the participants explained that it was annoying if their teammates were not performing well because most of the times, they could not really do anything about it, other than encourage them to play better.

4.4 Match Specific Context

In terms of players' experience of loss 'Match specific context' was identified as one of the factors affecting players' experiences of losing in Overwatch 2. In the following sections I will discuss players' experiences in relation to match specific context through two subthemes: type of loss (section 4.4.1) and matchmaking (section 4.4.2).

4.4.1 Type of Loss

The type of the match and therefore the type of the loss, how the game was lost and what was the match like, was also identified as a factor that affected how the players experienced losing. The type of loss had more significance in competitive mode as the matches are longer and winning is important to make progress (see 4.1.2). Eight of the participants claimed that one of the worst types of loss was when their team was getting stomped by the enemy team. As for how the participants experienced loss in relation to the type of loss, participants explained getting stomped (being completely dominated and potentially unable to even get out from the spawn point) made them feel discouraged and demotivated which resulted in not wanting to try anymore because they expressed feeling like there was nothing they could do to turn the match around. Similarly to other participants, P1 (age 24) described that he wanted one-sided matches to end as soon as possible so that he could move on to the next game.

> In a stomp phase I'm more likely to feel like I want to quit and take the L and move on to the next match. (P1, age 24)

Some participants (4 out of 10) also described that in addition to getting stomped, a tight competitive match where they had barely lost also made them feel upset and frustrated. Only P3 (age 24) and P4 (age 24) noted that to them losing a tight match was worse than getting stomped. P3 (age 24) explained this as "if it's a full stomp from the beginning you kind of expect to lose". Four of the participants explained that a tight match felt very emotional if they had been trying their best and seemed like their team was winning but ended up losing in the end. For example, P4 (age 24) noted that the tighter the loss the more it frustrated him: "the closer the victory the more it eats me". P5 (age 24) exemplified this by describing a situation where one's team has played so well that one does not expect the enemy team to be able to do better, but then they do, and the player's team loses although they have been trying their best.

> Sometimes it's the way you lose that might annoy me, if it's a tight match which you lose in the end, that you have pushed the payload really well or have had a full hold on the enemy that they have not been able to push the payload, but then the same thing happens to you and you lose because of that. Then it might annoy me because we should have won because we defended so well. (P5, age 24)

In summary, the type of loss affected players and how they experienced losing. If the loss was a full stomp, it made the participants feel like they wanted to move on from the match as quick as possible. Not being able to do anything in a stomp match also lowered the motivation to try to turn the match around. Some participants noted that sometimes a one-sided match would not make them feel as frustrated as a tight match because when getting stomped participants would already expect their team to lose. Participants described feeling that in a tight match they still had a sense of agency so thinking that their team was close to victory and then losing was deemed frustrating.

4.4.2 Matchmaking

Matchmaking was another match specific factor that affected how players experienced losing as some participants voiced concerns related to match quality, and how fair they thought the matchmaking was. All of the participants described that losing in QP did not matter much or even at all because there was really nothing at stake (see section 4.1.1). Only P1 (age 24) stated that losing in QP might annoy him from time to time because of the skill-based matchmaking. P1 (age 24) explained that sometimes QP matches could feel like competitive matches which meant that he was not able to relax and have fun by playing more casually and by practicing new heroes.

> I'm not the biggest fan of skill-based matchmaking because QP should be casual, but if you're at a certain level in the game QP can become competitive level gaming. If you wanted to try new heroes, you might lose cause the enemy team is playing their mains. Usually, the QP matches are pretty tight so I won't' be able to relax as much as I'd want, so that's why I might get annoyed in QP cause it's no way casual in the end. (P1, age 24)

Participants also described that sometimes they perceived the skill-based matchmaking as unfair if the game paired players with different skill levels both against and in the same team with each other. P7 (age 26) questioned that how it is possible that sometimes it seems like some players "have a controller in their hands for the first time". P1 (age 24) also noted that sometimes it felt like his teammates were underperforming although they were supposed to be similar skill level as him. P5 (age 24) also described a similar

situation of how it feels annoying “if you’re trying to grind ranked and lose because of a bad player on your team”. Having players of different skill levels playing against each other can often result in the other team having a higher competitive advantage and if there is a too big of a skill-gap between the two teams this can easily result in getting stomped. P1 (age 24) exemplified this by noting that the ranks of the match should be equal but if he gets stomped match after match he questions where the balance actually is.

> […] the matchmaking is all messed up because sometimes the random teammates are so useless although they should be the same rank as you. (P1, age 24)

P10 (age 28) noted that at the time of the interview she had felt like the matchmaking had been “really bad recently” and after winning multiple matches she had gotten many losses in a row. P9 (age 27) also shared similar experiences, as she described that after the ranking system was updated in Season 9, she expects to lose the next time she goes play competitive if she had won multiple matches in a row and to her this felt de-motivating.

> The new ranking system is horrible, and it affects me negatively that I feel like it’s very hard to rank up like if you have a win streak the next day you’re going to de-rank because you had five losses in a row. (P9, age 27, October 2024)

In summary, in relation to matchmaking, participants claimed that sometimes it felt unfair if the participants got teamed up against a higher ranked team and ended up getting stomped or similarly got paired with teammates that were not performing well. Some participants also explained that after winning competitive matches they would expect to go on a loss streak, and felt like they could not really have an effect on it.

4.5 Impact of loss

In terms of players’ experience of loss ‘Impact of loss’ was identified as one factor affecting players’ experience of losing in Overwatch 2. In the following sections I will discuss the players’ experiences in relation to impact of loss through two subthemes: loss streak (section 4.5.1) and dealing with loss (section 4.5.2).

4.5.1 Loss Streak

Loss streak was identified as a factor impacting players’ experience with losing. Almost all of the participants (9 out of 10) explained that if they went on a loss streak where they lost multiple matches in a row, they would most probably get so annoyed that they wanted

to stop playing either by taking a break or stopping completely. For example, P1 (age 24) noted that he rarely needed a break after a singular loss but after losing many matches in a row there would be a limit of not wanting to play anymore.

> I would continue and not quit after one loss, but after some point there is a limit if there have been many losses in a row, also depends on what the losses are like if I decide that is enough for today, I can't take anymore. (P1, age 24)

P10 (age 28) also exemplified this by describing that the loss type and whether her team was stomped or not also affected how fast she reached her limit of not wanting to play anymore. She described that after losing matches that have an emotional toll on the player maybe it would be for the best to take a break instead of continuing.

> If I lose matches and they are pretty bad, that my team is not killing anyone and the enemy is killing a lot so then this adds the tilt, so maybe it should be good to take a break or something. (P10, age 28)

As the repeated losses seemed to have an emotional toll on the participants, some of them (4 out of 10) for example mentioned wanting to put down the controller if they had lost many matches in a row. In addition to wanting to put down the controller participants described that when they felt frustrated, they would for example swear, speak louder or even walk around their room. P2 (age 24) explained that losing many matches in a row made him reach the limit and feel frustrated.

> Sometimes if I've lost many matches in a row and I've reached the limit and I've been stomped and lost, then I'll put the controller down quickly. I won't throw it, but I will sigh deeply and say that this was it, I don't want to play anymore, and my limit is full. (P2, age 24)

In summary, the results showed that after taking multiple losses in a row, the participants usually wanted to take a break or quit playing altogether.

4.5.2 Dealing With Loss

In this section, which rather focuses on a consequence of (situated) loss, than a factor of loss, I will discuss how participants dealt with different situations in relation to losing. Four of the participants stated that for example in QP they might start playing with a hero they are not familiar with either to practice or to have fun. For example, P5 (age 24) explained that if he noticed that his team was losing, he might have changed to a hero he

had played more so he could help turn the match around. Although all of the participants noted that there was nothing at stake in QP, P5 (age 24) also noted that "obviously it is more fun to play a match you're winning". In relation to performance and noticing that one's team is losing P2 (age 24) pondered how does a player decide when to switch heroes if they are not performing well with their main hero (the one they have played the most) – would switching help if they are already underperforming with the one, they know how to play best.

Regarding to being invested to ranked (see section 4.1.2) P3 (age 24) made a point of how he tried to protect the rank of his main role. In this scenario his main role, that he has played the most, is ranked higher than the other roles he plays. P3 (age 24) described that losing with the roles he had a lower ranking with did not matter as much as losing with his highest-ranking role because he had not given as much significance to them.

> I have my main rank that I try to protect that I don't want to de-rank with, so then I have my other ranks I can play that don't matter as much, it's nice if I get a better rank but losing is not as bad. (P3, age 24)

Four of the participants explained that although it might be a good idea to end on a loss they might still keep playing until they win. P3 (age 24) described how he thinks "it would be wise to end after the loss streak instead of trying to grind for the win" and P10 (age 28) also noted how "it would be good to take breaks but usually we just press re-queue", suggesting that she and her friend usually started looking for a next match straight after losing without taking a break. P4 (age 24) on the other hand called it a paradox of how a player might want to play more when they win but also play more because they do not want to end on a loss.

> You say that you can't end in a loss, that you play until you win, but when you win you play more cause "iron is hot", so there's a paradox that when you win you want to play more because of a good flow and if you lose you think "I can't end on a loss". (P4, age 24)

Most of the participants stated that the losses rarely affected them particularly long after the loss had occurred. However, three of the participants mentioned that if the losses they had taken were somehow significant, such as many losses in a row, they might have been upset and thought about the losses when they had quit the game. For example, P10 (age

28) explained how losing affected her and made her feel very frustrated in a way that she did not want to play the game ever again.

> […] I play very late so in bed I might be in a bad mood, that I'm not going to play ever again and uninstall but then in the morning I'm like let's go play. (P10, age 28)

In summary, the results showed that participants reacted to losses in various ways than and some had even come up with strategies so that losing would not feel as bad.

5 DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore and discuss the various factors that can influence the players' experiences in relation to losing in the video game Overwatch 2. In this discussion section, I will further briefly summarize the results and examine the significance of these results, compare them with existing literature, and explore their broader implications. The research questions of this study were "*what factors influence the experiences with losing in Overwatch 2" (RQ1)* and "*how do players experience loss based on these factors" (RQ2)* which allowed me to explore the social and game related factors that influenced how players experienced losing. Through interviews with ten players (eight men and two women) between ages 18 to 28, I was able to identify factors that influenced how players experienced losing. These factors were divided into five main themes: difference between game modes, social context, performance, match specific context, and impact of loss.

According to Juul (2013), we are motivated to play when something is at stake. In relation to the results I obtained from this study, the main thing at stake for the participants playing Overwatch 2 was their competitive rank. Almost all participants had given significance to their competitive rank which both meant that they had something to lose but were also highly motivated to win to see how far they could progress in the competitive ranking. In the occurrence of loss, participants noted how they could potentially de-rank so there is much more at stake in Competitive mode. As the results of this study showed players agreed that Quick Play on the other hand was the place where you can practice new heroes and your skills while there is nothing at stake, highlighting the *difference between game modes*. Players seemed to obtain a more relaxed mindset when playing in the casual game mode. This type of organisation between two different game modes occurs in other digital competitive games as well, such as in Marvel Rivals (NetEase Games, 2024). Only one participant pointed out how the competitiveness can seep over to the casual mode, and make it feel like one always has to try. This can be explained by gameplay optimization as some players might always want to optimize their gameplay instead of just practicing and having fun (Paul, 2024), even in QP which is considered to be the slightly more "unserious" mode (OW Wiki, n.d. j).

Time investment is also mentioned by Juul (2013) who states that the more time we invest into overcoming a challenge the bigger sense of loss we experience when we fail and

bigger sense of triumph when we succeed to win a match. According to Harper (2014) playing ranked (competitive mode) is a high investment activity, and in the context of Overwatch 2, the challenge could be the time and effort a player has invested to win a match in competitive mode. As most of the times competitive matches are longer and winning holds more value to the players (Juul, 2003), winning a match can feel more rewarding in competitive mode because you have put in more time and effort to achieving the victory. Players can also see their rank progress after every match so this could also work as a validation to the players. On the occurrence of a loss, players experience loss of progress as they get deducted skill rating points (points that are gained or lost after competitive matches), which can then make players feel like all the time and effort to both win the match and advance higher in ranks has gone to waste. The more time one invests into something, and the more significance players give to their rank, the more frustrated they will most probably feel when they lose progress due defeat. Investment to the game will influence how players experience failure in video games. The results of this study showed that being invested to their competitive rank and to the competitive mode was a significant factor that contributed to players' experiences with losing in Overwatch 2. Presumably this is also the case in other competitive games in general.

One participant mentioned that he tried to protect his main rank by playing competitive with other roles where losing did not matter as much suggesting the higher you are ranked the more significance you have given to your rank. The more time and effort players have put into climbing higher in the rankings the more they will most probably want to protect the rank by not losing progress, emphasizing the *impact of loss*. As an active player of Overwatch 2, I have noticed that players might create secondary accounts, also known as 'smurf accounts'. According to McCauley (2023) most of the times these secondary accounts can result in a mismatch in skill levels inside the match. Overall smurfing has a negative connotation withing the gaming culture as it is associated with a desire to win unfairly (McCauley, 2023). Although smurfing is often connected to the act of boosting (playing with the intention to increase someone's rank higher), competitive players might create smurf accounts to be able to play with their friends at lower ranks which is often prevented due to differences in rankings (McCauley, 2023). In relation to the results of this study, it is plausible that some competitive players might create these accounts not only because the system prevents them from playing with lower ranks but also to protect their ranks especially if there are different skill levels in the group of friends' people play

with. For example, this is something that I have done myself to protect my support rank on my main account but was not s strategy explicitly discussed in the interviews.

The reason we usually feel upset about failing, is because we, as players have performed poorly, and we feel like it is somewhat our fault that we have failed (Juul, 2013), echoing the results from Anderson's (2020) research. As the results of this study showed, most participants described having teammates that performed poorly also made them feel upset as they felt like they did not deserve to lose. Participants also felt like they could not really affect how others performed in a match whereas if they noticed they were not performing well themselves, they could still try to switch heroes and playstyles, highlighting *performance*. If the participants had lost and noticed that they had performed poorly, most of the times they reflected on the match by thinking if they would have performed better, they could have prevented their team from losing.

Performance was also mentioned by Harper (2014) who described that for competitive players winning and performing well is the primary source of enjoyment, not practicing and having fun. During the interviews participants highlighted similar experiences in relation to winning. In Harper's (2014, p. 58) book he notes how for competitive players, "being able to beat the other team is where the fun is". One participant said a similar thing here: "in comp I try to have fun, but it comes from the fact that I'm better than others and that I win and am successful in a game, winning is always nice when you know you've done better than others". To players with competitive mindsets, playing to obtain the victory is how the game should be played whereas casual players can prioritize other things than winning. Hence the way casual and competitive players play the game is sometimes incompatible with the other due how they think the game should be played, referred to as normative play by Harper (2014) which can in turn be connected to the *difference between game modes*.

The competitive nature of Overwatch 2 can contribute to toxic communications between players. In-game metrics are often used to compare and evaluate players and their performance (Brock, 2021). As the in-game metrics are displayed throughout the match, they can contribute to these cyber-bullying actions if players notice that someone is not performing well. Similar results were also mentioned by Hudson and Carins (2016), who described that when players lose in team-based competitive video games, they might feel disconnected from their team which can lead to poor behaviour. The participants of this study also pointed how easy it is to start looking for someone to blame because you can

access the scoreboard at any given time throughout the match, emphasizing both *social context* and *performance*. As a player who is part of the Overwatch community, there are many community-specific terms that reveal how players frame winning and losing experiences. When players lose the objective due to leaving its area, despite having the advantage the term 'C9' (short for 'Cloud 9') is often used to describe how someone fails to touch the objective, which results in the team either losing a round, or the entire match (British Esports Federation, 2022). 'Diff' (short for 'difference') is another common term that is used when a player is underperforming in a role in comparison to the enemy in the same role. For example, if the enemy tank is performing a lot better than their tank, someone might say "Tank diff" (British Esports Federation, 2022). One participant explained that if he noticed someone had been underperforming after losing a match, he might of have said "X person diffed" because he would have performed better in comparison to another player and therefore not contributed to the loss. These attitudes show that players in competitive modes assume others know how to play the game but also that the players are highly performance oriented. These attitudes could make participating in a highly competitive environment overwhelming for someone who is completely new to the game.

The Overwatch community is divided between casual and competitive players (Blamey, 2022), although Vahlo and Karhulahti (2022) noted that players might have needs for both casual and competitive experiences from time to time. As an Overwatch 2 player myself, I have noticed a such tendency as well, both within the broader community but also within the gaming group. It is worth to note that the attitude a player has taken towards a match could change as it progresses. More importantly these attitudes might shift based on the game mode as players could obtain a more competitive mindset when playing competitive and a more casual mindset when playing Quick Play. These casual and competitive mindsets were also visible in the participants of the study as they enjoyed both the competitiveness of ranked but also the casualness of Quick Play where they could practice heroes, have fun and even relax after a competitive match. The different attitudes participants had towards losing in Competitive and Quick Play also support the fact that the attitudes might shift based on the game mode, and that participants do not need to be either or – but can obtain a mixture of these different mindsets which highlights the *difference between game modes*.

In relation to losing in Overwatch 2, casual and competitive players might also have different viewpoints of failure depending on the goals and objectives, they have set for themselves. Based on the results of this study, the players who perceived themselves as good at the game – such as players with higher competitive ranking – seemed to be more affected by failure than players who said that they were "not that good anyway". This behaviour might be explained by the fact that experienced players give different value to failure than less experienced players and this way also have more at stake when they lose (Juul, 2013) which is connected to the *difference between game modes* and therefore to the *investment to ranked*.

Being stuck and not making progress was another factor that could affect players experiences of losing (Anderson, 2020). In the context of Overwatch 2 there are many situations where players can feel like they are stuck and not making progress. Here, not making progress could be related to getting stomped by the enemy team, as the participants expressed that such a situation made them feel demotivated and frustrated as there was nothing they could do to turn the match around highlighting *match specific context*. Another way players could feel stuck could be when they are not making progress in the competitive ranking due to losing multiple matches in a row, which according to the participants, was frustrating as they were not at the rank, they thought they should be at, drawing attention to the *impact of loss.*

Frustration was an emotional impact that was brought up repeatedly when participants described their experiences, throughout all of the factors, highlighting *impact of loss*. An example of this could be that: if they lost in competitive that was frustrating, if they performed badly that was frustrating, if someone else performed badly that was frustrating, if they got stomped that was frustrating, if they barely lost that was frustrating, if they lost to toxic players that was frustrating, when they lost multiple matches in a row they seemed to find losing so frustrating that they wanted to stop playing altogether, and so on. Players would rather win than lose, but in competitive video games there is always the possibility of failure. As Anderson (2020) described, failure is heavily influenced by the goals the player has, and in competitive gaming when we fail to meet the goal of winning, we feel frustrated because we have put in a considerable amount to not to fail (Juul, 2013).

In his research Anderson (2020) stated that it would be important to understand how different environments such as playing with a friend, in a team or in a competitive setting

would affect the way players react and experience failure. While this thesis does not include in-game material, it does explore and discuss the various self-reported factors that can influence the players' experiences in relation to losing in the context of Overwatch 2. The results of this study showed that players reported different experiences of losing when they were playing with friends and when playing in a team full of strangers, highlighting the *social context* of the match. Most of the participants described feeling more motivated to try on the verge of defeat when they were playing with their friends and the complete opposite when losing with strangers. The participants described how they did not want to let their friend down by playing badly and losing, especially if they felt like their friend cared a lot about their own competitive ranking. Some participants also described how winning with friends was important because they did not want their friend(s) to stop playing with them. Thereby, echoing Juul (2013), time spent with friends could also be considered to be at stake in the occurrence of a loss.

6 CONCLUSION

Video games motivate us to play more to escape both the feeling of failure but also failure itself (Juul, 2013). As the results of this study suggest, the claim is more complex and dual-faceted than it might seem. Participants described how getting stomped often made them feel demotivated, and most participants stopped trying so that they could move on to the next match as quickly as possible. This could be interpreted in a way the players also want to get the loss over with as fast as possible and not try and stall something that is inevitable hence, they want to escape the feeling of failure by moving on to the next match. Some participants noted how ending on a loss was not an option so losing in a way does also motivate us to play more. However, as loss streak was identified as one of the factors that affected how players' experienced failure, losing multiple matches in a row did not make players feel motivated but rather frustrated and made participants want to stop playing because they had reached an emotional limit. So, apparently at a certain point, players are escaping both failure and the feeling of failure by not wanting to play anymore.

In terms of this thesis, being part of a small gaming group when researching players and their experiences of losing in a certain video game proved useful to me. Having played Overwatch 2 myself I did not have to spend time researching the game itself to understand game mechanics, objectives, or the vocabulary that most players used when talking about their experiences. As I have been part of the gaming group for a couple of years now, to which seven of the participants of this study are also part of, it is important to note that my personal connection to the participants might have affected the way I interpreted their responses, knowing their in-game habits. However, in this study all of the participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and all participants were treated fairly, regardless of whether I knew them from before or not.

While I did not need to conduct any observations of the players during our play sessions, having knowledge of the people and how they have previously reacted to losing could have also affected my interpretation. Hodkinson (2005) on the other hand described having previous experiences could be used as a tool to assist the researcher to interpret the data. In this thesis I have used quotes of the responses the participants gave in the interviews to be transparent and to support my analysis. It is also worth mentioning that my own experiences initially helped me design interview questions that would generate data that addressed my research questions, resulting in focused interviews.

Although, most of the participants belong to the gaming group and are both familiar with me as a friend and a player, during the interviews the participants respected the setting and behaved appropriately according to the situation. It was interesting to notice that the participants interacted with me in my role as a researcher. When I stopped the recording of the interview, the atmosphere shifted to a more friendly tone, and participants started to discuss what I was going to do later tonight, and if I was planning on coming to play with them. For me, this shift signaled a shared respect (including for my work on this thesis) and years of friendship when it came to the participants who belonged to the gaming group.

While this study provides valuable insights into players' experience of losing, the sample size of ten participants limits the generalizability of the findings, and a larger sample might have offered a greater variation in responses. The study's participants predominantly consisted of men who were in their mid-twenties, and as all of the participants where white and from Finland, this could also limit the diversity of the perspectives noted in the results. My closeness to the topic could be considered as a strength of this study, as participants were comfortable to openly discuss something as sensitive as losing in a competitive game centered around winning. As I mentioned previously, I did not conduct any observations during our play sessions. For future research, in addition to interviews, gameplay observations of how players react to losing in competitive video games could bring valuable insights on player experiences.

The game environment creates a context that changes how players experience failure (Anderson, 2020), so most of the factors identified in this study are most probably visible in other competitive multiplayer games as well. Stomping could be seen as a situation that occurs in video games such as Overwatch 2 and Marvel Rivals (NetEase Games, 2024) which are structured around respawns where players constantly interact in real-time without turns. It would be important for future research to explore and compare whether players share similar experiences across different competitive multiplayer games. As competitive multiplayer games continue to grow their popularity among players (Kinnunen, Prykäri & Mäyrä, 2024), understanding both positive and negative experiences remain important. The findings from this study suggest that there are different factors within a game that can influence how players experience losing in competitive video games. Perhaps this study can serve as a reminder that sometimes it might be good to just "take the L" and move on.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These interview questions have been translated to English as they were originally in Finnish.

1) Could you state your age and gender?

2) Could you tell me your overall experience of Overwatch 2, how long have you played and which role do you preferably play? What rank are you in currently in this role?

3) When you lose a match in competitive, how does it feel and why?

4) How about losing in Quick Play, is it different compared to losing in competitive? (If there are differences) Where do you think the differences come from?

5) When you lose a match do you continue playing, take a break or stop playing or something else?

6) How do you think losing affects you? Such as does it motivate you, make you want to quit?

7) Are there any factor you think could affect the way you experience losing? (If player needs help with their answer ask about own performance, teams' performance, team members, toxic players etc.)

8) Does losing feel different when playing with your friends versus strangers (random players)? If yes, in what way?

9) If you think of a situation where your team is clearly losing a round or the match, for example it was not as fast with pushing the payload, or it was not able to hold the point, how do you react to it? Such as do you want to give up or try harder?

10) How about a situation where the enemy team is stomping you, does it cause a reaction in you?

11) Does losing cause any sort of reaction in you? For example, do you need to say, shout, or do something? Does the loss bother you long after it has occurred?

12) Was there anything you would have wanted to add?

13) Did you have a question in mind you thought I would have asked, but did not?