INTRODUCTION

Where there is culture, there is the opportunity for subculture, groups of people who create a separate identity within and often in contrast to the dominant culture of a society. In a large society, such as America, there are many cultures and subcultures. One such is the gamer subculture, people who can be identified by their affiliation to online, tabletop, collectible card and role play games. Gamers are predominantly male, but include a wide variety of ages. If there is a large enough gamer population in an area, there is often a store to support their interests. One such store is Olympic Cards & Comics in Lacey, Washington.

This paper introduces Ken Gelder’s six criteria of subcultures, then examines subculture and fandom in order to provide a better context for understanding the gamer subculture. Supported by data gathered via observation and a survey (Appendix A), the paper outlines the structure of the Olympic Cards & Comics gamer subculture before describing how they fulfill each of Gelder’s characteristics. In the interest of being thorough, the paper also offers alternatives to subculture and examines why the gamers and Olympic Cards & Comics do not meet those classifications.

In his book Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice, Ken Gelder identifies six criteria that can be used to identify a particular group as a subculture. According to Gelder (2007), subcultures are 1) understood and evaluated negatively in terms of relationship of labor to work; 2) understood ambivalently in relation to class; 3) located at one remove from property ownership; 4) come together outside the domestic sphere; 5) equated with excess or exaggeration in contrast with the restraint and moderation of the mainstream; and 6) in opposition to banalities of mass cultural forms (pp. 3-4). While much has been written of the subculture of online gaming, little work has been done on offline gaming and the subculture of the stores that host this form of socializing.
In this paper, I argue that the gamers of Olympic Cards & Comics constitute a gamer subculture because they meet Gelder’s criteria.

SUBCULTURE AND FANDOM

Before we delve into these six criteria and how the Olympic Cards & Comics gamers fulfill each, we will explore the concept of subculture and fandom, then outline the way gamers have organized themselves at the store. Culture is often defined as a set of shared, learned behaviors. A culture can be as broadly defined as ‘European culture’ or more specifically, ‘British culture.’ Usually, though, anything more specific than a broad geographic region or anything within a national boundary is categorized as a subculture. A subculture is a shared perspective based on a group of people’s common interests and activities (Gelder and Thornton, 1997, p. 100). It is a variation or subdivision of the dominant culture. Subculture can be regional or based on an affiliation. It arises from conflict between the smaller group and mainstream society’s values (Yinger 1960, pp. 525-635). In his book The Meaning of Style, Dick Hebdige (2003) calls this conflict “a crime against the natural order” and identifies it as a “refusal” of some portion of mainstream society (p. 3). Phil Cohen describes this phenomenon as “a compromise solution between two contradictory needs” (Hebdige 2003, p. 77): the need to express independence from and to identify with a dominant culture. According to Cohen, the latent function of subcultures is to express and resolve these contradictions (Hebdige 2003, p. 77). However, he also points out that subcultures operate within an imaginary set of relations and may be out of touch with the real conditions of social structure. Like anyone, members of a subculture are affected by the ideology, economy, and culture and find their own strategies for handling the raw material of social existence. As much of what finds its way into a subculture has already been filtered through the media, subcultures are, in essence, “representations of representations (Hebdige 2003, p. 85).” Ultimately, according to Hebdige (2003), subcultures express fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives (p. 132).

Gamers are fans and, therefore, part of the culture of fandom. Fans are people who develop “attachment to certain forms of mass produced entertainments that, for whatever reason, satisfy personal needs (Brown 2007, p. 13).” People can be fans of books, TV shows, movies, comic books, music, celebrities, and brands. In this particular instance, gamers are fans of the
worlds and products associated with their games as well as the tools of the games themselves. All the games described in this paper require fan-level participation in order to keep up with new releases, collect valuable cards and miniatures, be familiar with the rules, and come together with like-minded gamers. In addition to playing games, gamers further their immersion by collecting miniatures, cards, books, clothing, posters, and artwork inspired by their games.

In order to have a more nuanced conception of the gamer subcultures, it is useful to understand the context of social opinion within which they operate. The word *fan* comes from the word *fanatic*, which describes someone with uncritical, extreme enthusiasm or zeal. Originally, the word pertained to temple service and orgiastic rites, conjuring images of frenzied ecstasy (Merriam-Webster 2013). Today, a negative connotation persists. Fans, and perhaps comic book fans in particular, are looked down upon and personified as “misfits” who accumulate worthless knowledge about “crass” entertainment (Brown 1997, p. 13). As a result, fandom is devalued and the objects of fandom are viewed with disdain within the dominant value system. Jeffrey Brown (1997) asserts that America’s dominant value system is subject to the tastes of the affluent and, as a result, fan values challenge bourgeois standards of “good taste” and are looked upon as a “disruption (p. 18).”

Furthermore, comic book fandom, which is closely associated with gamer subculture, has been particularly vilified and continues to carry a stigma of defiance and perversion. At the height of popularity, comic books were attacked by a moral backlash because they were in ‘bad taste.’ Critics claimed that, like video games today, comic books were corrupting American’s youth. Middle class parents led by a very unscientific Dr. Frederic Wertham, were convinced that comic books taught children how to be criminals and endorsed homosexual lifestyles (Brown 1997, pp. 19-20). The senate subcommittee even met regarding juvenile delinquency in 1954 with the intent of rooting out these ‘evil’ influences. The pressure was so great that many publishers went out of business and the remainder voluntarily formed the Comics Magazines Association of America in order to censor the content of their own comic books (Brown 1997, p. 21). The counter-culture movement of the 1960s liberated comic books from such scrutiny, but the negative connotation remains in our social memory. Olympic Cards & Comics sells both comic books and games and, by association, the two and their participants are, even today, suspect.
THE OLYMPIC CARDS AND COMICS HIERARCHY

At Olympic Cards & Comics, gamers are self-organized primarily by which type of game they play. Olympic Cards & Comics, the Pacific Northwest’s largest comic book shop, has undergone three incarnations into progressively larger buildings and been in the community for over twenty years. Olympic Cards & Comics caters to comic book collectors, anime aficionados, sports card collectors, and gamers. Gamers spend a great deal of time at the store, socializing as well as competing. They participate in three types of games: collectible card games, role play games, and tabletop games (Washington 2011; Appendix B). These three types of games are played mostly by males, but age range varies. Collectible card games generally appeal to younger ages while tabletop primarily appeals to adults. Mainly teens and adults participate in role play games. These gamers gather at Olympic Cards and Comics on a regular basis to discuss their gaming hobby, to reinforce social ties and to play against one another. Each gaming type is scheduled for a particular night of the week so as to avoid overcrowding and overlap. The store also hosts monthly tournaments for collectible card games and tabletop games, however, role play games do not lend themselves to competition.

Within the store, the gamers of Olympic Cards & Comics have created their own hierarchy, alliances, language, code of conduct, and territories. The interior of Olympic Cards & Comics is divided into halves, one for product and one for gaming. The gaming side of the store is divided into further halves, one side for tabletop and the other for collectible cards. The tabletop side consists of several tables, custom made at standing height and to particular dimensions to accommodate tabletop play. The collectible cards side consists of a few rows of lower, narrow tables that players can sit at, across from each other, during games. Role player territory is a small table surrounded by couches and chairs, located in the product side of the store.

The Olympic Cards & Comics hierarchy consists of four tiers. At the top of this hierarchy is the store owner, Gabi Trautmann. She has owned the business from its beginning. Gamers behave very fondly toward Trautmann and have significant loyalty to her. She often behaves in a motherly fashion toward the gamers, especially the younger ones, regularly referring to them as
her kids. Securing her affection in return is important because her word is final and if she disapproves of a gamer’s behavior, she has the power to ban said gamer from the store. Trautmann’s employees fill the second tier of authority. Some employees have worked and/or played at the store longer than others and appear to have the seniority and the power to get things done. Others have specialized knowledge or experience with a specific game manufacturer or genre and their authority stems from their expertise. The third tier in this hierarchy consists of the gamers. According to the Washington (2011) survey (Appendix B), collectible card gamers have the highest status, followed by tabletop gamers, then role play gamers. This ranking is based on a perceived ability to influence Trautmann in order to dominate resources. The final tier of this hierarchy is the shopping patrons. Their purchases support the store and garner a certain respect from Trautmann, but they spend considerably less time at the store than do the gamers and, therefore, have less face time with Trautmann and her employees.

GELDER’S CRITERIA

Gelder’s (2007) first criteria of subcultures is that they are “understood and evaluated negatively in terms of their relation to labor or work (p. 3).” Dominant culture in the United States is built upon the Protestant ethic of hard work and discipline. Idleness is frowned upon. Leisure is only “earned” through productivity (Gelder and Thornton 1997, p. 74). Hedonism and self-indulgence are the complete opposite of the norm. Many subcultures do not work or members seek out unsanctioned means of material support such as organized crime, prostitution, or outright living off handouts or the support of others.

Gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics engage in leisure activities at the store. They meet there to socialize, play games, read comic books, and shop. According to the Washington survey (2011) of sixty five Olympic Cards & Comics gamers, 29% indicated they spent four to six hours per week at the store and 20% reported spending ten hours or more at the store each week. A total of 38% reported a monthly budget of $26 to $50 for their game hobbies. When it comes to their leisure activities, that investment of time and money is significant. Forty hours a month on a hobby flies in the face of ‘hard work and discipline’ and non-gamers judge the subculture as lazy, too focused on entertainment and pleasure, and not productive enough compared to mainstream standards. In addition, there is an unspoken expectation that games are a childhood occupation and that an adult should give up collections and games (Brown 1997, p. 18). Most of
the participants in the Washington survey reported their age to be twenty six to thirty one years old, followed closely by the next majority, which was twenty to twenty five years old. Just as this subculture focuses on leisure and entertainment, it also fits Gelder’s first criteria by involving a significant number of adults who, by mainstream expectations, should have already abandoned these ‘childish’ hobbies.

The next measure of a subculture is that it is “often understood ambivalently at best in relation to class (Gelder 2007, p. 3).” Subcultures are often seen as having deviated from their class backgrounds. Either they have disavowed their affiliations or, more commonly, transcended class or finally, they never belonged to a class consciousness to begin with. In “In Defense of Subculture: Young People, Leisure and Social Divisions,” David Muggleton is quoted as saying that “[people] from different social backgrounds can hold similar values that find their expression in shared membership of a particular subculture (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006, p. 129).” In other words, class divisions are less relevant when it comes to examining a subculture. Later in the article, however, the authors quote Steve Ball et al. to argue that a person’s actual capacity to participate in subcultures is different for different social classes. This could be based on geography or the structural and material factors of the dominant social world.

At Olympic Cards & Comics, gamers have taken the transcendence route when it comes to dealing with their class backgrounds. They do not arrange themselves on any criteria other than which games they play together and how skilled they are at those games. While the location of the store geographically limits access (underclass and upper class may be less likely to socialize there), once gamers enter the store, class is practically a non-issue. Their population is so small that taking class into consideration when socializing at the store would limit the possible number of friendships and game opponents.

The third benchmark of subcultures is that they are “usually located at one remove from property ownership (Gelder 2007, p. 3).” This means members of a subculture do not own their turf; they territorialize it. For example, they lay claim to neighborhoods, street corners, diners, and parks. The way in which they mark their territory is specific to each subculture, whether it’s graffiti and tagging or physical presence. Outsiders who intrude on a territory will likely be met with suspicion at first, even if they are from the same subculture in general. For example, gangs are a subculture, but each gang has its own territory and simply because a person is a member of a gang does not mean he or she would be welcome in the territory of any gang.
In regard to territory, the gamers of Olympic Cards & Comics fulfill Gelder’s third criterion of subculture because they are attached to a store that they do not own. Even within the store, gamers have divided the area into territories based on the needs of their particular type of game (chairs, table size, etc). Though gamers own their game pieces, they play in a store they do not own, at tables they do not own, using terrain they do not own.

The fourth characteristic of subcultures is that they “generally come together outside the domestic sphere, away from home and family (Gelder 2007, p. 3).” Subcultures are part of the deviation from one’s initial home and family circle, the most basic unit of society and the environment in which members of a society are initially socialized into acceptable norms. Moving outside the home involves modifying those norms and values. Just as subcultures migrate away from rural settings toward the metropolis (Gelder 2007, p. 26), they move away from the domestic sphere and the discipline and restraint imposed by smaller communities toward divergent values and impulses.

The subculture of Olympic Cards & Comics exists outside the home and family unit. The expectations of the average home unit may not provide the freedom for self-interested individualism and gaming for hours on end without interruption, however, Olympic Cards & Comics does. Many of the games played there could be played at home or online, but gamers choose to go to the store to participate in the subculture there rather than remain in isolation. The store is a ‘safe zone’ where youth can begin to explore beyond the boundaries of parental supervision. In fact, after some exposure to the subculture at the store, many gamers venture beyond the building and into the broader range of subculture by attending tournaments and conventions.

In the fifth criterion, subcultures tend to equate with “excess or exaggeration, registering the ‘deviance’ of a subculture … in contrast with the restraints and moderations of ‘normal’ populations (Gelder 2007, p. 3).” This is the most spectacular aspect of subcultures; the outward displays of style, language, behavior, and consumption. Recall from the explanation of Gelder’s first criterion of subculture that American society is supposed to admire restraint, discipline, and moderation. Excessive indulgence in things such as alcohol, money, clothes, music, work, or sex is viewed as deviation and deviation is looked down upon. Individualism is a threat to harmony and stability. Subcultures use excess to make such statements to the contrary.
At Olympic Cards & Comics, gamers do not generally show a great deal of material excess. Their games have particular standards and, while one may own thousands of collectible cards or miniatures, one does not bring them all to the store at once for display or competition. But some gamers do participate in the exaggeration aspect of this criterion. Observation at the store reveals that many gamers play up their ‘nerdiness’ by wearing t-shirts with logos from companies that sell products they buy (eg., Atari or xBox 360) or inside jokes, quotes and images from cult classic movies and TV shows (eg., *Star Wars* and *Firefly*). Some take a page from punks and ravers, sporting extreme hairstyles such as the afro, dyed colors, retro haircuts or braids. Others emphasize their rejection of mainstream by maintaining an unkempt appearance.

Gelder’s final criterion “casts subcultures in opposition to the banalities of mass cultural forms (Gelder 2007, p. 3).” This is Hebdige’s refusal, the rejection of conformist pressures and the quest for individuality in the face of mass society. In a way, this measure is the sum of the previous five. If the gamers were perceived as hard-working and productive, they would be part of the mainstream and well-regarded, but in this particular setting, they are not. As a result, gamers are evaluated negatively as rejecting the mainstream work ethic norms. If gamers owned the building they use, they would be more invested in mainstream norms of ownership, but they do not own it, they use it as a territory. If Olympic Cards & Comics were to shut down, the gamers would be more likely to find another territory than to build or purchase their own structure in which to meet and play games. If they were homogenous in their class background or exclusionary to other classes, they would be embracing the larger social system, but in rejection of the social system they transcend class divisions and operate without regard to their class backgrounds. Gamers participate in their hobbies outside the domestic sphere, rejecting the socialization of the home. When they go to Olympic Cards & Comics, gamers are free to reject social standards of dress and appearance. They use their clothes and accessories to make statements against conformity and the pressure to be ‘normal.’ Gamers reject the alienation so common in urban environments. They use the game store as a way to overcome isolation and to experience community.

**ALTERNATIVES TO SUBCULTURE**

What if gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics were not a subculture? What else might they be? Milton Yinger writes of the distinction between *subculture* and *contraculture*, also called
counter-culture. He says that the use of the word subculture indicates conflict with the values of a dominant society, but in contraculture, conflict with the dominant culture is the dominant element (Yinger 1960, p. 629). Subculture stands alone, but contraculture can only be understood in relation to the values of the dominant culture. In this case, an example of contraculture would be homosexuality. Current American social values do not condone homosexuality, nor protect many of the rights of homosexuals. If America were to embrace homosexuality, the contraculture’s values would no longer be in conflict and it would no longer need to be understood as a contraculture. The gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics have tension with the social norms of appearance and productivity, but if mainstream adopted leisure values, the subculture would still exist independently as a group of people who have come together over a common interest in games, comics and fandom; therefore, they are not a contraculture.

The gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics could also be a community. Communities such as neighborhoods or parishes have strong geographic boundaries and the gamers of Olympic Cards & Comics are very specifically bound to one geographical area: the store. In Subcultures: Cultural Histories, Gelder (2007) elaborates on the concepts of Gemeinschaft (community) and Gelleschaft (society), which were originally introduced by Ferdinand Tonnies in 1887 (p.25). According to Tonnies, the bonds of Gemeinschaft create a stronger, more cohesive unit that is usually based on family and kinship ties or fellowship and cooperation. It is an expression of locality such as a neighborhood or rural life. Tonies describes Gemeinschaft as organic, emotional, collective, cooperative, and local (Gelder 2007, p.25). The term Gelleschaft applies to a group of people who choose to associate together out of self-interest. Tonies describes Gelleschaft as rational, contractual, individualistic, competitive, mechanical, and impersonal (Gelder 2007, p. 25).

If the gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics fell into the Gemeinschaft category, they would have relationships that include each other’s families and they would care, protect, and provide for one another. They would join together out of emotional need to support and be supported by their community. However, the gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics are not a strong, cohesive unit that operates on emotional ties of fellowship, nor do they employ kinship bonds. The gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics seek each other’s companionship out of self-interest for their own hobbies and leisure. Their time together in the store is structured around the dictates of their game genre. Certainly, they have select friendships within this group of gamers,
but complete strangers may compete against one another on any given evening and not necessarily form bonds on a *Gemeinschaft* level. Therefore, the traditional concept of *Gemeinschaft* does not apply to them and they remain a subculture instead of a community.

CONCLUSION

The gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics have created a vibrant subculture of gaming, the pursuit of the hobby, and social ties. They have come together over common interests and values to fulfill each of Gelder’s six traits of subculture. The subculture is a result of conflict with mainstream values of conformity and emphasis on hard work and abandonment of ‘childish’ pursuits. The gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics have created their subculture as a way to deal with the alienation of being different and having different values – the values of fandom. Within this subculture, they find a sense of belonging and a place where they can develop an identity congruent with how they view themselves in contrast to how mainstream society views them.
References


Thank you for taking time to participate in this survey. I am a student at Saint Martin's University, writing a paper on the subculture of gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics. The following questions are designed to help me learn about status and hierarchy in the store. Please answer honestly and be assured that your privacy will be protected. None of your responses will be registered with any kind of identifying information.

Age
- Younger than 10
- 10-15
- 16-19
- 20-25
- 26-31
- 32-35
- 36-41
- 42-49
- 50-56
- 57-65
- 66 or older

Gender
- Male
- Female
- Other

Which game do you primarily play at Olympic Cards & Comics? (Choose one)
- Warhammer (40K or Fantasy)
- Warmachine & Hordes
- Clix
- MechWarrior
- Yu Gi Oh
- Magic the Gathering
- Pokemon
- Naruto
- Versus
- Dungeons & Dragons
- Other (please specify)

On average, how much do you spend each month on your game hobby?
- $25 or less
- $26-$50
- $51-$75
- $76-$100
- More than $100

How much do you estimate you initially spent to start up your game hobby?
- $25 or less
- $26-$50
- $51-$75
- $76-$100
- $101-$200
- $201-$300
- More than $300

How much time do you spend at Olympic Cards & Comics each week?
- Less than 1 hour
- 1-3 hours
- 4-6 hours
- 7-9 hours
- 10 hours or more
Which of the following best describes your attitude toward roleplay gamers (Dungeons & Dragons)?

- I get along well with these people
- They’re all right
- I don’t have much interaction with them
- I can take them in small doses
- I avoid interacting with them

Which of the following best describes your attitude toward tabletop gamers? (Warhammer, Warmachine, Clix, Mech Warrior, etc.)

- I get along well with these people
- They’re all right
- I don’t have much interaction with them
- I can take them in small doses
- I avoid interacting with them

Which of the following best describes your attitude toward collectible card gamers? (Magic, Yu Gi Oh, Pokemon, Naruto, Versus, etc.)

- I get along well with these people
- They’re all right
- I don’t have much interaction with them
- I can take them in small doses
- I avoid interacting with them

Scenario: Say each gaming community in the store wanted to host a tournament for their game next month, but they all wanted the same day. Assuming they all submitted their requests to Gabi on the same day, who do you think would get to host their tournament on that day?

- Tabletop gamers (Warhammer, Mech Warrior, etc.)
- Roleplay gamers (Dungeons & Dragons, etc.)
- Collectible card gamers (Naruto, Yu Gi Oh, Magic, etc.)
Appendix B. Gamer Subculture Survey Results.

SUMMARY

Olympic Cards & Comics is a local store that hosts many gamers on a daily basis. In an effort to explore the power structure of its gaming community, I administered a survey that asked about financial and time investments and attitudes toward other gamers. Sixty five people participated. They play many different games, but generally fall into three categories: tabletop, collectible cards and roleplay games. The most popular category is collectible cards, followed by tabletop, then roleplay. On average, the gamers report spending $26-$50/month with an initial start up investment of over $300 and a weekly time investment of 4-6 hours. In general, they report getting along well with each of the other groups of gamers. Ultimately, the majority of those who replied believe that collectible card gamers hold the most power.

INTRODUCTION

This report is a discussion of data regarding the gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics. This data has been collected by observation and via a survey administered in person and online. The purpose of this report is to discuss which group of gamers is perceived as having the most power in the store’s hierarchy. This report will begin with an introduction to Olympic Cards & Comics and each style of game and gamer, then analyze the survey results, providing a conclusion and recommendation at the end.

DISCUSSION

The Store

Olympic Cards & Comics is a long standing business that caters to the comic book and gamer community in the South Puget Sound. The owner, Gabi Trautmann, is enthusiastic about providing patrons of all ages a location where they can participate in a variety of games. Her business is currently in its third and largest location and holds the status of being the biggest comic book store in the Pacific Northwest. Her patrons esteem her highly and speak very well of her efforts, commitment and knowledge.

The customers of Olympic Cards & Comics fall into two categories: shoppers and gamers. Shoppers do not participate in game playing, but stick to purchasing items such as comics,
manga, baseball cards, books, models and t-shirts. Gamers usually shop at Olympics Cards & Comics, but also play a broad variety of games there including Warhammer, Warmachine, Hero Clix, Yu Gi Oh, Magic the Gathering, Pokemon, Dungeons & Dragons, board games, etc.

The Gamers

These games can generally be broken down into three categories: **tabletop**, **roleplay** and **collectible card** games.

- **Tabletop games** are strategy games that are played with large armies of miniatures on tables decorated with terrain to effect the feel of battle campaigns. This category includes Warhammer (which has two variations, 40K and Fantasy), Warmachine, Lord of the Rings and Hero Clix.

- **Roleplay games** are storytelling games in which one person leads several people playing characters through a storyline, much like a “choose your own adventure” book where each player makes decisions according to his or her character’s strengths and weaknesses. This category includes Dungeons & Dragons and Shadowrun.

- **Collectible cards** includes games like Pokemon, Yu Gi Oh, Magic the Gathering and Naruto. In this style of game, players collect many cards, assemble them into decks/fleets/characters, play them against another player’s cards and the more powerful deck wins.

While there are also many patrons who go to Olympic Cards & Comics to play board games and other strategy or card games, the three categories discussed in this report are the most prominent.

The Landscape

Within the store, there are three primary locations where patrons gather to play games. One side of the front half of the store is set aside for tabletop gamers. They have several custom built tables and a variety of terrain provided by the store. Tabletop games require a lot of mobility; therefore, these taller tables are especially suited to their style of game as they make it easier to move around the tables to reach pieces or get a good line of sight and not have to crouch to a lower table.
The only observed overlap in this area of the store is a small group of people who play Pirates. Pirates is a collectible card game, but its playing field is best suited to these wider tables. As a collectible card game that plays like a tabletop game it is a unique hybrid in the store.

The other side of the front half of the store consists of a few rows of tables with chairs on either side. There, mainly collectible card players face each other, seated across from one another at the narrower tables. Occasionally, roleplayers use these tables, but generally, they retire to a large table tucked in the back half of the store where it is quieter and they can interact better with their storyteller. The rest of the store is devoted to product.

*The Demographics*

![Most Popular Games](image)

The majority of gamers who responded to the survey fall into the 26-31 year old age range (28%), followed by the 20-25 year old age range (26%). Overwhelmingly, 86% of the responders were male. The majority of those who responded are tabletop gamers who marked Warhammer or Warmachine as their primary game (34%). Those who marked Yu Gi Oh and Magic the Gathering as their primary game total at 31% of the participants, but adding in various collectible card games listed under the “other” category brings the total closer to 46%.

Based upon observation, tabletop gaming appeals to an older demographic ranging from older teens to mature adults. This may be because tabletop games require not only an interest in battlefield strategy, but a personality willing to keep up with all the rules updates and a budget that can afford hundreds if not thousands of dollars a year. Collectible card games appeal to the broadest range of ages, from children to mature adults. While collectible card games *can* require a significant budget in the most competitive circles, it seems to be cheaper to get started and to maintain the hobby. Roleplay games also have broad appeal. They may require a significant start up investment for the storyteller who must be equipped with the appropriate rule books, but anyone who wishes to participate must simply come equipped with an imagination and a bag of dice. Roleplay sessions can last several hours; therefore, roleplay gamers typically meet at a player’s home.
The Cost

The estimated average monthly budget for these gaming hobbies is $26-$50 (39%) with the next closest range at $25 or less (28%). Tabletop gamers spend most of that. Start up, however, can be the most expensive part of a gaming hobby as there are many accessories to purchase including cards, miniatures, carrying cases, paints, books, card sleeves, etc. Tabletop gamers also carry the bulk of startup investment reporting they spent more than $300 while collectible card gamers reported their start up cost was between $76 and $100. The three roleplay gamers who responded equally report spending “less than $25”, “$26-$50” and “$51-$75” per month.

The Time

In addition to a significant start up cost and a monthly budget to keep up to date with the newest releases, gaming can involve a significant investment of time. Tabletop gamers report that 32% of them spend 4-6 hours per week at Olympic Cards & Comics and 27% report more than 10 hours per week. Collectible card gamers report that they also spend the same amount of time at the store: 4-6 hour and more than 10 hours per week (45% of collectible card gamers). Roleplay gamers report spending 1-3 hours per week at the store.

The Point

The final question of the survey is the entire crux of the matter. If all three gaming communities wanted the same day for a tournament, but there was only room for one, which would Gabi pick? It was designed to determine which group of gamers is perceived to have the most power in the store. My original hypothesis was that this status would be related to how much money
each type of gamer spent, with those who spend more holding more control over the store's resources. If that hypothesis fell through, I believed I would find a connection between the amounts of time they spent at the store, with those who spend more time there having more power.

Both hypotheses proved incorrect because tabletop gamers and collectible card gamers reported similar budgets and time investments, only differing significantly in the amount of start up money. 59% percent of tabletop gamers predicted that collectible card gamers would get the store and 77% of collectible card gamers predicted that they would get the store. Overall, 58% of those who took the survey indicated collectible card gamers would get the store.

The reasons behind this can only be speculated upon at this point. An employee of Olympic Cards & Comics reported that collectible card gamers do not bring the store more significant income than tabletop gamers. They are more likely than tabletop gamers to shop online for a better deal. Tabletop products are kept at a fixed price by the manufacturers so there are few options for cheaper deals. Tabletop gamers exhibit more spending loyalty to Olympic Cards & Comics, but do not feel they hold a greater command over the store's resources.

Likeability does not seem to be a factor behind this perception of power. Overall, 45% of total responders said they get along with roleplay gamers, 42% said they get along well with tabletop gamers and 48% reported they get along well with collectible card gamers. The two largest factions (tabletop and collectible cards) have the least affection for each other. Only 18% of tabletop gamers said they get along well with collectible card gamers and 27% of collectible card gamers said they get along well with tabletop gamers. Of the sixty five people who responded to the survey, ten indicated that they avoid collectible card gamers or can take them in small doses while only four said the same of tabletop gamers. Tabletop gamers like collectible card gamers least, but still predicted that collectible card gamers would have precedence in the store.

CONCLUSION

According to this survey of gamers at Olympic Cards & Comics, the majority of respondents believe that collectible card gamers are the most powerful group. Regardless of age, financial investment, time investment or likeability, those polled felt that collectible card gamers held enough of a command of store resources and Gabi’s attention that they would be able to get their way despite opposition.
I recommend that further study be given to this situation to determine why gamers feel this way. Determining this, and especially uncovering whether the other groups harbor any kind of resentment over it, may help improve relations among the three groups and create a better environment at the store.