

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELF-IMPOSED DOUBLE ROLES IN ONLINE STREAMING OF SOCIAL DEDUCTION GAMES

Apirath Limmanee*
Email: apirath.li@kmitl.ac.th*

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ABSTRACT

For game streamers, the main objective in playing social deduction games is not only to win the games but also to make the gameplay more dramatic and enjoyable so that larger audience can be attracted. Streamers of social deduction games usually employ storytelling and comedy techniques to emphasize the surreal, dramatic, and mysterious aspects of their games. However, there are limitations given by the roles obtained in each gameplay. Some roles (for example, impostor) are more dramatic than others (for example, crewmate). Therefore, while being given a particular role, some streamers desire other roles that they can better express themselves.

In this paper, we will use the term “Double roles” to describe this phenomenon resulting from players’ longings for more exalted roles than given ones. The act of assuming double roles usually occurs after some important information regarding the enemy identity is revealed to them, allowing them to make some forms of “contracts” with the pre-assigned enemies.

Keywords: Social deduction games, Online games, Video games, Streaming, Psychology, Double roles

*Corresponding Author E-mail: apirath.li@kmitl.ac.th

¹Department of Engineering Education, School of Industrial Education and Technology,
King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Bangkok 10520 Thailand

I. PROBLEMS IN STRATEGIC APPROACH TO SOCIAL DEDUCTION GAMES AND INTRODUCTION TO SITUATIONAL COMPARATIVE APPROACH

In the research literature of the present time, the time that sees the progressive development and popularity of online video games, there are papers trying to penetrate beyond the surface of joy and laughter in social deduction games, in order to portray and interpret the subtle player strategies. (Eger & Martens, 2018, pp. 24-30; Kopparapu et al., 2022, pp. 1-11; Wiseman & Lewis, 2019, pp. 781-787).

Strategies of a “good guy” in a social deduction game generally aim at uncovering other players’ roles and additional secret information, occasionally from manifest evidence. Also, good players playing as good guys do not shy away from seemingly random observations, investigations, or inquiries, in the game, because those playing as bad guys will try to make any possible evidence as obscure as possible.

One of the challenges faced by the players of social deduction games when playing the games is the lack of concepts to describe and predict the behaviors of other players. For example, in the game “Among Us,” although we know that players gathering in a dense group at a specific game map’s location will likely lead to murders as it is difficult to see who kill who, we do not know when murders will occur and who will kill or be killed.

Even when strategic approach is taken, we cannot say that one strategy matters only for the “bad guy” roles, while another applies only to “good guys.” What really matters is the fundamental framework combining several strategies. For the framework to be fundamental as assumed, it must be able to explain the playing behavior of all parties from the start to the end of the game. In addition, it must be able to explain chronological development of each character as well as to reveal essential relationships among characters.

In the bigger picture, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to predict the impact of introducing new maps in the same game, new variations of social deduction games, or new roles in the same game. Social deduction games evolve dynamically over time, providing different sets of rules, complex interactions among players, tasks, side quests, as well as other elements in game environment (Rank, 1989).

Therefore, there should be no objection if we take, as the point of departure, the dramatic scenes in the game, which lead to insightful joy and laughter as well as contribute to its popularity. After that, in future work, we can thus trace back the history of traditional social deduction games such as Werewolf (Mafia) which has stimulated subsequent imaginative and thoughtful game designers.

Our task can only become comprehensive and generalized by considering the significant differences in game environments and rules from which playing styles and strategies are originated. This comparative method seeks not so much to establish similarities as to form an extension of meaning concatenated from the earliest social deduction games played in a party to today’s games played online.

II. DOUBLE ROLES IN ONLINE STREAMING OF SOCIAL DEDUCTION GAMES

For game streamers, the main objective in playing social deduction games is not only to win the games but also to make the gameplay more dramatic and enjoyable so that larger audience can be attracted. Streamers of social deduction games usually employ storytelling and comedy techniques to emphasize the surreal, dramatic, and mysterious aspects of their games. However, there are limitations given by the roles obtained in each gameplay. Some roles (for example, impostor) are more dramatic than others (for example, crewmate). Therefore, while being given a particular role, some streamers desire other roles that they can better express themselves.

In this paper, we will use the term “double roles” to describe this phenomenon resulting from players’ longings for more exalted roles than given ones. It should be noted that this more frequently happens when the given roles are, by nature, unsure about others’. It is far less likely for “imposters,” who know from the start who their friends and enemies are, to impose double roles on themselves. As will be seen in this paper, the act of assuming double roles usually occurs after some important information regarding the enemy identity is revealed to them, allowing them to make some forms of “contracts” with the pre-assigned enemies.

III. VARIATION OF SOCIAL DEDUCTION GAMES AND THE FIRST EXAMPLE

It may perhaps turn out that online social deduction games, with their associated virtual multiverses and maps, can remind us of our own dream worlds. In some cases, actions taken in dream worlds can be intentionally or inadvertently performed in reality because they express certain psychological facts and relationships (Rank, 2012). These expressions vary from game to game. On the one hand, in “Among Us”, verbal discussion is only allowed in the meeting where voting takes place to eliminate suspicious players. On the other hand, in “Goose Goose Duck” and “Deceit 2,” verbal interactions are allowed outside the meeting or voting phase and can be achieved locally or sometimes remotely under some special conditions.

Capability of verbal interactions allow players to describe or receive (sometimes fake) information, thus facilitating their understanding or misunderstanding about the situational reality. Streaming social deduction games attract viewers’ attention because it parallels what they learn from real life regarding how to successfully convey information or deceive people.

First, let us try to capture what MRYEARN was thinking and interacting with other players as a goose in an impressive match from “Goose Goose Duck.”

MRYEARN, given the role of a “Lover Goose,” had two ways of winning the game. On the one hand, to win as a “Goose,” he has to eliminate all “Ducks,” mainly by cooperating with other geese to vote the ducks out. On the other hand, he can also win as a “Lover” by surviving until the end only with his lover. Naturally, it is easier to win as a goose and more challenging to win as a lover because of the limited winning condition of only two remaining survivors in the “Lover” case.

After he found out his lover in the game is NONGPAT, he has not much challenging things to do except perhaps to find out all the “Ducks” and other roles, especially the “Pelican.” Then, he was suddenly swallowed by SOMETIMES, the pelican, only to be escaped later after NONGPAT slew SOMETIMES. This scenario let him know that his lover, NONGPAT, was a duck. So, he knew almost every important role in the game, except one remaining duck.

After the escape, he found himself in a scene where NONGPAT the duck, HEART, the fellow escapist, and VIPERDEMON were present.

In this scene, only VIPERDEMON was a truly innocent goose having no idea which ones were his enemy. HEART was indeed a duck. To prove to NONGPAT that he was a duck and not a “Mimic Goose,” HEART killed VIPERDEMON and revealed himself such that all remaining three players in the scene knew one another’s roles.



Figure 1: Goose Goose Duck Scene After MRYEARN and HEART Escaped From The Pelican's Belly

Source: HEARTROCKER (2024)

MRYEARN was initially astonished with HEART's revelation which left him a sole goose accompanied by two ducks. However, he suddenly detached himself from the assigned role of goose. He announced that from now he would help the ducks win, thus creating an alter ego which cannot be described by any of the game's official roles.

After this scene, MRYEARN strictly played along with his new self-imposed role, brainstorming and cooperating with the two ducks like he was one of them, except that he could not kill.



Figure 2: Goose Goose Duck Scene After HEART Killed VIPERDEMON And Implicitly Revealed His Role

Source: HEARTROCKER (2024)



Figure 3: Goose Goose Duck Cutscene with Ducks' Victory

Source: HEARTROCKER (2024)

The ending cutscene showing HEART and NONGPAT as victorious ducks came after the meeting where MRYEARN cooperated with ducks to eliminate CONNUAY, thus leaving him and DISTROTION as only two remaining (official) geese, satisfying ducks' winning condition.

MRYEARN lost the game as a lover goose, but, according to his self-imposed role, he won.

IV. THE SECOND GOOSE GOOSE DUCK EXAMPLE AND COMPARISON WITH THE FIRST

In specific cases studied in this paper, we need to analyze for the meaning of double roles in order to understand complicated player strategies. This can be achieved by tracing the player motifs in game streaming and comparing the observed formations with one another as well as psychological literature. We should be able to clearly see how these motifs originate from individual concepts in the mind of game streamers who are psychologically disposed to them.

In Thailand's streaming community, there is not much doubt that "HEARTROCKER" (named as "HEART" in the previous game example) gives much streaming inspiration to his successor and audience. He is seen as the classical content creator of many online games, in which his social deduction game streaming is one of the most popular with more than a million YouTube views per video.



Figure 4: Ending Cutscene With Lovers' Victory

Source: HEARTROCKER (2023a)

From observation, none of HEARTROCKER's social deduction game streaming is entirely free of our double roles concept. Another example is taken from the 19th gameplay from the game "Goose Goose Duck," streaming on September 15, 2023, with the video title "Playing Ducks First Time in Many 20th Anniversaries."

The gameplay bears similarity with the previous example. HEART, the lover goose, met CONNUAY, the lover duck from the very start of the game. CONNUAY let HEART know from the start that he is a duck. HEART decided to cooperate with CONNUAY, apparently never considering about winning as just a goose. Note that had HEART betrayed and CONNUAY been voted out, HEART could still have won even when he died. However, HEART decided to join CONNUAY, walking together the entire game as the partner of the crime, witnessing CONNUAY murdering other geese while lying and giving false alibi. At the end of the game, all other players are eliminated such that they win together as lovers.

For the sake of relevance, we will indicate here briefly about the essential correspondencies and parallels, and also some differences, from our two examples discussed so far. Just as in MRYEARN's case in the previous example, this example is also the case in which the lover goose (HEART) bargains with his own soul and form a pact with the villain (Duck).

Although, suddenly after the game ends, the general feeling expressed by other losing players in the two game plays are quite different, the feeling of audience watching the streaming is similar. They particularly enjoy both gameplays more than others in the same game streaming. Some called it "MVP" (Most Valuable Play) in YouTube's comment section. Indeed, even if MRYEARN himself officially lost, he was proud of himself for helping the Ducks win, as he remarked "I did not actually win but I felt I won anyhow."

As for the losing players' reaction, in the first example, they were at first nothing but slightly disappointed, because they did not know how MRYEARN helped the ducks win. However, they became more interested during the discussion thereafter. This contrasted with the second example where the lovers won. They were unanimously amazed since the victory as lovers rarely happened.

V. THE DRAMATIC THIRD EXAMPLE: DECEIT 2

One of the most formal, explicit, and profound treatment of double roles in social deduction games is found in the streaming of a famous social deduction game called “Deceit 2.” The game portrays the effort from the “Innocents,” being chased and persecuted by the “Infected,” to escape the “Ritual.” Within the “Ritual,” time is divided into “Reality” and “In-Between.” In the “Reality” phase, the innocents and the infected look-alike. The innocents may not be aware of the infected’s existence until the in-between phase breaks out. In this state, a nice fellow during the reality phase can transition into “Terror,” a horrific creature that hunts down and execute the innocents, who have to survive this phase until the reality returns. The phases will alternate until all innocents are killed and the infected win, or all infected ones are eliminated in the reality phase and innocents win. Also, if the innocents find the key, they might escape together even when the infected are not yet eliminated.

The development of our example’s story from the start to the catastrophic end of our streaming protagonist HE5 (Nina), who is given the “Guardian” role, are reproduced here in words. Of course, some detail is omitted, as we try to recapitulate briefly.

The unfortunate hero of the story, HE5 (Nina), with his role as a guardian, was determined to make his role beneficial. In the first reality phase, he first met DIP DIP (Alex) and used his role skill to protect him. After that, the two encountered KS139 (Chang) before having a fistfight with one another. Irritated by his two companions, HE5 continued on his own and then noticed ZYLNAZTER (Beck) drinking blood at a blood altar. ZYLNAZTER asked HE5 to stay quiet and tell no one about what he saw. Otherwise, his role as an infected would be revealed.



Figure 5: ZYLNAZTER Drinking Blood From The Blood Altar

Source: HEARTROCKER (2023b)

Both made a bargain. HE5 promised to tell nobody if ZYLNAZTER told another infected one not to hurt him. The contract seemed unavoidable, so ZYLNAZTER agreed. When the first in-between arrived, HE5 was walking together with ZYLNAZTER, who then transformed himself into a gigantic terror form. ZYLNAZTER attacked other innocents but kept HE5 safe.

With every innocent being safe after the first in-between, the next reality phase came and HE5 was joint by KS139 and 1000PRUENI. The reality ends quickly and the second in-between entered. Being convinced he would be spared by the infected. HE5 roamed the Ritual carelessly but found himself attacked by a terror. He managed to escape and reprimanded the terror, reminding it about the contract made between him and ZYLNAZTER. While this happened, one innocent was killed somewhere else in the map and the reality returned.



Figure 6: Terror Attacking HE5

Source: HEARTROCKER (2023b)

In this third reality phase, HE5 ran into KS139. Having a gut feeling that KS139 was the terror attacking him, he made an accusation and KS139 easily confessed. Still angry about the previous attack, with ZYLNAZTER present, he told some other innocent that ZYLNAZTER was the infected who broke the contract. Then, the third in-between arrived.

In-between should be the time when the infected chase the innocence. However, when the contract with the evil was made and partly broken, HE5's de facto role now was not really the innocent. He now engaged in a heated discussion with the two infected players regarding the attack in the last phase. ZYLNAZTER acted as if he was very guilty and blamed KS139 for breaking the contract. The broken contract tormented him to the point that he challenged his fellow infected, KS139, to a bare-handed duel. The streaming viewers found themselves in a hilarious scene where two gigantic terrors got into a fistfight while HE5 witnessed. Unfortunately, during the fight, HE5 was caught by accident and ended up dead.

The last reality phase in the game ended in chaos as ZYLNAZTER, filled with grief and guilt at HE5's death, confessed he was the infected. There are fistfights all around. Eventually, ZYLNAZTER and KS139 was voted out. The innocents won.



Figure 7: Two Terrors' Fistfight
Source: HEARTROCKER (2023b)

VI. CONCLUSION

From our three examples, apart from the contracted double roles, which might take various forms as Lover Goose-Duck or Innocent-Infected, all these gameplays exhibit a series of coinciding motifs so noticeable that it seems hardly necessary to call special attention to them once again. If the two parties strictly follow the contract, the gameplays may look funny to the streaming viewers but at least the end can be viewed as smart strategic maneuvers. However, as seen in the last example, possible conflict of interest can lead to a catastrophic drama resulting in the loss of the parties involved. The game situation could look chaotic and confusing. However, viewers like it and find it hilarious, as seen in the video streaming's comment section.

Taking notice of the double roles pattern implemented by different streamers and loved by viewers, some attention should be called to their similar underlying psychological structures. We intend to look at them more closely in detail in future work.

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