

Andy Kim // Jimmy Wang // Elaine Han

Introduction:

Rush A! Drop me a Vandal! Smoke mid, Brimstone! These are the kinds of expressions that you will typically hear in this week's game. This game is a 5 vs. 5 multiplayer, first person shooter game where one team attacks and one team defends. Officially released to the world by Riot Games on June 2, 2020, this fresh game is booming in popularity all over the world. With the game developers releasing new patch notes every 2 weeks to keep the game updated and hyped, it seems like the game won't die anytime soon. Let's talk about Valorant and how this game teaches us to be more logical, have more trust, and take greater risks.

Main content:

Welcome to this week's podcast episode of *The Longest Rainy Sunday*, titled "**The Underlying Lessons in Valorant**". Before we dig into all the fun and exciting things about the game, allow me to introduce today's production team. My name is Andy Kim, and it is my distinct honor to be serving as today's producer. I am joined by Jimmy Wang, the co-producer, and Elaine Han, today's line producer. We have researched intensively and excited as can be to share with you about Valorant. As a preface, Valorant has 4 game modes: Competitive, Unrated, Spike Rush, and Deathmatch. We will focus only on the Competitive gamemode, as it is the most played. So what exactly does this game entail? **The attacking team's main objective is to eliminate the other team or to plant a 45 second timer bomb called the Spike and allow it to detonate. The defending team's main objective is to similarly eliminate the opposing team and to defuse the Spike in the occurrence the Spike gets planted. There are 12 distinct agents players can choose from, each with unique abilities and a unique role that allow for different strategic combinations. Each agent has 3 common abilities and also their own specialized ability called their 'Ultimate', which can heavily influence the course of a round. Players at the beginning of each round are given a basic pistol, the Classic, with the option of spending their Valorant currency on armor and/or their character abilities. Players get money as the game progresses. It is up to the players to manage their independent economy so they can coordinate their buys. Because let's face it, no one wants to be that person to have no money when the entire team is able to buy a full loadout. Although people unfamiliar with Valorant might consider the game to be another first person shooter, we argue that Valorant is far more important than the average shooting game. It teaches us skills that are, in fact, applicable to our everyday lives. From the novels we looked into like Mary Flanagan's *Critical Play*, Steven Johnson's *Everything Bad Is Good For You*, and Jane McGonigal's *Superbetter*, we concluded that Valorant teaches us to be logical from the strategy-based framework of the game, builds more trust between players through the required team communication, and encourages us to be more audacious as the game fosters risk-taking and creativity.**

Before we dig straight in, there are numerous things you can learn about Valorant. Note that we said "about", not "from". As Steven Johnson explains in *Everything Bad Is Good For You*, he explains that *probing*, "a mode of intellectual labor that is key to the collateral learning of playing games", is universal in games. Johnson explains that "probing involves a nuanced form of exploration"; in simple words, it involves testing the rules and challenging "the physics of the virtual world". All games follow a different set of physics. Unlike the common first-person shooter game, Valorant's physics make

it so that players have to be stationary to be able to maintain gun-firing accuracy. Players can learn to adapt the physics of Valorant by simply just playing it more. However, we wanted to take it a step outside the confines not of what we can learn about Valorant but rather what we can learn from it, by analyzing aspects of the game that can teach us actual lessons to apply to the real world.

Number one: valorant helps us to become logical. Valorant is built on the foundation of strategy—of outsmarting and outperforming your opponents. Within strategy is the concept of money management. In the novel *Critical Play*, Greg Costikyan’s definition of a game is “a form of art in which participants...make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal” (Flanagan 6). In the case of Valorant, players need to strategically manage their resources with their Valorant currency. At the start of each round, players discuss in what ways to pursue their round whether through “saving” or “buying”. Assessing their financial situation, players basically choose whether they should “throw a round”, a gaming term for losing purposefully and to get more money in the next round, or buy a full loadout with abilities and expensive weapons at the potential expense of having no money the following round. Players also discuss what plays they should make. They converse about which route to take and where to look out for. They tell certain agents to use certain abilities at particular spots; like a teammate would ask the Omen player to send a smokescreen to disable the enemy’s vision as they take over a site. The strategy involved in Valorant is described in *Superbetter* by Jane McGonical in which she speaks about the Bad Guys effect. In order to compete with our opponents, we need to figure out their strategy in order to counter them. The Bad Guys effect is prominent in Valorant because the team who is able to predict the enemy team has the highest chance of winning. This is why football teams prepare for their next game by watching films of how their opponent team plays. This constant cognitive thinking is why we become more logical in a game like Valorant.

For example, let's say your attacking team has been going to the A bombsite on Ascent (a map with 2 bomb sites) for the past 3 rounds and has lost every single time. What would you do? The correct answer would be to try the B bombsite. Obvious, right? Not just Valorant, but all first person shooters foster thoughts like these to help us make better decisions. Science even backs it up. The American Psychological Association released a 2014 study called “The Benefits of Playing Video Games”. In one of their findings from an fMRI, they found that neural mechanisms that control attention allocation were more active during a pattern-detection game in regular gamers than in non-gamers, leading the researchers to suggest that shooter game players allocate their attentional resources as well as filter out irrelevant information much more effectively (Granic 3).

Number 2: valorant also teaches us to have more trust. The game has 12 characters with different abilities that can be categorized into 4 distinct roles—duelists, sentinels, initiators, and controllers—each role with individualized role expectations. For instance, the duelists’ main purpose is to be the aggressive front-line. Thus, Valorant creates an atmosphere where these different agents need to rely on each other to fulfill their disparate expected roles. This ties into Costikyan’s belief found in *Critical Play* where he mentions that players have what is called “player agency”, the ability for players to make choices that “mean something to him or her” (Flanagan 7). This is how trust is built. Trust is also incorporated into the team communication. Players have different methods of communicating with each other, the most common being talking to

each other directly through the in-game microphone feature. Team communication involves telling where they got shot from, pointing where enemies are coming from, and reporting which entrance they will guard, and even motivating their teammates in times of defeat. Valorant teaches us to build trust. *Superbetter* sums it up. When you play games, you neurologically sync up with your teammates because games activate your mirror neurons which is why professional teams that spend thousands of hours scrimmaging together look so seamless as they easily take over a bomb site. It's because they can count on each other so everyone can positively bounce off each other.

Number 3: Valorant teaches us to be greater risk-takers. Valorant is like a simulation where your actions in the game have no real-life consequences. This allows people to be more daring than they normally would, encouraging audacious, unconventional plays. The most notorious strategy that has now become a worldwide meme is Rush B. It's when the offensive team bull-rushes into a bombsite using all their utilities and abilities at once. Believe it or not, plays like these can get teams wins. Sometimes it's the team with the most audacity to make crazy plays that win in the end. Thus, this game promotes creativity so people make plays for the sole purpose of being experimental. This is why sites like Reddit are filled with clips of games from all genres of ridiculous clips of people making insanely cool plays.

Speaking of Reddit, Valorant is closely tied to social networking platforms where people all over the world can watch others play Valorant, spurring various communities in the process. On the live streaming platform, Twitch, people watch professional Valorant players compete in tournaments for large sums of money where people by the tens of thousands cheer for their favorite team, just like any other sport. On YouTube, content creators post videos related to Valorant, also spawning communities that obsessively watch their content for entertainment. Flanagan's *Critical Play* quotes Sutton-Smith that the concept of play is essential to cultural formation, and that by playing together, people from communities and thus group identity (Flanagan 5). Valorant is no different. Interestingly enough, Valorant is not just a game. It is also a sport where people can base their career off playing it at a professional level. It is a form of entertainment for everyone, even people who have never played it. Its hybrid identity allows it to be accessible to all which is especially crucial for this period where people long to join a community and find self-identity.

Thank you for listening to another episode of *The Longest Rainy Sunday*, produced by Andy Kim, Jimmy Wang, and Elaine Han. This podcast was directed under Professor Morgen at Emory University. Check out the resources listed below in our bibliography, and

Hey it's Andy again. I would like personally thank the Line Producer of today's episode, Elaine Han, for assisting Jimmy and I for this episode. We would all like to credit where credit is due. Starting with... (see citations below) Thank you again for listening, and stay tuned for next week's episode.

Citations:

Audio:

Deliberate Thought by Kevin MacLeod

Link: <https://incompetech.filmmusic.io/song/3635-deliberate-thought>

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Sources:

- 1) *Critical Play* by Mary Flanagan
- 2) *Everything Bad Is Good For You* by Steven Johnson
- 3) *Superbetter* by Jane McGonigal
- 4) “The Benefits of Playing Video Games, written by Isabela Granic”, Adam Lobel, and Rutger C. M. E. Engels, published from Radboud University Nijmegen
<https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-a0034857.pdf>
- 5) “Valorant Agent list: Abilities, ultimates and more of each character”, written by Joe Rivera, published from SportingNews
<https://www.sportingnews.com/us/other-sports/news/valorant-agent-list-abilities-ultimates-character/zkc9y3ok2w4r1ucuy6v9pbjxu#:~:text=As%20with%20a%20lof%20of,and%20help%20the%20team%20push.>
- 6) “The best part about ‘Valorant’? Its potential”, written by Michael Espinosa, published from The Stanford Daily
<https://www.stanforddaily.com/2020/09/01/the-best-part-about-valorant-its-potential/>

Episode Cover



Original image by Steven Cropley from VPESPORTS, edited by Andy Kim

<https://www.vpesports.com/valorant/news/valorant-is-officially-live-full-1-0-patch-notes>