

MISOGYNY AND GAMING: THE MAINTENANCE OF
A MALE-GENDERED GAMER CULTURE

by

Stephanie Kendrick
BA, University of Waterloo, 2013

A major research paper
presented to Ryerson University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Digital Media

In the Yeates School of Graduate Studies
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2015

© Stephanie Kendrick 2015

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION FOR ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF A MRP

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this MRP. This is a true copy of the MRP, including any required final revisions.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this MRP to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this MRP by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my MRP may be made electronically available to the public.

Stephanie Kendrick

ABSTRACT

The construction of the gamer identity as one that is naturally male, originates from culturally embedded societal gender roles and technomascularity, and the industry as a male-dominated space. Despite these associations being solely derivative of cultural norms, each posits female gamers as inferior to their male counterparts. However, the mainstream popularization of gaming, and increase in the accessibility of videogames, has facilitated a diversification of the gaming population and its associated practices, posing a threat to the traditional gamer identity. The result is a cultural shift that could restructure a cultural landscape that was once highly exclusive, initiating a number of operations that alienate female gamers, as a means of preserving an illusion of male ownership. These operations are apparent in literature and gamer discourse. An original survey and participant-observer discourse analysis were used to collect data on the pervasiveness of misogyny in the community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The execution of this major research paper would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my supervisor, Dr. Jason Boyd. I would also like to thank those who participated in the study. Your voices have allowed this paper to humanize the perspective of the female gamer, in your own words.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author's Declaration for Electronic Submission of a MRP.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Appendices.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: A Male-Gendered Gamer Culture.....	3
Gender and Technology.....	3
Barriers to Gaming Technologies.....	5
Professional Barriers and Influences.....	7
The Traditional Gamer Identity.....	9
Chapter 3: The Power Struggle over Ownership of Gamer Culture.....	12
The Diversification of Gamers.....	12
The Accessibility of Gaming Technologies.....	14
Gamer Elitism and the Negotiation of the Gamer Identity.....	16
The Struggle for Control.....	18
Chapter 4: Methods.....	21
Online Resources.....	22
Survey Study.....	24
Chapter 5: Results.....	31
Quantitative Survey Results.....	31
Qualitative Survey Results.....	33
Chapter 6: The Maintenance of a Male-Gendered Gamer Culture.....	36
The Assumption of Maleness.....	37
Women as Inauthentic Gamers.....	38
Women as Inferior Gamers.....	40
Gendered and Sexual Harassment.....	42
Threatening Behaviour and Violence.....	45
The Rejection of Feminine Concerns.....	46
Chapter 7: The Consequences of Misogyny.....	49
Conformity.....	49
Gender Concealment.....	51
Ceasing Participation.....	53
Lack of Female Representation.....	54
Chapter 8: Conclusion.....	57
References.....	70

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Age Ranges of Participants.....	31
Table 2. Years of Experience Playing Video Games.....	32
Table 3. Hours Spent Playing Video Games Per Week.....	32
Table 4. Gaming Platforms Used by Participants.....	33

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A. Recruitment Script.....	59
Appendix B. Research Questions.....	61
Appendix C. Survey.....	6

INTRODUCTION

It is unlikely that a singular faction could rightfully claim ownership of a social culture. The culture of video games manifests in and beyond the physical world, encompassing virtual landscapes of common fantasies, and a cultural environment of its own. It embodies the entire scope of all that is to do with video games. It is referred to here as *gamer* culture, for its members, called *gamers*, understand the ideological construct of *gamer* culture, and the gamers themselves, to be the core of the culture of videogames. What began as a group of pioneers creating an assortment of modest and pixelated games has since expanded into a diverse and multi-million dollar industry and culture with an extensive global reach. Despite its universal qualities, a vocally dominant faction of the gaming public intends to limit its peripheries to a tightly bound understanding of gamer culture.

The gendered nature of gamer culture originates out of a construction of the traditional gamer identity as one that is naturally male, allowing male ownership of gamer culture to remain prevalent. However, almost half of video gamers are now female and women over the age of eighteen now represent a larger portion of the gaming population than boys under the age of eighteen (“Essential Facts,” 2015). The mainstream popularization of gaming, partly due to an increase in the accessibility of gaming technologies (granting gamers a more simple and attainable gaming experience), has resulted in a diversification of games, gamers, and gaming discourse that has increased the visibility of ‘other’ gamers. This shift has initiated contention over the gamer identity, resulting in a cultural shift towards an open and diverse community that was once greatly exclusive. This shift has ensued a power struggle between traditional gamers and ‘other’ gamers, with a primary focus on the female gaming population, for ownership of the culture. The focus of ‘other’ gamers is directed more towards having their voices heard, rather than achieving ownership. This paper will demonstrate how a number of operations can be identified throughout gamer culture that work to maintain the dominant members’ assumptions about the status of the culture, and the conventional identities associated with it, in an effort to preserve an illusion of gamer membership as male. The suggestion that women do not belong in the mainstream gaming space, and that there are more appropriate gaming spaces for them, is pervasive. This paper addresses all women

in gamer culture, but with a particular interest in those women who wish to participate in the mainstream gaming space that has consistently been branded as male territory.

A MALE-GENDERED GAMER CULTURE

Despite female participation in the video gaming community from its early days, there exists a powerful association between video games and masculinity that is reproduced and reaffirmed throughout the discourse of gamer culture. The perception of gaming as a gendered technology has positioned males as the “natural users of game technologies” (Jenson & de Castell, 2010), with, consequently, the ‘natural’ authority to reduce female gamers as inferior interlopers. ‘Gaming’ here refers not to the general act of playing games, but instead to the playing of video games, specifically. In the following chapter, it is argued that the male-gendered nature of gamer culture, and the perceived notions of the traditional gamer identity as one that is naturally male, originate from a strong cultural association between technological competence and masculinity. Societal gender roles, and barriers, have assisted with the formation and reification of this association, leading to assumptions about the traditional gamer identity as one that is male, in opposition to what would be considered appropriate femininity, according to normative feminine gender roles. Although a significant portion of the gaming population has been identified as female (Essential Facts, 2015), gamer culture continues to perpetuate an illusion of male membership as the norm.

Gender and Technology

The construction of the gamer identity as one that is naturally gendered as male originates from the cultural normalization of technomascularity, which forms “a gendered ideological perspective that naturally associates men with highly skilled technological work and advanced knowledge of computers” (Johnson, 2014, p. 581). The assumption of technological competence as a masculine characteristic is a binary understanding that requires that a lack of technological competency be posited as feminine, contributing to an understanding of technology as a gendered medium. As argued by Salter and Blodgett (2012), “the association of technical skills and prowess with masculinity encourages a rejection of the feminine as nontechnical and irrelevant to digital spaces” (p. 408). This association, however, is not representative of actual proficiency, but instead, is

representative of the construction of a gendered identity (Jenson & de Castell, 2010, p. 54).

Technomascularity, as a societal norm, runs parallel with cultural understandings of binary gender roles. According to Jenson and de Castell (2010), “women lack technological competence to the extent that they seek to appropriately perform femininity; correlatively, men are technologically competent by virtue of their performance of masculinity” (p. 54). Technology is then gendered in terms of what is, and is not, appropriate behaviour according to one’s gender. Research has revealed that such notions are so culturally embedded that even girls and women limit their use of technology depending on what they believe they can experience, due to their performance of gendered roles that they affiliate with “technological ineptitude” (Thornham & McFarlane, 2011, p. 83). Consistent with normative gender roles, technology is used proficiently by males, as a practice of what is suitable behaviour for that gender, while it is regarded as an unconventional practice for females.

The gender norms that produce the gendered status of technologies simultaneously decrees gaming as a masculine pastime. Not only is this phenomenon blatantly apparent throughout society, but recent research has also demonstrated how gaming is perceived as gendered as male, as a construct of social and cultural influences (Bryce & Rutter, 2013; Carr, 2005; Shaw, 2011; Thornham & McFarlane, 2011). As suggested by Shaw (2011), “the way researchers and marketers discuss gender differences in gaming often promotes the traditional correlations between masculinity and technology, and the converse disassociation of femininity and technology” (p. 35). Since gaming is fundamentally based in technology, it functions under the effect of technomascularity, which normalizes a gendered conception of gaming technologies. This association suggests that the games that use these technologies require a level of competence that is essentially masculine. As argued by Bryce and Rutter (2013), gaming has the capacity to reproduce “the gendering of specific skills, abilities and activities... consistent with the reinforcement and reproduction of societal gender roles” (p. 2) while reinforcing gendered behaviours (Brehm, 2013). Societal gender roles position traits of bravery, independence, and accomplishment with the masculine, and traits of empathy, sociability, and care with the feminine (Williams et al, 2009), strictly defining which

behaviours are appropriate and expected for each gender. Traits that would normally be associated with a conventional understanding of gaming, such as competitive motivation, are in direct conflict with feminine traits, such as passivity, that are expected of women (Fox & Tang, 2014). From this conviction, gaming can be understood as a naturally male pastime that would require the performance of normative masculinity, in opposition to what would be accepted as appropriate feminine behaviour.

Barriers to Gaming Technologies

The reaffirmation of gender norms plays a crucial role in the development and positioning of sturdy barriers between women and video games, and subsequently gamer culture. The accessibility of video games, in association with one's social and cultural positioning, can have a strong and direct impact on the development, or lack thereof, of an interest in gaming. One's ability or desire to purchase and use gaming technologies, and how well those technologies fit into one's lifestyle, are each definitive of one's access to video games.

The implementation of binary gender norms commences at birth, and expectations about one's assigned gender begin to shape one's identity development, especially considering the influence of parental figures. Bryant and Levine, of the innovation and development company *PlayScience*, conducted a study to explore how parents with younger children perceive the relative value of the technological devices used by their children, and whether factors such as context, age, and gender had any influence. Their research revealed that the gender bias in technology can be observed amongst children in domestic spaces, induced by their parents' decisions of which technologies were deemed appropriate or not for use by boys or girls (Bryant & Levine, 2015). Parents' attitudes towards specific technologies depend on the gender of their child, which ultimately reproduces and reinforces societal gender norms onto children, directly manipulating their access to specific technologies in the early stages of their lives. Consequent to these norms, parents place the most value for their children's technology on safety and ease of use for their daughters and the child's own preferences for their sons, and are three times more likely to favor gaming technologies for their sons (Bryant & Levine, 2015), effectively reproducing the concept of technomascularity in domestic spaces.

For girls, access to gaming technologies is limited in domestic spaces, and their parents more heavily control their consumption than boys (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). Although domestic spaces have conventionally been understood as a feminine domain, domestic gaming still requires the use of technologies that are typically controlled by male members of the household (Bryce & Rutter, 2013) such as the television set, or the gaming platform itself. Research has demonstrated the ways in which male members of the household take control of gaming technologies within the home, even when using the female's console (Schott & Horrell, 2000).

Beyond the household, as determined by Bryce and Rutter, the social and spatial organization of public spaces have had a significant impact on the gendering of gaming technologies and public gaming spaces:

Prior to the development of computer gaming, games such as chess, cards, and dominos have been played in public leisure spaces such as pubs and bars... Traditional games within these spaces have, over the last twenty years, been supplemented by pinball machines and more recently a wide range of arcade games... During this same time, public gaming arcades have developed as a separate, male dominated leisure space (Griffiths, 1991), and the predominantly male computer gaming industry and user base has developed a claim on other spaces for gaming. (Bryce & Rutter, 2013, p. 8)

This indicates how gaming, even without the considerable effect of technomascularity, has become gendered as male through the evolution of gameplay in public spaces, which also simultaneously renders public gaming spaces as gendered (Bryce & Rutter, 2013). Research suggests that female's access to games outside of the home is limited by the masculine nature of public gaming spaces, such as game shops and arcades, as they recognize these spaces as male preserves (Schott & Horrell, 2000). This notion corresponds to the disproportionate presence of males versus females at cyber 'LAN' (Local Area Network) cafes, where gamers participate in public gaming and socializing (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Bryce & Rutter, 2013). This pattern in gender is also parallel with the scope of participation of male versus female gamers in other public

gaming environments, such as public competitive gaming, where females tend to portray societal gender norms by performing supportive roles for male participants (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Bryce & Rutter, 2013).

The development of an interest in gaming can be defined by one's access to gaming technologies, both inside and outside of the home, as determined by societal gender norms. Positioning girls in opposition to technological skills and interest, and thus to gaming as a suitable female pastime, constructs barriers that can prohibit an understanding of one's self as appropriate users of gaming technologies. Consequently, females may fail to develop or actively suppress an interest in gaming and further perpetuate cultural norms that describe women as nontechnical.

Professional Barriers and Influences

As demonstrated by an enormous disproportion between genders in the video games industry (Johnson, 2014), the culturally ingrained notion of technomascularity has had a significant impact on the presence of women in technology-based studies and professions (Beavis & Charles, 2007; Jenson & de Castell, 2010). Returning to an understanding of societal gender norms, "gendered expectations about experience and expertise, and the perception that girls 'aren't good at' computers conspire to make it more difficult for girls to have equal opportunities to develop the competence they need" (Beavis & Charles, 2007, p. 692). The lack of women in computer science and engineering programs at the postsecondary level of education has actually decreased in recent years (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). This phenomenon has been shown to be cultural. Women are less likely than men to pursue or complete a university STEM program, regardless of ability (Statistics Canada, 2013). A smaller ratio of women in the three highest categories of PISA scores (Programme for International Student Assessment) pursued a university STEM program than men in the three lowest categories (Statistics Canada, 2013). These statistics have concerning implications for the present and future state of the games industry.

It can be argued that the gendered organization of the games industry has perpetuated the masculine nature of game production, in terms of the creation of content for, and the marketing of, video games to a massively male audience, with specifically

male tastes (Johnson, 2014). In this sense, the industry becomes an incubator for those masculine norms and practices of gamer culture:

Computer games as we know them were invented by young men.... They were enjoyed by young men, and young men soon made a very profitable business of them.... Arcade computer games were sold into male-gendered spaces, and oriented consumer electronics channels to more young men. The whole industry consolidated very quickly around a young male demographic—all the way from the gameplay design to the arcade environment to the retail world. (Laurel, in Carr, 2005, p. 467)

Laurel's statement clearly identifies the historic and economic factors that have contributed to the gendering of gaming technologies (Carr, 2005). Male developers in the video games industry have effectively maintained male dominance by reproducing their personal tastes and cultural norms (Schott & Horrell, 2000). Similarly to the distortive representation of femininity in gamer culture, maleness and masculinity are represented in a hypermasculine way that is not normative in general culture. Hypermasculinity manifests as "an exaggeration of masculine cultural stereotypes," such as the overemphasis of stereotypically masculine physical traits or behaviours (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 402). When considering popular themes in video game content, evidence of deliberately hypermasculine motifs, that would likely be unappealing to a female audience (Bryce & Rutter, 2013; Brehm, 2013; Fox & Tang, 2014; Schott & Horrell, 2000; Jenson & de Castell, 2010), is evident. The games industry had for long assumed a singular male audience, ignorant to the broader gaming demographic. It is this assumption of a solely male audience that has resulted in the continuous production of themes and genres that may be undesirable to gamers who do not fit that traditional male demographic. Although it cannot be assumed that all women are turned off by those themes in video game content (Yee, 2008), this reproduction of masculinity can act as a deterrent to female interests in gaming. Female disinterest in gaming equates with female disinterest in game production, and this progression had, for decades, trapped the industry in an acrimonious cycle of masculine reproduction.

The Traditional Gamer Identity

Within a gamer culture that perpetuates masculine norms, the traditional gamer identity becomes one that is naturally and essentially male. Culturally embedded technomascularity, consistent with societal gender roles, posits women in opposition to technology, translating their identities into non-gamers. As demonstrated by the cycle of male developers and male consumers, such social and economic factors have contributed to the “construction of maleness as the default gender” for gamers (Carr, 2005, p. 467). It can then be argued that as a male-gendered culture, gamer culture is conceptually and literally owned by men.

The traditional gamer represents a stereotypical and conventional understanding of the gamer, as it is defined throughout the following pages. This notion of the traditional gamer has been developed throughout the evolution of gamer culture since its beginnings, into the current mainstream market of present society. In addition to the influence of technomascularity and the male-dominated games industry, the conventional maleness of the gamer identity can be understood in terms of its relation to geek masculinity (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Although geek masculinity appears to exist in opposition to normative masculinity and hypermasculinity, it simultaneously embodies certain qualities of hegemonic and hypermasculinity in its opposition to all forms of femininity, and its focus on obtaining “geek power” (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 412). The geek identity remains male by default, for it functions “as a way of doing masculinity that at once resists, reaffirms, and ironizes hegemonic masculinity,” and is understood as representing specific masculine qualities (Bell, 2009, p. 99). Geek masculinity, equivalent with technomascularity, and hegemonic masculinity, embodied in the games industry and games themselves, are both represented throughout gamer culture. Simultaneously, the two are complimentary and in opposition of one another. As illustrated by Johnson (2014), the two have one significant characteristic in common: “From the perspective of power, both hegemonic and technomascularity are concerned with mastery. Hegemonic masculinity is often associated with mastery over other social groups or institutions, while technomascularity is associated with mastery over nature and machines through technology” (p. 591). From this perspective, male ownership over

gamer culture, and the gamer identity, can be understood not only as the preservation of societal gender norms, but also as an expression of hegemonic and geek masculinities.

The geek has conventionally been represented as a white and heterosexual male (Bell, 2009; Kendall, 2000), “lacking in social and interpersonal skills and obsessed with arcane and specialist knowledges and skills” (Bell, 2009, p. 99). Considering that the geek identity exists in association with computer expertise, this understanding of the white and heterosexual geek originates from the branding of technomascularity with a white and heterosexual identity. This is due to the technological competence of the computer geek in Western culture having been conventionally associated with white heteronormativity (Bell, 2009; Kendall, 2000). It is no surprise that this profile correlates with that of the traditional gamer identity, as a white and heterosexual male (Fox & Tang, 2014; Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Shaw, 2011). Similar to the geek’s obsession with his “arcane and specialist knowledge and skills” (Bell, 2009, p. 99), the traditional gamer is absorbed in his superior skills and ‘hardcore’ status (Kowert, 2012; Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Not only does this white and heterosexual maleness position the traditional gamer identity in opposition of women, but also other minority gamers, including LGBTQ gamers and racial minorities, who are active members of gamer culture. However, this understanding of the gamer is being challenged, creating contention around the status of the traditional gamer.

The ‘hardcore’ aspect of the traditional gamer identity is one that can often be portrayed as a cause of social withdrawal (Kowert, 2012), for it necessitates a level of commitment that requires a significant time investment. It is one that reflects an individual’s gaming skills, knowledge, and competence, which are of high value in gamer culture as a form of gamer capital. Those gamers who demonstrate skill and competence also validate their authenticity as a gamer, for the “hardcore and quick-fingered gamer market... is the site of traditional gaming culture” (Shaw, 2011, p. 408). As technomascularity opposes women with technological competence, the ‘hardcore’ nature of the traditional gamer identity excludes women from its demographic by labeling them as incompetent and casual gamers (Salter & Blodgett, 2012), and in turn, inauthentic.

These heavily engrained impressions inspire the development of implicit assumptions about the nature of the gamer identity as one that is white, heterosexual, and

male, who demonstrates the 'pureness' of his gamer status through his authenticity, described by his 'hardcore' gaming proficiency. As demonstrated throughout the discourse of gamer culture, the dominant community perceives any divergence from this norm, or diversification of the culture, not as a practical expansion, but as an encroachment to authentic gamer territory. The current status of the dominant culture, industry, and market cultivates a scene where assumptions about the 'valid' gamer identity remain greatly unchallenged.

THE POWER STRUGGLE OVER OWNERSHIP OF GAMER CULTURE

For decades, the status of gamer culture, the games industry, and the market, have produced a consumerist culture within which each of these interconnected components forms a cyclical loop, with each feeding into the other. This cycle has fostered the formation of a cultural landscape where male ownership of gamer culture was not frequently contested, within these narrow boundaries. However, the gamer identity has recently come under contention, and so has the question of gamer membership. The mainstream popularization of gaming, enabled by the increase in the accessibility of videogames, has resulted in a diversification of games, gamers, and gaming discourse, posing a threat to the traditional gamer identity and his elite status. The recognition of gamers of varying demographics, gaming interests, and skill levels, into and beyond traditional gamer culture, is resulting in a cultural shift towards an open and diverse community that was once highly exclusive and monocultural. The dominant members of the community perceive this diversification as an infringement of regular practices, as opposed to an enlightening expansion of the culture. This conflict has resulted in a political struggle between traditional gamers and ‘other’ gamers, with a primary focus on the female gaming population, for who has a voice in the community and the authority to shape the culture’s discourse.

The Diversification of Gamers

The movement away from the conventional and static understandings of gamer culture has created an opportunity for the expanding culture to redefine what *game*, *gamer*, and *gaming* can mean in gamer culture. The dominating understanding of the traditional gamer is one that is white, heterosexual, and male. It is not that persons who diverge from this norm were not playing video games or participating in the culture, it is simply that their presence within the community was greatly unrecognized (Shaw, 2011). The Entertainment Software Association is responsible for aiding companies that publish computer and video games with their business and public affairs, and engages in a number of programs aimed to positively impact education and health in the context of video games (Overview, 2015). The association publishes an annual ‘Essential Facts’

report about gaming technologies and the gaming population, but the report only includes demographics relating to gender and age (Shaw, 2011), making it difficult to accurately gauge minority participation in gamer culture. However, the presence of minority gamers has recently become more apparent, arguably due to the accessibility of broader and more inclusive gaming communities. Examples can be found in communities of ‘gaymers,’ as demonstrated by online destinations like the Gaymers community on the popular online forum *reddit*, where LGBTQ gamers can participate in gamer culture on their own terms. Proudly wearing the ‘gaymer’ identity, and building strong communities around it, is one example of how minority gamers are claiming their territory, while preserving their identities, in a seemingly white, heteronormative, and masculine gamer culture.

Recent statistics trounce the adolescent, male stereotype of the traditional gamer. Females now comprise of almost half of video game players, and adult (over 18) women represent a significantly larger portion of gamers than boys under the age of eighteen (“Essential Facts,” 2015). Perhaps this is partly due to the emerging understanding of video games as any digital games played on virtually any platform, including console, PC, and handheld systems, as well as gaming platforms, such as mobile phones and tablets. This spectrum of genres and platforms is recognized by the Entertainment Software Association in the publishing of their annual ‘Essential Facts.’ As described by Carr (2005), “the increasing visibility and viability of the female player is evidence that the cultures of reception surrounding gaming technologies have shifted over time” (p. 468). To some, it may be no surprise that female gamers hold a significant position in gamer demographics, for the ‘girl gamers’ movement of recent decades was a strong indicator of the female presence in the gaming community (Dickey, 2006). Likewise, recent research has empirically confirmed female participation in gamer culture (Bryce & Rutter, 2013; Carr, 2005; Williams et al, 2008). Since the recent increase in female gamers correlates with that of older age demographics, and considering that the female presence in gamer culture has previously been established, it could be argued that this could partly be due to the expansion of the gaming population into older generations.

Substantial differences in the age demographics of gamers have occurred over the last decade, with the average age of the video game player jumping from 29 years (“Essential Facts,” 2004) to 35 years (“Essential Facts,” 2015). Today, adults 36 years or

older make up 44% of the gaming population, and over the past decade, the demographic of gamers under the age of 18 has dropped (“Essential Facts,” 2004; “Essential Facts,” 2015). This influx of adult gamers did not come from nowhere and it has two possible explanations. First, a number of current adult gamers have been gamers for large portions of their lives, potentially since childhood, meaning that they have enjoyed gaming as a pastime for decades. This means that those gamers, as they grow older, are entering an older age demographic, and the result is an expansion of the adult gaming population. Second, video games have recently become more accessible. Some digital games are being made more simply and for a more general audience, as they were decades ago, with games like *Pac-Man* and *Tetris* (Juul, 2010). As a result, adults with little or no prior experience with gaming can develop an interest in gaming by playing these more casual and accessible games, in contrast to the more ‘hardcore’ games that had recently dominated the mainstream market. With this said, a recent expansion of the video games market, and an increase in the accessibility of video games and gaming technologies, have had a significant impact on the diversification of the gaming population.

Accessibility of Gaming Technologies

For decades, gaming technologies have been arguably rather exclusive. Domestic gaming has conventionally involved the purchase of expensive gaming platforms that would normally constitute a previously established interest in gaming, and ‘hardcore’ games that require a significant time investment, not to mention a particular level of proficiency, in order for the player to have a meaningful experience (Juul, 2010). However, this norm is rapidly diminishing, for the increased accessibility of video games has not only had a substantial impression on who qualifies as a gamer, but also what qualifies as a game, and which practices can be considered a form of gaming.

The mainstream popularization of video games correlates with the recent trend of the highly accessible genre of casual games, in opposition to the less accessible ‘hardcore’ games that overshadow the dominant market (Johnson, 2014). These changes in game designs are reaching new players by developing more intuitive games that are easier to play, and that fit well into the lifestyles of the general population (Juul, 2010). In addition to changes in game design, the introduction of more accessible gaming platforms

has influenced the movement of video games into the mainstream. Today, casual games can fit into the palm of one's hand, on the player's cell phone, can be accessed via social media, and can even be downloaded for free. As Anthropy asserts, when using a computer, a person is just seconds away from accessing a digital game, even without a prior purchase or installment (2012). The introduction of the Nintendo Wii into the console market marked the initiation of a more comprehensible style of gameplay and a console for all kinds of gamers, with its "new kind of controller and a strategy for reaching a new market of more casually oriented players" (Juul, 2010, p. 16). The major distinction that came from this increase in accessibility is that video games became 'normal' for everyone, and were able to fit easily into their lives, as they once did decades ago (Juul, 2010). The mass market for games has expanded in terms of genres and gameplay, making games more accessible for wider range of consumers.

Beyond the mainstream market, a recent growth in the accessibility of game creation tools and platforms has occurred, widening the scope of the scene for independent games. The design and development of digital games was previously privileged only to engineers and programmers who understood the complicated language of computers, but this norm has since changed (Anthropy, 2012). This movement is defined by an increase in the availability of game development technologies, described by Anthropy as creating opportunities for those who lack skills in programming to develop games and distribute them online (2012). The Internet has created a landscape that makes publishing and distributing games simple, allowing game creation to go beyond the capacity of the mainstream market (Anthropy, 2012). This horizontal landscape allows for a diversification of game developers, broadening the distribution of independent games.

Increased access to gaming technologies and tools for game development has enabled an expansion of gaming practices. These changes could potentially allow for a renegotiation of the conventional practices of gamer culture, such as a redefining of the gamer identity, and a reinvention of digital games. As increasingly diverse individuals develop interests in gaming and game development, the larger community must manage its transforming cultural landscape.

Gamer Elitism and the Negotiation of the Gamer Identity

The mainstream popularization of gaming, and increase in the accessibility of videogames, has broadened the scope for participation in gamer culture. However, the dominant members of the community have maintained control over gaming spaces for decades (Salter & Blodgett, 2012), and this mastery over the community is in conflict with the diversifying culture. The source of contention over why an expansion of gamer culture, and the gamer population, poses such a threat to the traditional gamer identity, is derived from the concept of gamer elitism. Gamer elitism is descriptive of the hierarchical nature of gamer culture and the way that ‘true’ gamers “communicate authenticity” (Peer, 2014, p. 41). As within other fandoms, where fans communicate their authenticity to demonstrate their status as a member of the fandom (Peer, 2014), the demonstration of legitimacy by the gaming elite functions as an establishing of superiority over other members of the ‘gaming fandom.’

As described by Salter and Blodgett, the diversification of the gaming community necessitates the formation and implementation of regulations regarding the authentic gamer identity, executed by the gaming elite:

Given the expansion of the gaming community beyond traditional hardcore genres (Juul, 2010), it is not surprising that this contention currently centers on defining identity boundaries within the gaming public, particularly as those coded as outsiders appear to be trying to wrest control of those definitions. Within the dominant public this problem is solved by identifying certain ‘elite’ members from within their group who are solely responsible for identity formation. (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 412)

There exists a tightly coded boundary around the identity of the ‘true’ gamer that remains sacred to the dominant members of gamer culture. The assumption is that the authentic gamer identifies with the traditionally white and heterosexual demographic, and his ‘hardcore’ gaming proficiency and knowledge grant him enough cultural capital to assume an authoritative role amongst the gaming elite. As demonstrated throughout the discourse of gamer culture, a high level of importance is placed on the use of select

gaming platforms, having knowledge of, as well as experience with, the correct 'hardcore' games, and reaching the highest level of gaming proficiency. These boundaries dictate a number of rules regarding who is, and is not, granted gamer membership, "to alienate, separate, and redefine in groups and out groups within gaming" (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 412). This obsession with elitism is demonstrated well by the Internet gaming meme, 'The Glorious PC Gaming Master Race.' This reference, rich with offensive connotations, is a tool frequently used by 'PC gamers' to establish their dominance over other gamers, by virtue of their preference in gaming platforms ("The Glorious PC," 2013). Their primary use of PC grants them 'true' gamer status, for they play for solely for the sake of playing, while "all others play digital games for suspicious reasons" (Johnson, 2014, p. 589). Likewise, the gaming elite expresses their disapproval for casual gameplay by referring to casual gamers as 'filthy casuals,' demonstrating their discontent for gamers outside of the 'hardcore' gaming norm, and for games that require a low level of commitment ("Filthy Casuals," 2013). These examples are used as tools for the communication of privilege.

Such rigid boundaries around the 'true' gamer identity allow the gaming elite to sustain their authority, and maintain control over gamer culture and its authentic discourse. The gaming elite uses that authority to uphold laws that dictate who is, and who is not, an authentic member of gamer culture, because "in order to differentiate authentic behaviour from violating behaviour, distinctive rules must be enforced" (Peer, 2014, p. 45). These rules are well understood by the masses, and can have a direct effect on whether or not one self-identifies as a gamer. Research has revealed how lacking 'hardcore' gaming tendencies, such as high levels of gaming proficiency and larger time investments, can be the reason that some gamers fail to self-identify as legitimate gamers, even when those subjects do exhibit proficiency during gameplay (Shaw, 2011). Even one's preference for a particular gaming platform can act as a deterrent to self-identification as a gamer (Shaw, 2011), consistent with the message conveyed by the 'PC Master Race' meme. These subjects exhibit their understanding of the rigid rules of gamer culture, and how the dominant members perceive their allegedly casual gameplay as inauthentic cultural practice, by failing to recognize themselves as gamers. This notion

is consistent with the dominant culture's emphasis on the value of 'hardcore' proficiency that alienates allegedly casual gamers, by rendering their gamer membership as inauthentic.

The Struggle for Control

The disparity between the 'hardcores' and the 'casuals,' or essentially any gamer that does not meet the elite standards of the traditional gamer identity, leaves a market gap between the two groups. These 'hardcore' gamers and 'geeks' had once identified as 'other,' building their own community where they felt that they belonged. Previously, the emphasis on technical issues and the value placed on proficiency in gameplay by male gamer 'geeks' afforded them the empowering opportunity to structure and limit the spaces within which they participated (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). The growing number of gamers and games that fail to fit inside of the normative model of gamer culture is concerning for the elite members of the community, driven by the potential for a loss of control of the culture. This functions at two levels: Control of the discourse of gamer culture and control of the mass market for games. Considering that the dominant members of gamer culture render virtually all female gamers as 'casuals' by virtue of their gender (Salter & Blodgett, 2012), the recent increase in visibility of female gamers can be used as an example to illustrate this power struggle for control.

A diversification of gamers would demand a renegotiation of appropriate discourse in gamer culture that goes beyond the narrow scope of its generally accepted discourse. Conventionally, this rhetoric has been laced with prejudice and hate speech towards specific groups (Tucker, 2011), so an influx of female gamers would necessitate the existence of a community more inclusive to women, prohibiting the sexist dialogue that is currently considered 'normal' discourse.

Research suggests that many members of the gaming community portray no interest in the prospect of an inclusive and socially conscientious community (Braithwaite, 2014; Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Salter and Blodgett's (2012) case study of the 'Dickwolves incident' documented a rape survivor's attempt at boycotting the sale of a popular webcomic's t-shirt that promoted themes of rape culture. The comic's creators, backed by the support of a greatly misogynistic audience, refused to censor the shirt's design to be more sensitive to rape survivors, and other members of the community.

Likewise, Braithwaite's (2012) study involving the popular massively multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft* investigated the community's reaction to the sexist dialogue of a new character, Ji Firepaw. During beta testing for a new installment of the game, female beta testers requested a gender-neutral edit to the character's sexist and gendered dialogue. This censorship led to enormous backlash from other members of the community who failed to perceive the change as a move towards a more inclusive community for the game's diverse audience. Instead, those protesting the censorship claimed that the gender relations personified in Ji Firepaw's character are "just the way things are," and therefore the edit was not only unnecessary, but an attack on the normally accepted discourse of the *World of Warcraft* community (Braithwaite, 2014, p. 710). As argued by Salter and Blodgett (2012), "as the hardcore gaming identity resists the incursion of casual and female gamers, the larger discourse of gaming publics is still controlled by their rhetoric" (p. 412). The cases of the 'Dickwolves' incident and Ji Firepaw's sexist dialogue are representative of how the dominant members of gamer culture place no importance on creating a more inclusive community by renegotiating its conventional discourse.

The Ji Firepaw debate also illustrates how diversification can directly influence video game design and content. When female beta testers raised their concerns, the developers took action, resulting in a divergence from what was once considered to be tolerable and standard discourse, and a change in the content of a favourite franchise. The fear of the traditional 'hardcore' gamer is that "the games he or she enjoys will stop being made. For some players, there is a genuine sense of loss, watching games becoming mainstream and accessible" (Juul, 2010, p. 151). Considering that video games have fostered a \$22 billion market ("Essential Facts," 2015) the companies that produce these games must develop them to meet the demands of the market, and the needs of their customers, in order to maintain a relationship with consumers. It has been established that the mainstream market consistently produces games with highly masculine motifs that can be off-putting for female gamers (Bryce & Rutter, 2013; Brehm, 2013; Schott & Horrell, 2000; Jenson & de Castell, 2010). An inflow of women into the market could impose changes in game development to suit their consumer needs. Perhaps this could include, as an example, an increase in the number of representative and playable female

leads that do not fit the sexualized or stereotypical female tropes that frequently appear in video games (Brehm, 2013).

Diversification can also have a powerful influence on the structuring of public spaces of gamer culture. The expanding community can directly affect the organization of game shops and public gaming spaces, and which products intermediaries, such as shopkeepers, make available for their customers (Woo, 2012). Woo (2012) asserts that the mainstream popularization of video games may be “revitalizing” gaming communities, but “as more and increasingly diverse participants enter the scene, intermediaries must negotiate their differing needs and wants” (p. 665). This means maintaining a balance in order to stay in business and meet each customer’s diverse needs, potentially altering the public spaces within which gamers participate.

Although gamer culture is undergoing an expansion in terms of gamers and gaming technologies, the dominant members of the community recognize this diversification as a trespassing on the territory of the ‘real’ gamers, identified as the gaming elite. A culture that was once highly exclusive is experiencing an extension of its tightly bound limits, requiring action by its dominant members to redefine those boundaries and sustain control. Research indicates how certain members of gamer culture place a strong emphasis on who counts as a member of the community, and will cast out those who do not conform to mainstream ideologies (Braithwaite, 2014). In this case, the indication is that ‘casual’ games, or games that do not fit the market’s ‘hardcore’ criteria, are not actually games, and gamers who do not fit the traditional gamer norms, are not actually gamers. Within a gamer culture that defines female players as ‘casual’ gamers (Salter & Blodgett, 2012), this suggests that women are not actually gamers. These rules that dictate the authenticity of games, gamers, and gaming discourse, are a powerful tool used by the dominant members of gamer culture to uphold their authoritative status, and maintain control over a culture that could potentially be renegotiated by diversification.

METHODS

In order to demonstrate how the gendered nature of gamer culture is maintained, research was conducted to illustrate the ways by which female gamers experience sexism while participating in the gamer culture. In the community of gamer culture sexist behaviours are used as powerful tactics by the dominant members of the community as a means of asserting dominance and maintaining control of the culture. These operations are carried out through the discourses of gamer culture.

Data was collected for this research using two methods. The first method was a participant-observer approach to observing communication between gamers on websites that facilitate discourse related to gaming, in the context of the primary researcher's personal use of the web. This personal participation in gamer culture on the web can be understood as a case study that portrays the average female gamer's participation. The second method was survey of 42 participants, designed to gather data on the forms of discrimination and harassment that female gamers do, or do not, experience while participating in gamer culture. Through a review of the scholarly literature, and an analysis of gamer discourse observed on websites and forums through the primary researcher's personal use of the web, patterns of misogyny were identified that made it possible to categorize the sexist tactics of the gaming community into distinct classes of behaviours. Using this method, a classification model for the sexist behaviours of gamer culture was developed. The following model emerged through the research: Presuming a male identity of participants of gamer culture; rendering women as unauthentic participants; positioning women as inferior gamers; perpetrating gendered and sexual harassment; threatening behaviour and violence; and rejecting women's concerns about gaming and gamer culture. Each of these behaviours becomes a powerful tool that maintains a male-gendered gamer culture, by rendering female gamers either invisible or irrelevant. Each of the behaviours of the classification model are those that were observed the most frequently through discourse analysis on the web, and were frequently discussed in literature pertaining to misogyny in gamer culture. The model was used to portray the forms of discrimination and harassment that women experience in gamer culture, and to identify patterns in these behaviours. The patterns that can be identified include the

frequency and severity of specific behaviours, and the forms that these behaviours most commonly take. For example, although women in gamer culture experience harassment in a number of ways, gendered and sexual harassment appear to be the most pervasive. Indeed, most cases of harassment appear to be gendered or sexual in nature, and those that are not can be classified under another behaviour.

Online Resources

Gamers participate in gamer culture in a variety of ways that facilitate discourse related to gaming. This discourse can occur in an offline environment, on the web, and during multiplayer gameplay of video games. Social media is an accessible platform on which gamers can interact with an enormous pool of potential participants, mostly anonymously: “Thus the proliferation of easily accessible sites, the opportunity to respond anonymously and the ability to do so rapidly and reach thousands if not millions of like minded others are affordances enabled by internet technologies” (Dutton, 2011, p. 298). It is evident that the male and ‘hardcore’ gaming demographics dominate the online gaming community, both in multiplayer gameplay and in the participation of forums and websites related to gaming. Male gamers can be observed denying the presence of women in these online spaces, and ‘hardcore’ gamers are more common participants in these spaces, likely due to their deep investment in gaming, in comparison to less ‘hardcore’ and more casual gamers. Consequently, these affordances are more advantageous to those male and ‘hardcore’ members of gamer culture, allowing them to use those affordances to establish a widespread dominance that continues to oppress women.

Social media, for this study, refers to websites that facilitate discourses related to gaming. This includes online forums and other media that allow users to create content with the ability to communicate with other users about that content. Gamers can also participate in discourse during online multiplayer gameplay. The affordances of online multiplayer games vary between games and platforms. Typically, participants can communicate verbally either through written text by typing electronically, or orally by using a microphone. This form of communication is voluntary and usually not a crucial component of gameplay. It should be noted, however, that some multiplayer gaming

situations could require a significant amount of coordination that does necessitate oral communication between players.

These virtual landscapes afford users the opportunity to participate by creating an account that need not communicate any identifying information about the individual. As long as a user does not include any identifying information in their public profile, screen name, or avatar, he or she will have the ability to remain anonymous. Anonymity grants users very little accountability for their words and actions in these environments.

As the primary researcher, I represent an average participant in gamer culture and an average user of websites that facilitate discourse related to gaming. My experience with participating in gamer culture in an online environment can be understood as a case study that illustrates the average female gamer's participation in gamer culture. Although this case study is focused on my individual participation, my observations contain generalizable aspects that would very likely be experienced by other female gamers while participating online. A number of illustrative examples of common sexist behaviours of the gaming community were found throughout my personal use of the web, and my personal use of the web should not be generally different from the way that other female gamers might participate online. My personal use of the web, in terms of my participation in the gaming community, consisted of visiting a number of forums and content-sharing platforms that were either dedicated to gaming or had an audience whose interest in gaming was apparent by the amount of content found on the website that pertained to the subject. These websites include online forums and other media that allow users to create content and communicate with other users about that content. For example, *YouTube*, a popular video-sharing platform, is an online destination that I visit on a daily basis. Users upload video content for the viewing of other users on *channels*, which are user accounts and collections of content uploaded by the account holders. A comment section is available for each video where users can communicate with one another publically by writing new comments or replying to other users' comments. Users can subscribe to other *channels* and be notified when that user uploads new content. On this platform, I am subscribed to a substantial number of *channels*, many of which are related to gaming. Discourse related to gaming can be found on *YouTube* in the comments section below each video, or within the actual video content.

This research was conducted with a participant-observer approach over a span of eight months. It should be noted, however, that I did not participate in any online discussions used for this research nor did I have any relationship with those that did, to the best of my knowledge. This method of research is modeled on Andrea Briathwaite's (2014) "critical discourse analysis" of *World of Warcraft* players on online forums (p. 705) and Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett's (2012) multi-sourced online study of a particular case of misogyny in the geek community, "the Dickwolves incident" (p. 404). The differentiating factor between these studies and my own is that my research was conducted through my voluntary participation in the community as an active member of gamer culture. When instances of sexist behaviours towards women occurred in online discourses related to gaming, and were considered relevant and valuable, the web pages were collected by bookmarking each page. This also applied when people were found sharing their opinions and personal experiences with sexism in the community. These pages contained instances that manifested in numerous forms, such as text discussions between gamers on forums, videos on YouTube, images or Internet 'memes,' and comments left beneath various forms of media. If bookmarking the relevant pages was not possible, for example, if the instance was observed on a specific page of a section of comments that is consistently growing and changing, then the instances were collected by capturing an image of the screen. This form of research contributed to the classification model for sexist behaviours developed for this paper. Some examples that were observed in this research are quoted throughout the paper. In these examples, the original spelling, punctuation, and grammar has been preserved.

Survey Study

A mixed-methods survey study was conducted to gather data on the forms of discrimination and harassment that female gamers do, or do not, experience while participating in gamer culture. The study is titled: *Misogyny and Gaming: Uncovering the Operations that Maintain a Male-Gendered Gamer Culture*. The survey consisted of four multiple-choice questions, five open-ended questions, and one question that asked participants to provide their age. This study was designed to compliment the prior research by collecting real-life examples of misogyny in gamer culture, as experienced by

actual women. The purpose of the study was to determine whether sexism was present, and problematic, in the gaming community, and to demonstrate which forms of sexist behaviours were the most common or severe. The study would also determine whether the forms of sexism experienced by the participants supported the findings of the prior research.

Recruitment

A sample of 42 self-selected participants was recruited for the study. Although the initial intention was to recruit 100 participants, this number functioned more as a maximum than a requirement. The study required enough data to demonstrate clear patterns and draw meaningful conclusions from the data. A sample of 42 participants proved to be an adequate representation of female gamers that provided meaningful results.

Participants were recruited through the online forum *GirlGamers* at www.reddit.com/r/GirlGamers. A link to the survey, hosted by Google Forms, was posted with a recruitment notice as a text-based post on the forum. The forum is a discussion hub for gamers identifying as female, providing an audience of potential participants with the required characteristics for participation in the study. Through participating in this community and viewing content shared by its users, it can be inferred that this forum contains thoughtful and socially conscious discussions pertaining to gaming. Due to the potential risk of exposing the research to those in the community who might do it harm, it was of importance that participants were recruited from at least a predominantly female audience of gamers who were likely to provide constructive, as opposed to destructive, responses, if participating in the survey. In addition, since the survey was designed to collect data from female gamers, it need not be offered to a male audience.

Since this study pertains to the experiences of adult women in gamer culture, exclusionary criteria for participation in this study were not identifying as female and being under the age of sixteen. The exclusionary criterion for the age of participants ensured that participants were able to provide informed consent, and had the capacity to participate in a study involving potentially sensitive and mature subject matter. All

participants identified as female, were at least sixteen years of age or older, and provided consent. Those participants who were 16 or 17 years of age confirmed that they provided informed consent and that they fully understood what it meant to provide informed consent. Respondents under the age of sixteen were not included in the study.

Participants' ages ranged from 17-44 years, with a mean age of 25 years. All participants played video games. As a whole, the participants were highly competent in terms of their gaming experience. The sample had been playing video games for large portions of their lifetimes and spent considerable amounts of time playing video games each week. In terms of preferred gaming platforms, PC was the most popular, followed by console. The vast majority of participants used PC, console, or both. Although many participants did use handheld or mobile platforms, these options were less popular than PC and console, and were rarely the only preferred platform. The consistency in the number of years having played video games, and the number of playing hours per week, is likely due to the recruitment method. The respondents would have been invested enough in their gaming interests to be participating on a forum dedicated to gaming. Having played video games for a significant portion of one's life, and spending considerable amounts of time per week playing video games, are indicators of a deep investment in gaming.

Measures

Participants were asked to complete a survey about their experiences, or lack of, with sexism, as participants in gamer culture. A mixed-methods approach involving multiple-choice and open-ended questions was used to gather data for this research. Survey studies have proven to be effective methods for the collection of data for similar research. Audrey L. Brehm's survey, consisting of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, collected data on sexism and gendered play in *World of Warcraft* (2013). Men and women elaborated on their personal experiences and opinions, and this data was quoted in the discussion to demonstrate common themes in the results. Helen Thornam's study of gendered play in domestic spaces (2008) included an observational study accompanied by interviews and a questionnaire. The data revealed how gender dynamics play a crucial role in domestic gaming, and how gaming as a pastime is essentially

gendered male. Nick Yee investigated gendered gaming motives and preferences (2008) using online surveys consisting of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The study revealed that many women found gamer culture to be a preventing factor in women's desire to be gamers.

The survey questions for this study consisted of four multiple-choice questions, five open-ended questions, and one question that asked participants to provide their age. The multiple-choice questions were intended for the collection of statistical information, such as demographic information and the gaming competence of participants. These questions provided a general understanding of the sample. The open-ended questions were intended to collect qualitative data from the participants about their personal experiences with, and opinions about, sexism in gamer culture. These questions pertained to participants' experiences on the web, in multiplayer gameplay, and in gamer culture as a whole.

The open-ended survey questions were designed to allow participants to elaborate openly about any forms of discrimination or harassment that participants had encountered while participating in gamer culture. These questions specifically examined participants' experiences with online spaces related to gaming, including websites that facilitate discourse related to gaming and online spaces of multiplayer gameplay, and their experiences, or the experiences of other women, with sexism in the general gaming community. Personal accounts collected from real women in the community are highly valuable in their ability to humanize the perspective of the female gamer identity. In a community that ostracizes its female members for speaking out about misogyny, it is rare for a woman to publicly share her experiences in a way that hasn't been censored to avoid negative reactions. Participating in a private and anonymous survey, in a safe environment, allows for participants to be open and honest about their experiences, without the risk of receiving criticism in return.

Procedures

After obtaining approval from the Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University, a formal request to post the survey on the *GirlGamers* forum was submitted. Once permission had been granted from the forum's moderators, a link to the survey,

accompanied by a recruitment script, was posted on the forum. The post was given the title *Study about Misogyny in Gamer Culture* to clearly inform potential participants of the content of the post. Potential participants could either open the post if interested, or if not, continue scrolling through the forum. This procedure allowed for a sample of self-selected participants. The data was gathered over a span of one month. This granted potential participants plenty of time to contemplate participation and to complete the survey.

The recruitment script offered potential participants an overview of the purpose of the study and what it would mean to participate. The link on the recruitment script brought potential participants to the Google Forms survey. The first page of the survey contained a consent form. Consent was obtained on the first page of the survey, containing the consent form, by asking participants if they agreed to participate, after reading the consent form. Depending on the participants' responses, a number of pages followed asking the participants to confirm their age and gender identity. Participants that did not identify as female, or were under the age of sixteen, were informed of the exclusionary criteria for the study, and were asked to exit the survey. Participants that were at least sixteen years of age, but were under the age of eighteen, were asked to confirm their ability to provide informed consent. A description was available that outlined the definition of informed consent and what it meant to provide informed consent. After providing consent, all participants were brought to another page containing the survey. Participants had the opportunity to skip any of the survey questions. The only required questions were those pertaining to consent and the participants' gender identity, in order to satisfy the exclusionary criteria for the study. Once the survey was complete, participants could submit their responses. The submitted responses were automatically downloaded to a database on a private Google account associated with the study. This data was stored on Google Drive and displayed on a spreadsheet where it could be analyzed.

Analysis

To analyze the findings, statistical analysis, content analysis, and classification methods were used. Statistical analysis was used to analyze the multiple-choice responses

and create a statistical representation of the responses. Content analysis and classification methods were used to analyze the open-ended responses. The classification methods used to analyze the qualitative data also allowed for a statistical analysis of those responses.

The questions that pertained to the participants' personal experiences were open-ended in order to grant participants the opportunity to elaborate as much as they felt necessary. The responses provided a means of embedding the actual words of real women into the discussion. Quoting these responses directly means that the original spelling and grammar of quotations is preserved. The questions were designed to encourage participants to answer in a "yes," "no," or neutral fashion, but in a way that allowed participants to do so in their own words, and on their own terms. A classification method was used to categorize responses into positive, negative, and neutral responses. For example, one question reads: "Do you feel that sexism in the gaming community has been a problem for you or other women? Why or why not?" A response that clearly implies that the participant feels that sexism has been a problem would be categorized as a positive response. A response that clearly implies that the participant feels that sexism has not been a problem would be categorized as a negative response. A response that does not clearly imply a positive or negative opinion would be categorized as a neutral response. If the question asks about a specific form of participation in the gaming community, such as participating in online multiplayer gameplay, and the respondent does not practice that form of participation, then the response is considered neutral to avoid skewing the results. This classification method was used in order to develop a general understanding of how the participants as a whole responded to the open-ended questions. In order to illustrate this, a statistical analysis was used to analyze how many participants answered with a positive, negative, and neutral response for each question. This method was used to answer the research questions that asked whether sexism was present in the gaming community and whether it was a problem for female gamers.

The other open-ended questions asked the participants to elaborate on their personal experiences with sexism in the gaming community. In order to answer the question of which forms of sexism female gamers encounter while participating in the gaming community, these examples were categorized according to the classification model for sexist behaviours that had been established through prior research. This

analysis allowed for an understanding of the frequency and severity of each of the behaviours. If a response clearly demonstrated a particular kind of behaviour, that response was placed in the associated category. It was possible for responses to belong to more than one category. This method of analysis was used to answer the research question that investigated which forms of sexism female gamers encounter while participating in the gaming community.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to launching the survey, approval from the Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University was sought and received. A consent form appeared at the start of the survey outlining all necessary information for potential participants. All participants provided consent on the consent form, before gaining access to the survey questions. If potential participants had any questions related to the research, the consent form contained contact information for the primary researcher, the primary researcher's supervisor, and the Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University.

Participation in this study was completely voluntary, as outlined in the consent form. The survey was posted on the *Reddit* forum *GirlGamers* with a link to the survey, so the participants were self-selected and were not contacted directly for recruitment. Participants were informed that they could skip any questions or exit the survey at any time. The only required questions were those pertaining to consent and the gender identity of the potential participant. Identifying as female and being sixteen years of age or older were exclusionary criteria for this study. Any participants that did not fit the exclusionary criteria had their data destroyed.

Only the primary researcher reviewed the responses and all responses were completely anonymous and confidential. No identifying information was collected from the participants.

RESULTS

Quantitative Survey Results

Age

There existed an extensive range in the ages of participants, from 17-44 years, with a mean age of 25 years. The lack of participants aged 16 or 17 years can be explained by the exclusionary criterion for the study that prohibited participation from persons under the age of 16. As a whole, the participants were mostly comprised of young adults (defined as ranging in age from 18 to 35), with only two participants over the age of 36.

Table 1. Age ranges of participants

Age range	Percentage	Quantity
< 18	2.43	1
18-25	53.65	22
26-35	38.02	16
36+	4.87	2

Experience

The most prominent conclusion that can be drawn from the quantitative data is that the group of participants was comprised of highly competent individuals, in terms of gaming experience and commitment. It can be inferred from the results that the participants as a whole were experienced gamers, for not a single participant had been playing video games for less than six years, and the vast majority of participants had at least ten years of experience. By examining the relationship between participants' ages and the number of years they had been playing videogames, it is evident that as a whole, the group had been playing videogames for significant portions of their lifetimes.

Table 2. Years of experience playing video games

Years of experience	Percentage	Quantity
< 2	--	0
2-5	--	0
6-10	9.75	4
10+	90.24	37

Commitment

The participants were generally committed to gameplay throughout the week, setting aside a number of hours each week to dedicate to gaming. The vast majority of participants spent at least ten hours or more playing video games each week, with nearly one third committing at least twenty hours or more of their week to video games. Considering the age of participants, and the likelihood that those participants have jobs outside of the home, in addition to other commitments and pastimes, this is a considerable amount of time to dedicate to gaming. It can be inferred from these results that the group, as a whole, is comprised of highly experienced gamers, considering the high number of hours per week that the group dedicated to gaming.

Table 3. Hours spent playing video games per week

Hours per week	Percentage	Quantity
0	--	0
1-4	4.87	2
5-9	4.87	2
10-14	31.70	13
15-19	26.82	11
20+	31.70	13

Platform Preferences

In terms of gaming platforms, participants were most likely to use their PC for gaming, followed by console. With the exception of a small number (16%, n=4), console gamers were also PC gamers. Participants rarely used any platform other than PC as their only preferred gaming platform (9.75%, n=4), while more than one third of PC gamers used only their PC for playing video games (38.88%, n=14). Participants never used mobile as their only preferred gaming platform. It can be inferred that the vast majority of participants used PC, console, or both (92.68%, n=38).

Table 4. Gaming platforms used by participants

Gaming platforms used	Percentage	Quantity
Console	56.09	23
PC	87.80	36
Handheld	31.70	13
Mobile	26.82	11
Other	2.43	1

Qualitative Survey Results

Responses, for the most part, were rich and informative. Participants' lengthy answers suggest that there is a lack of safety for the female gamer to adequately express her opinion on the sexist climate of the culture. In a community that ostracizes its female members for speaking out about misogyny, a woman cannot be expected to publicly share her experiences in a way that has not been self-censored to avoid adverse reactions. Participating in a private survey, in a safe environment, allows for participants to be open and honest about their experiences without the risk of receiving criticism in return.

It can be inferred from the data that misogyny is active in the gaming community and that it is a problem for female gamers. Additionally, respondents expressed concerns over the presence of homophobia, racism, and transphobia throughout gaming communities. One quarter of the respondents reported having experienced some form of discrimination or harassment while participating in online multiplayer gameplay.

Participants were encouraged to provide examples, and although the question did not ask participants to offer instances of sexism specifically, the examples provided, as a whole, were inherently misogynistic. These instances ranged from 'minor' cases of name-calling to deeply grotesque examples, such as threats of rape. The majority of negative responses did not provide justification and these responses were the least complete. However, those who did provide justification for their negative answers did so by exhibiting an 'it's just the way it is' or 'no big deal' attitude, with some victim blaming.

For the question regarding the participants' experiences within online spaces and social media related to gaming, there was very little disparity between positive, negative, and neutral responses. This is largely due to the fact that nearly one third of the participants did not participate in these kinds of spaces. A common reason for not participating was to intentionally avoid harassment from other participants in these spaces, demonstrated an understanding that harassment was common within these spaces. A number of those who did reported that their participation was merely observational, or that they intentionally only participated with friends, within groups that were known to be safe spaces. This finding is interesting, since it suggests that the understanding of gamer culture as a male dominated space could be at least partly derivative from women intentionally not engaging in the community, as opposed to the culture actually being one that is predominantly male. Although not all participants reported experiencing misogyny first-hand, the vast majority claimed that sexism in the gaming community was a problem for women, offering reasons for believing this to be the case. Overall, the open-ended survey results were consistent with the categories of sexist behaviours that were developed from prior research. The positive responses fit well into at least one of the categories, with many responses offering additional examples that demonstrated other forms of sexist behaviour. Not surprisingly, the most common category was gendered or sexual harassment. This could be explained by considering that if a person is to harass another person by virtue of their gender, that person's gender becomes an easy and seemingly appropriate subject for that harassment. Gendered and sexual harassment was followed by the assertion of women as inferior gamers to their male counterparts. This result is derivative of how elite gamers assert their alleged dominance over female gamers, in an attempt to uphold an authoritative status. Threats of violence were

categorized the least frequently. It is expected that perpetrators would be less prone to threatening other gamers with violence than some other forms of harassment, such as persistent flirting, considering the severity of violent threats.

Participants were asked whether or not they had intentionally concealed their gender online on forums or other websites related to gaming or during multiplayer gameplay. Most of the responses indicated that those respondents had concealed their gender at some point, or frequently did, and recurrent justification for this behaviour was to avoid harassment from others. About one third of participants reported that they do not conceal their gender, and the frequent reason for this behaviour was that concealing one's gender could potentially amplify issues of sexism in gamer culture by encouraging the invisibility of the female gaming demographic.

When asked to share any additional information that the participants felt needed, the responses were generally a reiteration of the opinion that each had expressed through the previous question. This often included offering additional examples of sexism that had been experienced by the participants, with informational anecdotes about their personal experiences. No significant patterns were found throughout this data.

As a whole, the responses clearly indicated that misogyny is present in gamer culture and that it is a problem for female gamers. It appeared to be enough of a problem that respondents reported altering their behaviour while participating in gamer culture in order to avoid harassment from others. This implies that the community must become more inclusive before women are able to gain visibility within the culture.

THE MAINTENANCE OF A MALE-GENDERED GAMER CULTURE

The elitist nature of gamer culture fosters a toxic landscape for gamers who diverge from the traditional gamer norms. Historically, gamer discourse has often been characterized by prejudice and discrimination directed towards marginalized (Tucker, 2011). This typically takes the form of homophobia (Johnson, 2014; Shaw, 2011) and racism (Tucker, 2011), perhaps unsurprising given white and heteronormative nature of the gamer identity. However, the focus here is to uncover the ways by which male members of the gaming community ostracize their female counterparts for participating in gamer culture, simply for being female. The premise appears to be that women, no matter their intentions or cultural capital, hold the least eligible position within the community because they are women, as demonstrated by the overt hostility towards them as women.

As contention grows over who can identity as a gamer, the membership status of participants of gamer culture is potentially open for negotiation. When assumptions about conventional gamer identity are challenged, this must be contested in order to preserve these assumptions. As a result, misogynistic behaviours are used as operations by the dominant members of the community as a means of asserting dominance over ‘other’ gamers, maintaining control of the community, and preserving the illusion of male ownership of gamer culture. These operations can be classified as: Presuming a male identity of participants of gamer culture; rendering women as unauthentic participants; positioning women as inferior gamers; perpetrating gendered and sexual harassment; using threats of violence; and rejecting women’s concerns about gaming and gamer culture, further hindering the culture’s potential to become a safer environment. Each of these behaviours becomes a powerful tool that maintains a male-gendered gamer culture, by rendering female gamers as invisible or irrelevant. These acts of policing work to control the ways in which women can and do participate in the community, using overt hostility towards and harassment of female participants, with the aim of excluding femininity from the culture altogether, reaffirming masculinity as the norm in gamer culture (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). These behaviours are exhibited in gamer discourse, as

demonstrated on the web, and in the personal accounts of women in the community collected from the survey.

The Assumption of Maleness

Since masculinity is presumed to be the norm in gamer culture, the culture is constructed around an assumption that the gamer identity is male by default. Unless this assumption is explicitly challenged, and even when it is, the assumption remains that the real participants in the community are male. This assumption is perpetuated by online interfaces, such as online multiplayer gameplay and web forums, that can obscure or that give no indication of an individual's gender. This phenomenon contributes to the invisibility of female gamers, impeding their ability to contribute as *female* members.

When participating online, there is little evidence to indicate the gender of others, considering that their physical form is hidden from sight. The male gender has been established as the norm for gamers, meaning that unless a woman indicates her gender somewhere on her profile, by her avatar, in her screen name, or by vocally 'outing' herself, then, from the perspective of the other participants, it is assumed that she is male. One survey participant confirmed this phenomenon occurring during multiplayer gameplay, explaining "people always assume someone is male, unless they are specifically told otherwise."

Despite this, 'outing' oneself as a woman in these ways does not always satisfy the conditions for not being male, from the perspective of some males. A form of policing is used to determine who 'counts' as female on the web: "Anyone who tries so hard to point out they are a girl actually isnt. Real females don't go around announcing it..." ("Mario Kart 8," 2014). The frequent assumption is that if a woman reveals herself as female, then that woman either is doing so for the acquisition of male attention, or that the 'woman' is actually male. Similarly, during multiplayer gameplay, players identifying as female can be accused of actually being male, and it appears to be particularly common when those women display high levels of gaming proficiency. As one participant described: "It's as if it's impossible to get any respect unless you are constantly a top ranked player, even then you get the 'Oh, I bet her boyfriend is playing for her.'"

The association between ‘female’ and ‘non-player’ (Carr, 2005) is so deeply embedded that male subjects can deny the actuality of female participation despite witnessing it first-hand. It is not uncommon for male retail clerks in game shops to openly assume that a female customer’s purchase is truly intended for a man, instead of for her own personal consumption. A survey respondent expressed her distress with this scenario: “It’s not only online where this is happening. Several times I’ve gone in to [a game shop] and been treated poorly. It’s always assumed I’m buying games as a gift for my boyfriend.” The assumption is that it is so unlikely that a woman would purchase gaming technologies for her own consumption that the purchase must be for a man.

This assumption that all gamers are male persists is highly problematic for the visibility of the female gaming demographic. Rendering women as invisible in the culture results in a silencing of the female gamer, and in turn, the acceptance of a male-gendered culture.

Women as Inauthentic Gamers

It is arguable that the lack of female representation in the community motivates female gamers to express their gender, as a means of preserving their identity and confirming their presence in the culture. Subsequently, ‘outing’ oneself as female provides an opportunity for male gamers to accuse those women of not being a ‘real’ gamer through claims that they are expressing an interest in gaming only to attract male attention or to entice men. This phenomenon finds its origins in the notion of the ‘fake’ girl geek or gamer, synonymous with the label of ‘poser.’ It is assumed that because men are considered the “natural users of game technologies” (Jenson & de Castell, 2010, p. 62), women who partake in gamer culture must be doing so for ulterior motives that are unrelated to gaming, as opposed to for personal gratification. As a consequence, women have their authenticity challenged and are laden with the burden of proof to legitimize their gamer status.

The governing assumption here is that it is unlikely that a woman could have an interest in a conventionally male pastime without that interest being directly related to the male participants themselves. Put frankly by a frustrated respondent, “when I mention I’m a woman, I’m usually accused of participating in the forum for attention.”

Communicating through a headset during multiplayer gameplay, using an avatar or screen name that provides evidence of one's gender, or voluntarily 'outing' oneself as female, all function as indicators that a woman in question is making herself known in order to attract attention towards herself and her 'unlikely' female presence. This was illustrated by a survey participant's response to getting 'called out' for expressing her gender identity:

There's an overbearing attitude among certain players on how women should or shouldn't behave. Just the simple act of mentioning you're a woman in certain circles/forums, casually or otherwise, has some male gamers immediately trying to make an issue of it ('why'd you bring up being a girl? did you want internet points' / 'no need to mention you're a girl here, we're all 'equal'').

Her use of the term "internet points" describes how male gamers accuse of her of seeking a response from them by revealing her gender. Explicit examples of this can be found on web forums related to gaming. On one popular gaming forum, when a female participant indicated her gender in her post, another participant had the following response: "In reality, there are very very *very* few girl gamers. Most girls who play video games only do so because they get attention from guys" ("Mario Kart 8," 2014). This response is representative of the general forum's reactions to her act of 'outing' herself. However, when a male participant makes a reference to his gender, he is not accused of misconduct, but he need not do so intentionally, for the assumption will always be that he is male.

Post gender-reveal, women find their authenticity as a gamer challenged by their male counterparts, and this was well understood by the survey respondents: "Gaming is a boy's club that women are supposed to 'prove' themselves to get into." This trial can take many forms, whether it is challenging their knowledge, competence, or motives for participation in the culture, in an attempt to debunk their interest in gaming. One survey participant effectively mimicked these perpetrators: "If you dont know every single thing about the games and their creators then you are a FAKE!" Simply being present as a female in a public gaming space resulted in a challenge to her authenticity as a gamer.

If merely existing as a woman can constitute evidence of illegitimacy, then intentionally ‘outing’ oneself as female can certainly invite harsh consequences.

What perpetrators fail to understand is that perhaps expressing a female identity is an attempt to validate the female gaming demographic, by proving that women do play video games and participate in gamer culture, and for individual participants to preserve their identity and not be automatically rendered as male.

Women as Inferior Gamers

There exists an assumption perpetuated by the dominant members of gamer culture that female gamers are inferior to their male counterparts. Males are perceived to be the ‘experts’ and they play this role while undermining female members (Schott & Horrell, 2000). This inferiority is defined by a lack of qualities that one must have to be granted gamer membership, comprising an assured knowledge relevant to gaming and ‘hardcore’ gaming proficiency, which constitutes a high level of commitment. Considering that the gamer identity is by default male, “the powerful association of masculine subjects as gamers and game designers as well as the presumption (through technologies generally) of (male) competence and ability have positioned women and girls unerringly as ‘less able,’ ‘less competent,’ and as ‘casual’ gameplayers” (Jenson & de Castell, 2010, p. 54).

From this perspective, women are allegedly gamers only by virtue of their interest in casual games that require very little skill or commitment, coming from an association between casual games and femininity (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). This is to suggest that the complexity of ‘hardcore’ games requires a level of technological competence that is essentially masculine. As asserted in the survey: “Also if you (as a female) do well in those [hardcore] games, you're some kind of ‘exception’, and if you do poorly, of course you did. Girls suck at games (and math and science and and and).” The expectation that women can only play casual games implies that women are incapable of executing the same skill levels as male gamers, and that, as a male forum contributor stated: “The grand majority of these girls only plays facebook games, flash game websites, and mobile phone games” (“Playstation 3,” 2012). By this understanding, women who offer evidence of a high level of skill are a rarity, for the expectation remains that women are only

capable of excelling at the simplest of games, which the dominant community rejects as 'real' games. There is a common assumption that games existing beyond the realm of the 'hardcore,' or that games that can be played on highly accessible devices such as mobile phones and tablets, are by definition easy. However, it is not always the case that these games are not challenging. It should be noted these games can be understood as fitting more appropriately into the balanced lifestyles of people who are unable to, or unwilling to, commit significant time investments into gaming. Consequently, the enjoyment of these kinds of games should not be understood as reflecting a lack of skill.

Although skilled female gamers are often perceived as an exceptional rarity, discrimination occurs even when women demonstrate high levels of gaming proficiency:

In World of Warcraft... I was [playing] a character that was the "Main Tank," at the time a rather prestigious role that was almost never played by women (stereotyped as only playing support classes, and playing badly in general)... When I spoke in voice chat and some players realized I was female, they vocally protested and said that they would refuse to participate if a female was the main tank, stating that women were incapable of tanking.

This participant was capable of performing a role that required a high level of responsibility, by virtue of her existing skill and commitment to the game. Despite this evidence, male participants in the game were unable to comprehend the prospect of a female successfully executing this role, assuming that it required a level of skill that a woman could not possibly achieve.

These conventions have the potential to reproduce and reaffirm stereotypes of women as inferior gamers by consistently forcing women out of leading roles during multiplayer games. One respondent expressed frustration with this cycle:

I typically play MMORPG and MOBA games and was always forced into support-type roles because "girls only play support." Because of this I am only good at those roles since I was always required to play them and so... they're the only roles I play, perpetuating the stereotype.

The rendering of women as inferior gamers to men is harmful for female representation. Women who, for example, embody the stereotype by expressing an interest in casual games are accused of doing so because they are women. Contrarily, women who display high levels of gaming proficiency that is typically associated with masculinity, either become an ‘exception’ to a hard rule, or are discriminated against for being female.

Gendered and Sexual Harassment

The use of offensive language that is specific to a woman’s gender, uninvited flirting, and sexual harassment, exist pervasively in gaming communities, and each perpetration works to fashion a hostile environment for women. A common example of this rhetoric that can be observed in high frequency on the web, and during gameplay, is the expression “titsorGTFO.” The phrase translates to *show me your breasts or get the fuck out [GTFO], because that is all that you are good for*. Some web resources have done justice in publicizing the misogynistic nature of gamer discourse by documenting the harassment faced by female members of the community. *Fat, Ugly, or Slutty* (www.fatuglyorslutty.com) and *Not in the Kitchen Anymore* (www.notinthekitchenanymore.com) encourage women to record and their share the harassment that they are subjected to while partaking in online multiplayer gameplay, “in a kind of ‘shame the Johns’ approach” (Jenson & de Castell, 2013, p. 73). However, despite growing concerns surrounding the scope of sexual harassment in gaming communities, it remains a persistent obstacle for female gamers.

A woman’s gender creates an easy target for perpetrators, and this pattern was recognized throughout the survey results: “Women are targeted just for BEING women.” The labeling of women with offensive and often sexualized titles that are specific to their gender, such as ‘whore’ and ‘cunt,’ are examples of gendered insults intended to alienate women, at the fault of their existence as women. The orientation of gamer culture as a male space constructs an environment where the dominant rhetoric allows for gendered insults towards women and the normalization of that language, as stated by one survey participant:

...wife jokes, girlfriend jokes, "there are no girls on the internet" jokes, go back to the kitchen jokes, make me a sandwich jokes, rape references, etc.), and this just doesn't make for a very friendly, welcoming environment to anyone who isn't a straight, male gamer.

This rhetoric is normalized because it exists within an essentially male-gendered space, where its predominantly male and heterosexual participants rarely challenge these norms, if ever. Those who might challenge these norms are labeled as “troublemakers” and perceived as disruptive (Braithwaite, 2014, p. 708), motivating the dominant members of the community to utilize cruel tactics in an attempt to banish them from further participation, effectively preserving cultural customs. The normalization of gender-based offenses simultaneously opens the door to other forms of gendered abuse, including unwanted advances. Cases of unreciprocated flirting can range from mild advances to instances that could potentially place victims in a position of danger. As one respondent experienced: “[A guild acquaintance] asked for my home address because he wanted to send me jewelry that he makes (asked what my ring size was) along with asking if I would consider a personal relationship.” The frequency of unwanted advances can leave women in a position of discomfort if they wish to continue participating in the community. Often, these women can be ostracized or punished for denying advances from male players, further compromising gameplay. As one survey participant explained: “Someone has to point out I'm a girl then someone follows with a ‘Do you have a bf’ in a message or tries to add me because I am a girl. When I don't respond its a ‘Okay bitch fine.’ or ‘You're a cunt.’ or ‘i just wanted more friends whore.’” The indication here is that the victim is at fault for misunderstanding their ‘friendliness’ for flirtation. If she does not succumb to their uninvited advances, she is punished. This suggests that women, while participating in gamer culture, must either behave as expected or become subject to other forms of abuse.

Arguably due to the hostile nature of gamer rhetoric towards women, sexual harassment appears to be frequently experienced by women in the gaming community. These instances of sexual harassment can be graphic and invasive, characterized by invitations for the sending or receiving of explicit photos, the use of sexualized language

in conversation, and requests for sexual favors. Throughout the survey, the latter was often demanding, if not threatening, in nature: “One man became obsessed with me in World of Warcraft... when I kept ignoring him, he informed me that I ‘was boring, but that wouldn't matter with duct tape and handcuffs.’” Harassment from male players can also intend to undermine a woman’s potential: “My game client crashed and I said on vent that I was reloading. I was told to not bother, that instead I should take my clothes off and get into his bed.” The suggestion is that she is no longer needed in the game, and that her only viable contribution in this situation is to be used sexually. Comments such as this are undeniably pervasive and their frequency is likely due to the affordances that anonymity grants participants in a virtual setting.

Unlike generic violence, “rape isn’t a central feature of (most) games” (Shaker, in Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 405), yet this culture has normalized the casual use of the term ‘rape’ in gamer discourse to a disturbing degree. It is understood to be synonymous with ‘victory,’ as “part of a shared rhetoric of sexual violence within gaming culture” (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 406). Both casual and threatening uses of ‘rape’ are hostile to women in the community, considering that rape is a terrifying reality:

I'm so god damned tired of hearing ‘rape’ [in] every god damned guild, and community and hardcore gameplay scene I try to be apart of... ‘Rape’ an experience I had to live through, not once, but twice, and I'm tired of having to hear this word everywhere I go in the "hardcore" gaming segment. (“I’m so,” 2015)

The normalization of ‘rape’ evinces disrespect towards women, and men, that find the downplaying of this language offensive, and most importantly, to rape survivors that participate in these gaming communities. The intention of its users is that others will comprehend this linguistic violence as a ‘joke,’ as many male gamers do, but instead, it contributes to an inherently misogynistic cultural rhetoric that is unwelcoming for women.

Although sexual harassment is both frequent and public in the gaming community, it is an embedded standard, meaning that little is done to protect or seek justice for its victims. As one respondent recalls: “I've been essentially run out of guilds

before due to people sexually harrassing me both on teamspeak and in chat, with no one besides me saying anything on my behalf.” The lack of response from teammates in situations such as these leads to the normalization of sexual harassment and gendered insults in gamer discourse, and a sexualizing of the female gamer. When women speak on behalf of one another, they are subject to the same abuse. This cycle of perpetuating misogyny results in the construction of a landscape where women are recognized as second-class citizens of gamer culture, and are treated as such.

Threatening Behaviour and Violence

Violence is a pervasive theme in video games, fueled by a mainstream market that consistently produces military genres, ‘first person shooters,’ and games that allow your character to murder a sex worker or other ‘disposable’ female character, then continue on with his day. Can this explain why gamer rhetoric is, at times, integrally violent in nature? It seems reasonable to assume that gamers may consent to the exchange of violent threats towards one another’s avatars when the gameplay in subject constitutes some level of violent combat. However, threats of violence towards women, and gamer culture’s normalization of violent themes, that are initiated in the virtual landscape, can often reach beyond gameplay and into their ‘real’ lives.

Violence is normalized in gamer culture by virtue of its violent themes that commonly appear in video games, possibly providing an explanation for violent and aggressive discourse typical between gamers during gameplay, and even outside of gameplay. When women gamers receive threats, these instances are often violent or sexual in nature. Tales of these threats are frightening, as told by the respondents:

Most notably are the experiences that bleed into real life. I've had... people that do things like obtain my phone number, get into my voicemail, and call my friends and family. I filed a police report because this particular person also harassed the other prominent women on my [World of Warcraft] server, including taking pictures of their children's schools, sending threatening emails, etc.... Threats of rape or other sexist insults are so common that I don't pay attention to them anymore.

This also functions on a larger scale, demonstrated by the events relevant to the GamerGate ‘movement,’ within which an exceedingly vocal faction of the group evolved into a misogynistic hate group. The history of GamerGate and its scope is complex, but, in short, a zealous group of gamers began the GamerGate ‘movement’ in August of 2014, “as a pernicious attack on one female game developer, Zoe Quinn,” claiming that she had used her sexuality to gain publicity for her games (Hathaway, 2014, para. 5). The concern of ‘GamerGate-ers’ was that Quinn’s alleged misconduct was evidence of corruption in game journalism, indicating that her positive publicity could only result from the use of her sexuality, as opposed to her competence as a developer. Accusations of corruption led to severe threats of violence, and the hate spread to game developer Brianna Wu, and feminist video game critic Anita Sarkeesian. Quinn, Wu, and Sarkeesian fell victim to an enormous backlash from GamerGate supporters, characterized by countless threats of violence, including those of rape and murder. Brianna Wu was forced to leave her home after receiving rape and death threats, and Anita Sarkeesian cancelled a speaking engagement at Utah State University when someone threatened to commit a “Montreal Massacre-style attack” (Nerdlove, 2014, para. 4).

It is unlikely coincidental that only women were the primary targets of GamerGate’s attacks. GamerGate targeted very few men, and none received the same degree of punishment as its three favourite victims: “It’s about gaining revenge and sexual gratification by attacking women who dare to not just enter a malecentric space, but try to change that space to make it more friendly for women. And for that purpose, attacking men is pointless” (Ogle, 2014, para. 23). The ‘GamerGate-ers’ delivered a clear message: Women in gamer culture should not have a voice or a notable position, and if you do, and do not behave as expected, you will be harshly punished. It would not be expected for a woman to desire to have her voice heard in a community that threatens to kill off women who challenge its norms.

The Rejection of ‘Feminine’ Concerns

Feminism, in gamer culture, is perceived as a powerful threat (Braithwaite, 2014). From this perspective, feminists are understood to be executing a malicious agenda that challenges the community’s norms. When referring to feminism here, it refers not only to

the greater feminist movement and its influence on games and the gaming community, but also to attempts by women to create a more inclusive community, by voicing concerns about the sexist nature of gamer culture.

There is little understanding of, or desire for, gender equality in the larger gaming scene. A survey participant demonstrated her concern for this issue: “In a way, attitudes towards gender equality in the broader gaming community are a few decades behind where it should be, and that's a huge problem, [considering how] many girls and [women] are a part of that community.” This is likely due to its masculine nature. Voicing concerns about gender equality is to confront gamer norms, specifically the normalization of a predominantly male community that serves the needs of those males. Needless to say, gender equality is an unlikely desireable of the male gaming demographic, thus, the presence of feminism in gamer culture is perceived as a ‘ruiner’ of their enjoyable and exclusive space (Braithwaite, 2014).

To prevent feminism from successfully ruining the ‘fun’ for everybody else (by creating, in this case, a more inclusive and welcoming space for women), feminists, or those who strive for women’s rights in the community, must be banished. This process was observed at an extreme level in Anita Sarkeesian’s targeting by GamerGate. ‘GamerGate-ers’ grew increasingly anxious about Sarkeesian’s feminist critiques of the sexist nature of video games, resulting in threats of rape and murder against her, in an attempt to frighten her out of the spotlight. Sarkeesian’s criticism of female representation is a common and unremarkable one, but as long as the games industry remains a predominantly male space, this misrepresentation is likely to continue. One respondent, who works in the games industry, claimed that this could be observed in the workplace, when she attempted to address similar issues: “Often I [am] met with men telling me I am whining about details.” When in disagreement, describing a woman’s expression of her opinion as ‘whining’ is an attempt at discrediting her judgment and belittling her statement. Similar tactics are used to devalue feminist arguments against gamer norms (Braithwaite, 2014). The argument is that feminism has no place in gaming, as it has been made clear that topics such as the concerns of women in gaming or feminist analyses of games are not only unwelcome in the gaming community, but are seen as a powerful threat to the preservation of traditional gamer culture (Braithwaite, 2014).

This policing of whose assertions remain viable, and whose are not, is executed throughout gamer discourse to reduce feminist concerns to obsolescence. A community that excludes its female members as females fosters an environment that is no longer capable of facilitating conversations about the same gender inequality that omitted women in the first place. Attempts at such conversations are met with highly hostile and defensive responses that only further contribute to the censorship of female community members and their concerns.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF MISOGYNY

When the dominant culture fosters an unwelcoming environment for women, the result is the maintenance of a male-gendered culture within which its female participants adjust their behaviour, and alter the ways in which they participate in the community, as a means of avoiding misogyny. This can include succumbing to the pressure to conform (Fox & Tang, 2014), the concealment of their female identity, and the avoidance of expressing an interest in gaming, as a means of eluding harassment and participating with ease (Brehm, 2013). A culture that ostracizes its female members, simply for existing as women, builds the foundations for a social space that is unable to facilitate discourse about issues of gender inequality. This inequality is the primary factor that worked to initially omit women from the community, demonstrating a powerful cycle of misogyny. This cycle further promotes the invisibility of the female gaming demographic, meaning that the current status of female participation is left with little room for progress.

Conformity

Conformity here refers to adapting to the intrinsic ‘rules’ of the culture and to the performance of societal gender roles, both of which are encouraged by the dominant members. Women, in gamer culture, tend to suffer consequences from other community members when acting outside of feminine gender roles (Fox & Tang, 2014), so conforming to these norms becomes a sacrificial way of managing the potential for harassment while participating amongst other gamers. Considering that societal gender norms posit women as passive beings (Brehm, 2013; Fox & Tang, 2014), the understanding is that it is inappropriate for them to voice their contention with the sexist nature of the gaming community. Affirmed by Fox and Tang (2014), “when women violate this expectation and behave assertively, others question the legitimacy of this behaviour,” and as a result, those women will be “socially punished for violating expectations” (p. 315). This provides an explanation for why feminism is perceived as a powerful threat conventional gamer culture and the conventional identities associated with it. Attempts at such conversations are met with highly hostile responses that only

further contribute to the censorship of female community members and their concerns, limiting the ability to progress into a more inclusive space.

This passivity can also translate into the expectation for women to consent to and accept instances of sexual harassment received from other gamers, seeing as women are often defined by sexualized roles in the gaming world (Brehm, 2013). Considering that sexual harassment and offensive language have been noted as normalized in gamer culture, this normalization contributes to the construction of 'rules' that deems these forms of discourse as common and accepted, reinforcing a 'just the way it is' mentality. Women are encouraged to conform to these norms, as demonstrated by a respondent whose mixed-gender group was harassed with sexual and offensive language during gameplay:

The player eventually decided to leave of his own accord - the guild leaders were sympathetic to me and my friend over what happened, but the other male guild members said that they thought what the player who left was saying was no big deal and that we shouldn't have been so sensitive.

The male members of this group encouraged conformity in the form of passivity, claiming that female members were being overly sensitive about the matter. This implies that the banished member's distasteful language is 'just the way it is,' a cultural norm, and that the situation could have been improved if the respondent was silently tolerant. This occurrence serves as an example of how claims of female 'whining' can be used to devalue the spoken concerns of women.

Conformity can likewise occur in the unwilling performance of stereotypes associated with female gamers. As demonstrated previously, women can find themselves forced into performing stereotypical gaming roles that are associated with female inferiority, and only building skills in these roles as a result, further perpetuating these stereotypes. Women are expected to perform supportive background roles in relation to male characters (Beavis & Charles, 2007). In one example, a woman found herself forced out of a prestigious role that offered evidence of her high level of gaming competence, because her male teammates refused to be led by an 'inferior' woman. According to

Brehm (2013), this act “prevents females from accessing parts of the game that might otherwise be easily accessible for male players” (p. 7), which can prevent women from progressing or enjoying a fully comprehensive experience. The men’s refusal to participate delivered the message that if she was to conform to an inferior, and therefore more ‘appropriate,’ role, in relation to a male player, her participation in the game would not have been revoked. This argument does not aim to address that supportive roles are indeed inferior, but instead, that male players suggests that they perceive those roles as inferior. Female teammates are expected to play roles that are inferior to the roles of their male counterparts. Those who encourage this conformity likely perceive it as a means of building upon a more enjoyable experience by decreasing unpleasant interactions with others. Contrarily, it would be expected that sacrificing personal agency, and performing a role of passivity that encourages male domination, could never make for worthy trade-off to avoid harassment and discrimination.

Gender Concealment

Women conceal their gender while participating in gamer culture as a means of avoiding potential harassment (Fox & Tang, 2014; Lukianov, 2014; Yee, 2008). As stated by Yee (2008), these women “must either accept the male-subject position silently, or risk constant discrimination and harassment if they reveal that they are female” (p. 94). Methods of gender concealment include intentionally eliminating voice chat from gameplay, practicing nondisclosure of one’s gender, and omitting gender-identifiable information from avatars and screen names. Deliberately not disclosing the details of one’s gender allows women to go “under the radar” and appear as male participants, because the assumption that participants are male by default allows those women to blend in and be perceived as “normal” (Lukianov, 2014, p. 34). This ease of gaming ambiguously was demonstrated by a survey participant’s experiences with not disclosing her gender:

Outside of guild groups, I would often not reveal that I am female, and found that even if I did make a mistake, if they thought I was male, nothing was said about

it! I vividly remember REALLY screwing something up and thinking ‘oh boy, I'm gonna get yelled at’, but, nothing.....

Gaming ambiguously prompts other players to construct assumptions about others as males, allowing women to participate with a level of freedom that removes the need to consciously attempt to disprove gendered expectations during gameplay. When gaming as ‘male,’ a slip-up in game becomes an innocent mistake, as opposed to an expected ‘female’ blunder, by virtue of one’s gendered inferiority. Likewise, other forms of harassment and discrimination, such as sexual harassment or gendered exclusion from participation, are far less likely to occur.

The trouble with this disadvantageous solution is that it acts as a temporary resolution that actually further renders the female gaming demographic as invisible. Female gamers, as described by one respondent, are familiar with this disparity:

I think it is a huge problem in that women are afraid for other people to find out they are female. This leads to 'girl gamers' having little to no voice in the community or for feedback toward developers. Women are afraid to object to sexist language, characters, etc. because it will 'out' them, which leads to an apparent acceptance of those issues.

The problem with gender concealment is that perpetuates the norm of maleness and discourages women from voicing their concerns when confronted with sexist or offensive dialogue. The result is a contribution to the normalization of those conventions that oppress female community members. In response to this problem, some women intentionally choose not to conceal their gender as a means of affording visibility to female players (Lukianov, 2014). This phenomenon was observed throughout the survey results, validated by responses such as: “I want to help establish a female presence in games,” “if I remain silent the problem continues,” and “I feel that making my gender known is important to help normalize women in gaming.” Sometimes these responses were indicative of a personal desire to preserve an individual identity, as opposed to for the greater good, but the message remains that gender suppression is harmful for the

visibility of women in gamer culture. Gender concealment can not only result in a less enriched experience for those who pursue the practice, but also a continuance of the silencing of women in the community, and increased invisibility of the female gaming demographic.

Ceasing Participation

As a means of evading potential misogyny, ceasing participation in the gaming community can act as a definitive solution. In this sense, women might opt out from partaking in the gaming community entirely, or choose to limit their involvement to single-player games that do not require interactions between players. This solution would also result in a lack of participation in the greater community, which includes an avoidance of online forums and other web platforms devoted to gaming. The cost of this action is greatly apparent: Those individuals miss out on a fuller experience of the larger gamer culture, and most importantly, women continue to lose visibility in gaming communities, further contributing to the maintenance of a male-gendered culture.

The construction of gamer culture as a male-gendered space that propagates male norms can act as a restraint from initiating female involvement. Yee (2008) explains that women can often be subject to the reminder that their immersion is an infringement on male territory, and states that “the male-dominated player culture itself becomes a deterrent – something that isn’t an issue in single-player games” (89). This offers justification for why women might avoid commencing an initial interest in gaming, as well as why existing members might resort to single-player games, in avoidance of the larger community. These instances remain problematic, as each removes women from the gaming public, and further establishes maleness as the norm. Numerous survey participants expressed a disinterest in contributing to gaming communities online, noting that social platforms dedicated to gaming were not a welcoming environment for women:

I don't participate in many social spaces for gamers due to many negative experiences. Today is literally the first day I've signed up for a (female) gaming forum, and their [Facebook] group. Except for that I've only participated in

private guild forums, which I would only join if I was sure the group was not going to be full of sexist trolls.

Negative stereotypes and expectations about the female gaming demographic can have adverse effects on how those women perceive themselves as gamers. Associations between femininity and inferiority can result in a questioning of their viable position in the community. Unlike other demographics, gender can correlate with whether persons self-identify as a gamer, and men are more likely to identify as a gamer than women, despite those women demonstrating competence in gaming (Shaw, 2011). As a result, some women may choose not express, or further develop, their interest in gaming, as a result of failing to identify themselves as authentic members of the community, simply for being women. As one respondent recalled:

I have worked hard to hide my love for gaming and have only recently embraced it. However I am still scared that people are going to come after me. I constantly read posts on social media sites of girls receiving rude comments and being pushed aside in game because they are female and people think they can't play the game. I think it is common for women to not want to identify as gamers and not want to play MMOGs with their voice or their actual names to avoid any harassment they could face.

When women lack confidence in their own legitimacy as a gamer, it has concerning implications for what could ensue from having that authenticity challenged by others who mean to exclude them from the community. The consequences can manifest as an inability to self-identify as a gamer, or a ceasing of participation altogether.

Lack of Female Representation

As a consequence of alienating female members of the gaming community, those women lose their voices and visibility, resulting in a lack of female representation in gamer culture. This contributes to a notion of gamer culture as one that is gendered male, catering solely to the needs of its male faction. As a result, the voices of women are

ignored, and feminist action that aims to create a more open and diverse community is labeled as a threatening force that must be eliminated. A community that excludes its female members as females fosters an environment that is no longer capable of facilitating conversations about the same gender inequality that omitted women in the first place. Revisiting the concept of female ‘whining,’ it can be used to label feminist concerns as foolish and unreasonable. The dismissal of feminist concerns and women’s voices as ‘rants’ “echoes similar rhetoric used to marginalize women’s opinions as irrational,” specifying that their voices are not desirable in this community (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 409). Attempts at conversations regarding gender inequality are met with hostile responses that only further contribute to the censorship of female community members and their concerns.

The impact of the absence of strong female representation reaches beyond the general culture and into the video games industry. It has been established that this male-dominated industry is unwelcoming for female professionals (Johnson, 2014), and the recent events of GamerGate would not surprisingly have a negative effect on women’s motives for joining the games industry. The proposal that women who wish to positively impact the games industry, and eliminate sexist norms from the games it produces, should simply join the industry and initiate that change, can be observed throughout gamer discourse. Needless to say, this is easier said than done. The issue with a lack of female representation in the games industry is that it preserves its male-dominated status, prolonging the masculine nature of the greater culture: “When a culture of production consists of a high ratio of men to women, as is the case in video game production, masculine discourse is the only (and thus natural) way game projects are conceived, constructed, and completed” (Johnson, 2014, p. 581). To this understanding, the masculine nature of the industry, and development of those games, can contribute to a lack of positive female representation in video games. Argued by Salter and Blodgett (2012), “any community that is built upon commercial success and shared consumerism cannot afford to alienate members of the general audience” (p. 412). However, this cycle continues to deter women from developing an interest in gaming, and further down the road, an interest in developing games.

When those persons have the power to alter the ways by which women navigate their participation as gamers, it maintains their dominant status and control over greater culture. The indication is that this culture is incapable of accommodating those that diverge from its norms, despite those norms being an infringement of their right to liberally participate. This suggests that women, in order to participate, must conform to gendered expectations and the dominant culture's norms, or cease participation. To this understanding, the culture's intrinsic nature, and the 'rules' and norms associated with it, are permanent, and that those who challenge this will suffer the consequences and be banished from the community. In terms of the culture's war against women, this results in a lack of female representation in the community and the industry, fostering the growing obstacles that prevent the culture from evolving to become safer and more inclusive. If this culture is expected to become increasingly inclusive for gamers that exist outside of its norms, then the visibility of these gamers, and the strength of their voices, is of utmost importance for initiating change.

CONCLUSION

Gaming has long been understood as a male pastime and privilege. Culturally embedded notions of societal gender roles and technomascularity, and the fact that the games industry and market are male-dominated and masculine in nature, contribute to the construction of implicit assumptions about the gamer identity as one that is male by default. This produces an understanding of gamer culture as one that is figuratively and literally the preserve and prerogative of men. The recent diversification of gamer culture has caused contention over the gamer identity, and initiated a power struggle over ownership of the culture. As women gain visibility in the community, their authenticity as gamers, and their position within this community, are negotiated. As a result, misogynistic behaviours are used as powerful operations by the dominant members of the community to maintain their assumptions about the culture and the gamer identity despite change, by rendering women as inferior. Evidence of this can be observed throughout the discourse of gamer culture, on websites and forums related to gaming, and in the first-hand accounts of women in the community. These efforts are a means of asserting dominance over female gamers, maintaining control of the culture, and preserving the illusion of male ownership.

The suggestion here is that the essential nature of gamer culture, as defined by its exclusionary norms, is a permanent aspect of its existence. To this understanding, those who confront or deny the validity of those norms are rendered as inauthentic, and cast out of the community. This cycle is harmful for female representation, as it cultivates a cultural landscape within which conversations about gender inequality are forbidden, and therefore less likely to occur. If this culture is to become a more inclusive environment for gamers that exist beyond its norms, then high priority must be placed on increasing their visibility and strengthening their voices.

This permanent and flawed understanding of gamer culture as a monocultural space is absurd. It would be pessimistic, and simply false, to assume that this is how things are and how they always be. This logic is pervasive throughout gamer culture, and surprisingly, even some women can be observed accepting this 'fact.' What would contribute greatly the visibility of those gamers who do not fit the traditional gamer

identity, and the construction of a more open and diverse social environment, would be to amplify their voices and to reaffirm their presence in the community. With this said, a challenge should be extended to all gamers to refuse to contribute to the invisibility of women in the gaming community, and to contest those who wish to marginalize gamers who do not conform to traditional gamer norms. Although a significant number of women prefer to hide their identity online, it is contributing to the erasure of their presence in the community. It can be difficult to speak up when observing the harassment of other players, especially with the potential for consequentially becoming the subject of that harassment, but silence in these scenarios further perpetuates the acceptability of that behaviour. If all those who are marginalized, and their allies, refused to contribute to this cycle, there is absolutely potential for change. There is a need for a more inclusive community within which its subgroups are not subject to harassment, or even violence, for failing to fulfill the expectations of others. In order to progress, the current status of gamer culture must be restructured to support this growth. When women become visible and normalized, it will be increasingly difficult to uphold the norms of the formerly dominant members of the culture.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Script

“Hello, my name is Stephanie. I am a graduate student at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada, and a fellow gamer. I have recently become more aware of the severity of misogyny in gamer culture and the effect that it has on the community. A lot of my time has been spent browsing forums and communities, such as this one, studying the ways by which minority gamers experience discrimination and harassment in the community, with an emphasis on the female gamer identity. This has led me to pursue studying misogyny in gamer culture for my Master’s thesis.

This year I am writing a major research paper that examines the operations within dominant gamer culture that suppress its female members, and how such operations contribute to an illusion of a male-gendered community. I have received permission from the moderators to invite you to participate in my study if you wish to share some of your experiences as a woman in the gaming community, whether sexism has been an issue for you or not. The study is anonymous. If you participate in the study and do not wish for anyone to know that you have participated, then do not provide anyone else with this information. Anything written on this thread cannot and will not be used for my research.

You will be asked to provide informed consent before beginning the survey, and to confirm your age. After providing informed consent, you will be asked to complete a survey consisting of 5 multiple-choice questions and 5 open-ended questions. These questions will ask you about yourself a gamer, as well as your experiences with discrimination and/or harassment in relation to gaming. You should expect to spend less than 20 minutes completing the survey, depending on the length of your answers and the time you spend contemplating them.

In addition, if anybody has any suggestions in terms of valuable resources on this topic, please feel free to share! Thanks, everyone. I look forward to hearing from you.

This study has been reviewed and approved by Ryerson University's Research Ethics Board.

The survey: <http://goo.gl/forms/x1TdBCojD3>”

Appendix B: Research Questions

1. Is sexism present in the gaming community?
2. Is sexism in the gaming community a problem for female gamers?
3. What forms of sexism do female gamers encounter when participating in the community

Appendix C: Survey

Ryerson University Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

MISOGYNY AND GAMING: UNCOVERING THE OPERATIONS THAT MAINTAIN A MALE-GENDERED GAMER CULTURE

INVESTIGATORS:

This research study is being conducted by Stephanie Kendrick, a graduate student in the Master of Digital Media program, under the supervision of Dr. Jason Boyd from Digital Humanities at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Stephanie Kendrick
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON
M5B 2K3 stephanie.kendrick@ryerson.ca

Dr. Jason Boyd
350 Victoria Street Toronto, ON
M5B 2K3 jason.boyd@ryerson.ca (416) 979-5000 ex. 7509

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of the study is to demonstrate how a number of operations in gamer culture work to maintain assumptions about the culture being gendered male and being ‘owned’

by male gamers. This survey will collect data about the forms of such operations, such as discrimination and harassment, that female gamers experience. The survey helps to show that misogyny (the dislike of or prejudice against women) is a common and serious problem throughout the gaming community. The data collected from this survey might also show relationships between the many forms of harassment that people have experienced and their gaming styles. There will be 100 participants in this study. Personal accounts collected from real women in the community are very valuable in their ability to humanize the perspective of the female gamer identity in a way that literature and online information cannot.

Since this study focuses on female gamers, participants must identify as female to participate. Participants must also be at least sixteen years of age or older, and have the ability to provide informed consent. Providing informed consent means that you fully understand what it means to participate and have the ability to agree to this participation.

This research is being completed in partial to Stephanie Kendrick's completion of her degree, and the results of this study will contribute to the writing of her Master's thesis. The data collected in this study will be analyzed and discussed in her final paper.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO:

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Procedures

You will be asked to provide consent before beginning the survey, and to confirm your age. After providing consent, you will be asked to complete a survey of 5 multiple-choice questions and 5 open-ended questions. These questions will ask you about yourself a gamer, as well as your experiences with discrimination and/or harassment in relation to gaming.

Survey Expectations

You may review this consent form for as long as you'd like before agreeing to participate. This means that you have plenty of time to review this consent form and reflect upon potential participation.

You should expect to spend less than 20 minutes completing the survey, depending on the length of your answers and the time you spend contemplating them. For open-ended questions, your responses can be as brief or as long as you'd like. The survey consists of a variety of multiple-choice questions, and some open-ended questions. These questions will ask you about yourself as a gamer and your experiences with discrimination and/or harassment in relation to gaming. Two simple questions have been provided below.

1. How many hours per week do you play videogames? a. 1-4
b. 5-9
c. 10-14 d. 15-19 e. 20+
2. Have you ever or do you ever conceal your gender online during discourse related to gaming or during multiplayer gameplay? Why or why not?

Demographic Data

You will be asked to provide some demographic data during the survey. This includes your age and gender.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

The potential benefit that you could receive from completing this survey is greater awareness about your experiences in the gaming community. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study. The potential benefits of this study that might benefit society include raising awareness about misogyny.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:

The risk involved with completing this survey is the possibility of an emotional response to a question. Due to the personal nature of the questions asked in this survey, you might reflect on unpleasant memories while responding to a question. For example, you will be asked whether you have experienced hate speech, threats of violence, and forms of misogyny in your experiences related to gaming. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you may skip answering a question or stop participation. It is possible to submit an incomplete survey if you choose to skip any questions.

If you experience a level of discomfort while completing this survey that requires action, please refer to this list of resources.

Canada:

www.eMentalHealth.ca

Mental Health Services, Help and Support in Your Community

United States: [ww.CrisisChat.org](http://www.CrisisChat.org) Lifeline Crisis Chat

Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

OWH Helpline: 1-800-994-9662

OWH List of Hotlines: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/hotlines/index.html>

International:

Unsuicide <http://unsuicide.wikispaces.com/.VOzSprPF-DE#.VOzS9bPF-DE>

Instant Messaging Chat, Self-Help, Phone Hotline Directories, and Articles

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The information that you provide will remain confidential. Raw data might be released to the primary researcher's supervisor, Dr. Jason Boyd. Since Dr. Jason Boyd is overseeing the project as a whole, his guidance is necessary for the completion of the final paper.

This survey will not be collecting your name or any identifiable information. Your personal URL will also not be stored to further ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Information collected from the survey will only be stored under an email account that is specific to this study. Your information will not be shared with anybody. The information stored includes all of the data collected from the survey and analysis of this data. This email account will be deleted five years after the completion of this research, and the information stored under the account will be lost with it. Storing data under this email address will create an environment where I can guarantee confidentiality *to the best of my ability*.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question or stop participation. If you choose to stop participating, simply close your browser and no data will be collected. However, by submitting the survey, you surrender your right to withdraw from participation past that point. This allows for you to remain anonymous. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson or the investigators – Dr. Jason Boyd and Stephanie Kendrick - involved in the research.

It is possible that your involvement may be terminated without regard to your consent after your survey has been submitted. This will only occur if the investigators feel that the data collected is unreliable, at their discretion.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:

If you have any questions about the research please contact:

Stephanie Kendrick
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON

M5B 2K3
stephanie.kendrick@ryerson.ca

Dr. Jason Boyd
350 Victoria Street Toronto, ON
M5B 2K3
jason.boyd@ryerson.ca
(416) 979-5000 ex. 7509

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

* Required

Do you agree to participate? *

- a. Agree
- b. Disagree

(If “Disagree”) Thank you. You have indicated that you do not agree to participate in this study. You may now exit the survey. No data will be collected. Thank you for your time.

(If “Agree”) Please select the age group that applies to you. *

- a. I am under the age of 18
- b. I am 18 years of age or older

(If under the age of 18) Please select the age group that applies to you. *

- a. Under the age of 16
- b. 16 years of age or older

(If 16 or over) As a person under the age of 18, can you confirm that you have the ability to provide informed consent to participate in this study? Providing informed consent means that you fully understand what it means to participate in this study, as outlined on the consent agreement, and have the ability to agree to this participation. *

- a. Yes, I fully understand what it means to participate in this study and have the ability to provide informed consent to participate.
- b. No, I do not fully understand what it means to participate in this study and/or I do not have the ability to provide informed consent to participate.

(If “No”) Thank you. You have indicated that you are under the age of sixteen. You must be sixteen years of age or older to participate. You may now exit the survey. No data will be collected. Thank you for your time.

(If “No”) Thank you. You have indicated that you do not agree to participate in this study. You may now exit the survey. No data will be collected. Thank you for your time.

Do you identify as female? *

- a. Yes
- b. No

(If “No”) You have indicated that you do not identify as female. This study focuses on the perspectives of females, so it is necessary for individuals to identify as female in order to participate. You may now exit the survey. No data will be collected. Thank you for your time.

1. Please enter your age.
2. Do you play video games?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. How many hours per week do you play videogames?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1-4
 - c. 5-9
 - d. 10-14
 - e. 15-19
 - f. 20+
4. Which of the following gaming platforms do you use for playing videogames?
 - a. Console (Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Wii, etc.)
 - b. PC
 - c. Handheld Systems (Nintendo DS, PSP, etc.)
 - d. Mobile
5. For how many years have you been playing videogames (of any kind, at any rate)?
 - a. Less than 2
 - b. 2-5
 - c. 6-10
 - d. 10+
6. Have you ever been discriminated against or harassed by another gamer while participating in an online multiplayer game space? Please elaborate on one or more of these experiences, or lack there of, in the field below.

Discrimination and harassment can take many forms. These include hate speech, name calling, and aggressive language; harassment; sexual harassment and sexual language; threats of rape and other forms of violence; death threats; gendered insults including bitch, slut, whore, and cunt; discrimination or exclusion from participation.

7. Have you ever been discriminated against or harassed by another person while participating in an online social space related to gaming or on social media during discourse related to gaming? Please elaborate on one or more of these experiences, or lack thereof, in the field below.
8. Do you feel that sexism in the gaming community has been a problem for you or other women? Why or why not?
9. Have you ever or do you ever conceal your gender online during discourse related to gaming or during multiplayer gameplay? Why or why not?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to share? Feel free to elaborate on anything you wish. Whether it be sharing another experience, giving your opinion on the sexist climate of gamer culture, expressing why you think some gamers find female gamers to be threatening, or any other general comments.

Your survey has been submitted. Thank you for your time and participating in this study!

In the event that this survey has triggered some level of discomfort that requires action, please refer to this list of resources.

Canada:

www.eMentalHealth.ca

Mental Health Services, Help and Support in Your Community

United States:

www.CrisisChat.org

Lifeline Crisis Chat

Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

OWH Helpline: 1-800-994-9662

OWH List of Hotlines: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/hotlines/index.html>

International:

Unsuicide

<http://unsuicide.wikispaces.com/.VOzSprPF-DE#.VOzS9bPF-DE>

Instant Messaging Chat, Self-Help, Phone Hotline Directories, and Articles

REFERENCES

- Anthropy, A. (2012). The Problem with Videogames. In *Rise of the videogame zinesters: How freaks, normals, amateurs, artists, dreamers, dropouts, queers, housewives, and people like you are taking back an art form* (Seven Stories Press 1st ed., pp. 1-21). New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.
- A product of a gypsy curse • /r/gaymers. (2015). Retrieved June 13, 2015, from <https://www.reddit.com/r/gaymers/>
- Beavis, C., & Charles, C. (2007). Would the 'real' girl gamer please stand up? Gender, LAN cafés and the reformulation of the 'girl' gamer. *Gender and Education, 19*(6), 691- 705.
- Braithwaite, A. (2014). 'Seriously, get out': Feminists on the forums and the War(craft) on women. *New Media & Society, 16*(5), 703-715.
- Bell, D. (2009). Geek Myths: Technomascinities in Cyber Cultures. In *GEXcel Work in Progress Report: Deconstructing the Hegemony of Men and Masculinities* (Vol. 9, pp. 97-103). Sweden: Linköping U.
- Brehm, A. (2013). Navigating the feminine in massively multiplayer online games: Gender in World of Warcraft. *Frontiers in Psychology, 4*, 1-12.
- Bryant, A., Levin, P. (2015, March 23). Parents and Platform Perceptions. *Sandbox Summit*. Lecture conducted from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.
- Bryce, J., & Rutter, J. (2013). Gender dynamics and the social and spatial organization of computer gaming. *Leisure Studies, 22*(1), 1-15.
- Carr, D. (2005). Contexts, gaming pleasures, and gendered preferences. *Simulation & Gaming, 36*(4), 464-482.
- Dutton, N., Consalvo, M., & Harper, T. (2011). Digital pitchforks and virtual torches: Fan responses to the Mass Effect news debacle. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 17*(3), 287-305.
- Dickey, M. (2006). Girl gamers: The controversy of girl games and the relevance of female-oriented game design for instructional design. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 37*(5), 785-793.
- Entertainment Software Association. (2004). *The 2004 Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry*. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/125494009/ESA-Essential-Facts-2004#scribd>.
- Entertainment Software Association. (2015). *The 2015 Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry*. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from <http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ESA-Essential-Facts-2015.pdf>.
- Fat, Ugly or Slutty. (2015). Retrieved July 1, 2015, from <http://fatuglyorslutty.com>
- Filthy Casual. (2013). Retrieved June 18, 2015, from <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/filthy-casual>
- Fox, J., & Tang, W. (2014). Sexism in online video games: The role of conformity to masculine norms and social dominance orientation. *Computers in Human Behavior, 33*, 314-320.
- The Glorious PC Gaming Master Race. (2013). Retrieved June 18, 2015, from <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/the-glorious-pc-gaming-master-race>

- Haniver, J. (n.d.). Not In The Kitchen Anymore. Retrieved July 1, 2015, from <http://www.notinthekitchenanymore.com>
- Hathaway, J. (2014, October 10). What Is Gamergate, and Why? An Explainer for Non-Geeks. Retrieved July 4, 2015, from <http://gawker.com/what-is-gamergate-and-why-an-explainer-for-non-geeks-1642909080>
- Hayes, E. (2007). Gendered Identities at Play: Case Studies of Two Women Playing Morrowind. *Games and Culture*, 2(1), 23-48.
- I'm so fucking tired of hearing "rape" everywhere I go. • /r/GirlGamers. (2015, February). Retrieved July 5, 2015, from https://www.reddit.com/r/GirlGamers/comments/2t0mxt/im_so_fucking_tired_of_hearing_rape_everywhere_i/
- Jenson, J., & Castell, S. (2010). Gender, Simulation, and Gaming: Research Review and Redirections. *Simulation & Gaming*, 41(1), 51-71.
- Jenson, J., & De Castell, S. (2013). Tipping Points: Marginality, Misogyny and Videogames. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 29(2), 75-82.
- Johnson, R. (2014). Hiding in Plain Sight: Reproducing Masculine Culture at a Video Game Studio. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 7, 578-594.
- Joho, J. (2015, February 9). What computing loses when it forgets its feminine history. Retrieved February 18, 2015, from http://killscreendaily.com/articles/what-computing-loses-when-it-forgets-its-feminine-history/?mc_cid=4f48488ada&mc_eid=cc820fbe2d
- Juul, J. (2010). A Casual Revolution. In *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and their Players*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Kendall, L. (2000). "OH NO! I'M A NERD!": Hegemonic Masculinity on an Online Forum. *Gender & Society*, 14(2), 256-274.
- Kowert, R., Griffiths, M., & Oldmeadow, J. (2012). Geek or Chic? Emerging Stereotypes of Online Gamers. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 32(6), 471-479.
- Mario Kart 8: Looking for other girl gamers! (2014). [Online forum from *GameFAQs*]. Retrieved from <http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/700050-mario-kart-8/69364738>
- Lukianov, C. (2014) Finding the Invisible Player and Understanding Women's Experiences in Online Multiplayer Video Game Environments. Syracuse University, NY. *Theses - ALL*. Paper 26. 1-91
- Nerdlove, D. (2014, October 24). What We Talk About When We Talk About GamerGate. Retrieved July 4, 2015, from http://www.doctornerdlove.com/2014/10/when-we-talk-about-gamergate/#footnote_2_5748
- Ogle, A. (2014, October 26). GamerGate (Fall 2014): Why have GamerGaters only attacked female critics? I. Retrieved July 20, 2015, from <http://www.quora.com/GamerGate-Fall-2014/Why-have-GamerGaters-only-attacked-female-critics-Is-there-a-part-of-the-GamerGater-philosophy-that-exempts-male-critics-from-retribution>
- Overview - The Entertainment Software Association. (2015). Retrieved August 7, 2015, from <http://www.thesa.com/about-esa/overview/>
- Peer, G. E. (2014). Who We Are: How Sub-Cultural Capital Intensifies Communication Conflict between Whovians, Nuvians, and Fnadom-at-Large (Unpublished master's thesis). San Diego State University, CA. 1-87.

- Ramos, S. (2014). "Know Your Role." – Categorising Insults and Harassment Received by Female Gamers on Xbox Live (Unpublished master's thesis). National University of Ireland, Cork. 1-130.
- Royse, P., Lee, J., Undrahbuyan, B., Hopson, M., & Consalvo, M. (2007). Women And Games: Technologies Of The Gendered Self. *New Media & Society*, 9(4), 555-576.
- Salter, A., & Blodgett, B. (2012). Hypermasculinity & Dickwolves: The Contentious Role of Women in the New Gaming Public. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(3), 401-416.
- Schott, G., & Horrell, K. (2000). Girl Gamers And Their Relationship With The Gaming Culture. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 6(4), 36-53.
- Shaw, A. (2011). Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity. *New Media & Society*, 14(1), 28-44.
- Statistics Canada (2013). *Gender differences in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science (STEM) programs at university*. (Catalogue number 75-006-X). Retrieved from the Statistics Canada Website <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2013001/article/11874-eng.pdf>
- Thornham, H. (2008). "It's A Boy Thing." *Feminist Media Studies*, 8(2), 127-142.
- Thornham, H., & Mcfarlane, A. (2011). Cross-generational gender constructions: Women, teenagers and technology. *The Sociological Review*, 59(1), 64-85.
- Tucker, S. (2011). Griefing: Producing Masculinity in Online Games (Unpublished master's thesis). School of Journalism and Communication. 1-110.
- Playstation 3: What is the best way to meet girl gamers? (2012). [Online forum from *GameFAQs*]. Retrieved from <http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/927750-playstation-3/65092005?page=1>
- Williams, D., Consalvo, M., Caplan, S., & Yee, N. (2009). Looking For Gender: Gender Roles And Behaviors Among Online Gamers. *Journal of Communication*, 59(4), 700- 725.
- Williams, D., Yee, N., & Caplan, S. (2008). Who plays, how much, and why? Debunking the stereotypical gamer profile. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 993-1018.
- Woo, B. (2012). Alpha nerds: Cultural intermediaries in a subcultural scene. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(5), 659-676.
- Yee, N. (2008). Maps of Digital Desires: Exploring the Topography of Gender and Play in Online Games. In *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New perspectives on gender and gaming*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.