THE REPRODUCTION OF HYPERMASCULINITY, MISOGYNY AND RAPE CULTURE

IN ONLINE VIDEO GAME INTERACTIONS

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

Katherine Mary Bullock

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major Program:
Sociology

July 2017

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

THE REPRODUCTION OF HYPERMASCULINITY, MISOGYNY AND RAPE
CULTURE IN ONLINE VIDEO GAME INTERACTIONS

By

Katherine Mary Bullock

The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North Dakota

State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Christina Weber

Chair

Christopher Whitsel

Robert Mejia

Approved:

July 31, 2017	Jeffery Bumgarner
Date	Department Chair

ABSTRACT

Playing video games is a popular past time for many, and the introduction of online gaming allows people of various backgrounds to interact with one another. Yet, it is clear in the wake of incidences such as Gamergate which saw threats directed towards women, that gaming is still considered a male space that is hostile towards women. Through content analysis of online spaces, this research sought to understand how violence towards femininity manifests in gaming. Through Louis Althusser's (1972) concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) I explore how hypermasculine and misogynistic ideologies are reproduced in online gaming culture. It was found that violence towards women, hypermasculinity, and misogyny were perpetuated through the expression of dominant ideologies that place men above women. That being said, there were a significant number of people who spoke out against these ideologies thus working to dismantle the dominant attitudes that contribute to violence towards women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, roughly 42% of the population plays some form of video game on a regular basis, which accounts for around 155 million Americans (ESA 2016). Of those 155 million people, roughly 44% are females. Even though the number of female gamers is only 12% lower than the number of male gamers, the world of video games continues to be very much a male dominated one. This can be observed in video game content itself when looking at the hyper-sexualized versions of female characters, to incidents within online gaming communities that pit male and female gamers against each other. Females continue to be second class citizens in the video gaming world, often receiving threats of sexualized violence if they choose to speak out against the misogyny that exists in gaming communities (Wu 2014). The goal of this thesis is to analyze how hypermasculine and misogynistic ideologies that contribute to rape culture are reproduced within online gaming communities.

Video games are a relatively new phenomenon, with the first known video game being created by Physicist William Higinbotham in 1958 (APS News, 2008). This game had a simple tennis-like format, similar to the game known as "Pong" which was released by Atari in 1972 and was a key factor in launching the video game industry that we know today (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). Since the induction of the industry, there have been remarkable advancements from enhanced graphics to the introduction of motion controlled and virtual reality gaming. One major accomplishment that has greatly changed the way video games are played is the ability to play games online with other players. While it gained little popularity at the time of its release, the game known as *Habitat* released in 1986 by LucasFilms games, later LucasArts, was the first to allow players to interact with each other during game play (Spohn, 2016; Lecher, 2016). Today, online multiplayer games are becoming more popular, with 48% of frequent gamers playing

online with others. The average online player spends 6.5 hours a week playing with others (ESA 2016). These interactions can occur in a variety of online formats from PC to console games and be as simple as taking turns playing a board game on Facebook or as complex as engaging in strategic team battles. Players often communicate, allowing both for positive relationships and hateful interactions. This research focuses on these interactions between players and how these interactions shape and are shaped by sexism and rape culture that exists in gaming culture, and what aspects of gaming culture foster these interactions.

To begin, it is important to understand rape culture and socially sanctioned violence towards women and how these concepts came to exist in society. Rape culture can be defined as "a complex set of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women [and girls], a society where violence is perceived as sexy and sexuality is violent, and a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself" (Cobos, 2014, p. 38). Put another way, rape culture occurs when males are expected to be sexually aggressive, while women are expected to be sexually submissive.[1] Rape culture works to perpetuate itself in that, it creates an atmosphere in which rape and gender-based violence is viewed as "acceptable" in certain situations. This is done through the creation and perpetuation of rape myth acceptance, which refers to the notion that, because of something a survivor of sexual violence did or did not do (e.g. how they dressed, not resisting "enough," etc.) they are in some way responsible for the violence. When looking at the world of video gaming and the violence that takes place between gamers, it can be argued that women are occupying a male space in which females are often seen as sexual objects. For a woman to go outside of her prescribed roles

---

[1] Here, it is important to note that rape and rape culture does not solely affect women, nor are males the only perpetrators of rape; however, for the purpose of this research the focus will be primarily on sexual and gender based violence towards female gamers.

within this space is viewed as doing something that warrants a negative and often violent response.

This idea that women have a specific, often sexual, purpose in the world of video gaming and that to go against these roles has consequences for women has already manifested into several incidences of violence and threats. While these occurrences often go without much notice, some did receive significant media attention, the most notorious of which being GamerGate. The story of GamerGate began on the website known as 4Chan, a message board formatted site that allows users to anonymously post and interact with each other on various topics. It was on this site that game designer Eron Gjoni compiled and shared personal information about his former girlfriend and fellow game designer Zoe Quinn, in what would later be known as the Zoe Post. In addition to personal information such as her address, phone number, email, address, and passwords, this post also contained nude photographs of Quinn and information about her sex life, including an alleged affair between Quinn and a gaming journalist (Jason 2015). This post quickly became viral and soon there were stories that Quinn had slept with several men in gaming journalism to get better coverage and reviews for her games. While there was no evidence to support such allegations against Quinn, 4Chan users among others online quickly spread the controversy, siting that this was proof of the ever-slipping standards of ethics within gaming journalism (Johnston, 2014). In what might be understood as an attempt at vigilante justice after this information was released, Quinn as well as those close to her received horrific death and rape threats from those in the gaming community. This even included the editing of Quinn's Wikipedia page, changing her date of death to "Soon" as well as "October 13, 2014" which was set to be Quinn's next public appearance (Jason 2015). The false assumption that Quinn was using sex in exchange for positive

press along with the threats and harassment she received as a result would not be the end of the GamerGate controversy nor the violence perpetuated towards women in the gaming world.

The GamerGate controversy would continue to affect women in the gaming industry, including game critic and founder of the video series "Feminist Frequency," Anita Sarkeesian. Sarkeesian is no stranger to online harassment, which she received plenty of after the outpouring of support she received on her Kickstarter campaign to start Feminist Frequency, which looks at and challenges misogyny in popular culture, particularly video games (Johnston, 2014). Sarkeesian has since received thousands of death and rape threats as well as a bomb scare and an email that promised a mass shooting at an event where Sarkeesian was to speak (Valenti 2015). This violence emerged because a woman dared to criticize the problematic elements that exist within a male dominated world. This relates back to the concept that in our society men are "supposed" to be aggressive while women are passive or submissive. The violent threats towards Sarkeesian are considered socially acceptable to many because Sarkeesian stepped outside of the prescribed roles for women in society, especially when doing so in the male-dominated gaming world. In addition to the outright violence that was perpetuated against both Quinn and Sarkeesian, conspiracy theories soon emerged that alleged their successes in the gaming industry came not from their own merit, but from unethical journalism tactics as well as the government working in conjunction with feminists to take over the gaming industry, (Chess & Shaw, 2015).

Later, this movement of violence towards women in the gaming industry continued when software designer and founder of the gaming company Giant Spacekat, Brianna Wu received threats for a meme she retweeted in opposition to GamerGate. When writing about being targeted for speaking out about GamerGate, Wu noted that "They've threatened to rape me. They've threatened to make me choke to death on my husband's severed genitals. They've threatened to

murder any children I might have" (Wu 2014). The sexual nature of the threats Wu received reflects the fact that sexual violence towards women and rape culture are evident in the gaming world as well as our society at large. These of course only highlight the cases of violence towards women in the gaming world that received some amount of media attention, and does not even scratch the surface of what women experience both within the gaming industry itself as well as in online gaming communities.

One contributing factor that works in creating an environment of open hostility towards female gamers is the rampant hypermasculinity that exists within video games and gaming culture. Hypermasculinity can be defined as "an overemphasis upon masculine-gendered physical traits and/or behavioral patterns, particularly dismissal or hostility towards feminine displays" (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 402). If we break this definition down, we can understand how hypermasculinity is likely to contribute to rape culture and rape myth acceptance. To begin, we can understand a "hostility towards feminine displays," as a hostility towards women. Indeed, when examining the relationship between hypermasculinity and aggression towards women, it was found that "high-hypermasculine men displayed higher levels of aggression on the laboratory paradigm and reported to have assaulted women more often than their low-hypermasculine counterparts" (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003, p. 70). Arguably, we can infer that those who take in the hyper-masculinized messages that are presented in video games are more likely to view these qualities as positive, thus aggression towards women becomes not only accepted, but encouraged in hypermasculine settings.

This overemphasis on masculine traits is one element that contributes to the shaping of what is and is not socially acceptable behavior based on one's gender. In most social contexts, when someone steps outside of their expected gender roles there is some amount of backlash that

can manifests itself in hostility or even violence; this holds true for the gaming world as well. It can be noted that:

> Contemporary video game culture has become the site of a fierce conflict over the performance of gender roles. The increase in the visible contribution of female gamers to video game communities has coincided with misogynistic reprisals against those who challenge the old hegemony of hypermasculine performativity within the culture. (Tomkinson & Harper, 2015, p. 617).

With these strong gender role expectations within the gaming community, we can see how masculinity becomes prized while femininity is disregarded. Those who step outside of this gendered binary are subject to threats that often include rape. This suggests that rape culture within the gaming community is high as many see it as a suitable punishment for going outside of this preset way of doing gender. This places a heavy burden of responsibility on the rape survivor to stay within their normative roles to avoid the occurrence or threat of rape, thus perpetuating the acceptance of rape myths regarding victim blaming.

With the large number of female gamers, it is important to examine the violence that is being perpetuated against women within the gaming community. One way to do this is to look at the culture that exist within online video games, and how rape culture and violence towards female gamers has become an acceptable part of the culture for many within gaming communities. Wu made the statement that since the beginning of gaming, the industry has been run by men and games have been marketed towards men with negative portrayals of women throughout. She notes that "The consequence of this culture is male gamers have been trained to feel video games are their turf" (2014). With this in mind, this thesis set out to analyze the experiences of female gamers to better understand the culture of misogyny that exists within the

video gaming world. This was completed using content analysis of messages female gamers receive from other players when playing video games in an online format, as well as analyzing videos of game play and communication within the gaming community as a whole. Through this analysis, this thesis used sociological theory to understand why violence and harassment towards women occur in gaming communities, and why this behavior is considered acceptable by many within this realm.

To complete this thesis, I began by examining past works in the literature review section. I discuss the theoretical frameworks that will help guide my research, followed by a review of works related directly to rape and gender in video games to establish what holes exist in the current research. I then discuss the data that was gathered which included online interactions that occurred in private messages, YouTube videos, messages boards, and comment sections and the sampling methods used. Through a content analysis of the data gathered, I was able to determine that these online spaces contribute to rape culture primarily through the reproduction of hypermasculine and misogynistic ideologies that exist in society. Despite this, it was also found that these online spaces serve as sites of struggle in which there is resistance to these ideologies and the ways in which they are reproduced through gaming culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I begin by describing the theoretical work that is used to help guide this research and analysis. I begin by discussing how we come to understand the world around us and what is socially acceptable through Louis Althusser's work regarding Ideological State Apparatus, as well as how we gain social understanding through Karl Mannheim's work on the sociology of knowledge. I then discuss theoretical frameworks around gender and masculinity by reviewing Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* as well as R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt's work on hegemonic masculinity and Michael Kimmel's work with masculine rage. This is followed by an examination of past research conducted around rape and gender and how these concepts relate to video games. Finally, I highlight gaps in the literature that I intend to fill with this thesis.

Theoretical Framework

When understanding the ways in which video games link to hypermasculinity, misogyny and rape culture, we can look through the lens of ideology and how it operates within our society. It is possible to examine how ideology operates within society through the work of Louis Althusser (1972), particularly in his work titled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation)." Althusser begins this work by looking at the Marxian understanding of the means of (re)production within an economic system. Althusser states that "no production is possible that does not allow for the reproduction of the material conditions of production: the reproduction of the means of production" (1972, p. 128). From a purely economic point of view this makes sense, it is not possible to produce a product (at least not for an extended amount of time) if the material means of that production are not constantly reproduced such as new materials needed to make said product. As Althusser also points out, this concept can also easily be applied

to understand the social means of production, particularly in the form of ideology. Althusser discusses the ways in which society reproduces itself on multiple layers, the first being the infrastructure, or the economic base, and the superstructure which consists of the state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus (ISA). ISAs work by reproducing the means of power production through ideological institutions such as religion, school systems, and cultural ISAs. Arguably, video games and the messages they provide fit in the latter of these categories.

Since ISAs work to reproduce the power relations within a society, we can understand the ways in which video games play a part in reproducing these relations, particularly those that lead to hypermasculinity, misogyny, and rape culture. Ideological institutions work to reproduce the conditions of the dominant class by instilling us with ideological images that we then reproduce with our own attitudes, actions, and biases. Video games play into this phenomenon largely in the fact that they hold up men in positions of power, as can be observed by examining the ways in which men and women are portrayed within video games that represent men as strong and heroic while women are presented largely as sexual objects. If we examine this through Althusser's understanding of ISAs and the reproduction of the means of production, we can understand the ways in which video games serve as a means of producing and reproducing the conditions in our society that place men at the top of the social hierarchy, creating a sense that violence towards women is to some extent socially acceptable. Many mainstream video games also reproduce the means of hypermasculinity that not only value sexual aggression, but also devalues anything feminine. By contributing to the ideology that places men above women, video games are reproducing the standards that women are sexual objects and continuing to produce these thoughts in a new generation, thus reproducing the means of sexist ideological production.

Similar to Althusser and his understanding of how we come to understand our social world through ideology, Karl Mannheim (1936) is also interested in how we come to gain our social knowledge. Mannheim's primary work in this area is what he calls the "sociology of knowledge." The main thesis of this work, according to Mannheim, is that "there are modes of thought which cannot bet adequately understood as long as their social origins are obscured" (p. 2). Put another way, it is incredibly difficult to completely understand the intricacies of how one comes to have social knowledge without understanding the background of that particular person and the life events they experience. Mannheim goes on by stating that "Only in quite some limited sense does the single individual create out of himself the mode of speech and of thought we attribute to him. He speaks the language of the group" (1936, p. 3). By this we can understand that thoughts of an individual rarely, if ever, exist in vacuum, untouched by the world around them. It is quite the opposite; our thoughts are never entirely and uniquely ours as we are influenced by the everyday experiences we have in life and that shape the way we come to and what we view as knowledge. This view can shed some light onto why those in the gaming community behave and believe the way they do, which can be used to understand how rape culture and violence towards women come to operate within gaming culture.

Directing the focus towards patriarchy and how it operates in society, I use Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* (1989). Beauvoir discusses the ways in which women in society have come to be "Other," in that men are the standard and women the outlier. When speaking of the relation between men and women and how they are perceived in society Beauvoir notes that "She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (p. 6). Other, in many cases means less than the standard in society. This is something that manifests

in many aspects of society today, one of which being the gaming world; this can be identified both in the ways in which males and females are portrayed within game content, as well as how women are treated in the gaming world as players, game designers, and critics. This inherent otherness of women in a predominately male world helps to frame the ways women are treated in the gaming world, particularly when looking at the violence and harassment that is perpetuated.

To narrow the focus on how patriarchy works within gaming culture, I also examine the ways masculinity operates within this sphere. One specific concept that will help guide this work is what is known as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity has helped to guide the way we think about and study masculinity since the early 1980s and has often been understood as "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allow men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Not only do hegemonic masculinities work to oppress women and femininity, but also masculinities that do not fit the socially valued hegemonic masculinities. To this point, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that "the concept of hegemonic masculinity presumes the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities" (p. 846). Hegemonic masculinity includes aspects of masculinity such as constant strength, both physical and emotional, and dominance over every situation, something that does not fit all or even many men in real-life. Indeed, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that:

> Hegemonic masculinity need not be the commonest pattern in the everyday lives of boys and men. Rather, hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g., professional sports stars), symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them (p. 846).

While most men and boys do not live up to hegemonic masculinity within our society, it is very much the standard in which masculinity and manhood are measured. The importance of hegemonic masculinity and the pressure that is placed on men and boys to enact this standard leads to hypermasculinity, as discussed by Salter and Blodgett (2012), in that there is an overemphasis of embodying highly masculine characteristics while rejecting femininity, violently if necessary. Thus, boys and men are more likely to take on hypermasculine attitudes in an attempt to live up to hegemonic masculine ideals. This framework will help understand the ways in which men behave within the gaming world, both in the ways masculinity is presented to players during in-game content, and in the ways men exert their masculinity while interacting with other players in online formats.

A related view of masculinity and violence comes from the work *Angry White Men* (2013) by Michael Kimmel. Kimmel discusses what he refers to as "aggrieved entitlement" in which men feel entitled to the dominance they have held within society. Kimmel notes that "When threatened, that sense of entitlement, of proprietorship, can be manipulated into an enraged protectionism, a sense that the threat to 'us' is internal, those undeserving others who want to take for themselves what we have rightfully earned" (2013, p. 31). This relates to online gaming in that, as Wu mentioned, men often feel that gaming is their "turf" and to have it be invaded or questioned by women is perceived as threatening the sense of entitlement men have over this space, thus creating rage and feelings of injustice. This aggrieved entitlement also links to the concept of hypermasculinity in that, not only can a violent or aggressive response be viewed as overly-masculine, but also that the threat to this masculine domain is women or femininity. The societal emphasis on hypermasculinity and devaluing of femininity places traditionally masculine men in a higher position on the social hierarchy, which fosters a sense of entitlement to masculine

domains, such as the world of video gaming. It stands to reason, that women entering this hypermasculine sphere would then be perceived a threat to males' sense of entitlement to that space.

In addition to discussing the ways in which rage manifests itself through a sense of aggrieved entitlement, Kimmel also discusses the ways anger exists in men's entertainment. Kimmel (2010) argues that men, especially younger men, who engage in various forms of media, including playing video games, are doing so in an attempt to escape their "emasculating lives," and "what they think of as the burdens of adult masculinity" (p. 169). This argument stems from a study Kimmel conducted in which he interviewed nearly 400 young, college-age men to understand what Kimmel refers to as "Guyland" or a period of time in which many men navigate the space between adolescence and adulthood. Kimmel argues that this time period of roughly a decade in a young man's life can be beneficial in many ways in learning how to grow up, yet there is the negative and disturbing side that is fraught with violence and rampant hypermasculinity. Focusing specifically on how men Guyland interact with media, Kimmel argues that entertainment become a place for men to act "like men," which often means in a non-politically-correct manner. In fact, many men Kimmel interview state that they enjoy forms of entertainment such as violent video games because they don't have to worry about being PC. Kimmel argues that

> All their macho blustering about being proudly not PC is belied by the fact that most of them wouldn't dream of expressing such blatantly racist and sexist opinions in the company of women, for example, or in the presence of a person of color, or in front of their parents or teachers (2010, p. 171).

This conclusion that men assert their masculinity in ways they may not in everyday life through entertainment clarifies why some men behave in violent and misogynistic ways when they enter the realm of online gaming.

Past Research

The world of video games consists of many interworking parts, from the industry that creates the games, to the game content, as well as the loyal fan bases. In this thesis, I focus on online gaming communities to understand the ways people interact with each other in these spaces. While this work focuses primarily on gaming communities rather than in-game content, it is important to look at the ways in which males and females are portrayed in video games to understand how gender operates in gaming. One work that looks at gender portrayal in video games is "Sex, Lies, and Video Games: The Portrayal of Male and Female Characters on Video Game Covers" by Melinda C.R. Burgess, Steven Paul Stermer, and Stephen R. Burgess (2007). In this piece, Burgess, Stermer, and Burgess examined the portrayals of gendered characters on video game covers to understand how men and women are represented differently in video games. To do this, the authors examined 225 video game covers for the Xbox, PlayStation 2, and Nintendo GameCube consoles to determine the frequency and context of character representation within these images. It was found that of the 173 covers that contained human characters, 90.2% of covers featured men, while only 42.7% featured women, suggesting that women are underrepresented in the gaming world. Similarly, men were over 5 times more likely to be portrayed in an active role, suggesting male characters are an integral part of gameplay while women were more likely to be displayed in passive or ornamental roles. Finally, it was found that women were portrayed as sexually objectified in 42.3% of the time, while male characters were only objectified 5.3% of the time. This indicates that video games work to perpetuate stereotypes

that create a hierarchy between men and women. This hierarchy exists within the larger video gaming world, which is noted by the fact that women in gaming communities as well as the gaming industry continue to receive threats of violence.

One of the stereotypes that is often perpetuated by video games is women as sex objects, which is something that can be observed not only on covers of video games, but also in the ways these video games are marketed. This concept is briefly explored in "Big Breasts and Bad Guys: Depictions of Gender and Race in Video Games," by Charles Dickerman, Jeff Christensen, and Stella Beatriz Kerl-McClain (2008). In this piece, the authors note that, for many video games that have been marketed in the recent past, female nudity or sexual innuendo is often used to sell to their target market regardless of if the game play itself features such nudity or sexuality. Not only does this show that women in video games are often used solely for the purpose of being sexual objects to sell to their target audience, it also shows that the target audience for these video games is intended to be heterosexual males who most likely also view women as sexual objects. This works to further the notion that the gaming world is for men, thus making women who attempt to enter this world in a capacity other than providing sexual gratification for men, they are inherently "other" and are often not welcomed.

Dickerman, Christensen, and Kerl-McClain also look at the ways in which gender and race have been portrayed in in-game content, and important one to note being the game known as "Custer's Revenge" or "Westward Ho," which was released in 1982 for the Atari 2600 console. Dickerman et.al. note that, in this game, "To score points, the player needed to dodge arrows and make it towards the woman. Upon reaching the tied-up woman, the character would then have intercourse with her" (2008, p.24). While this game did receive criticism from Women's and Native American groups, the release of a game that simulates rape on such a well-known and

15

loved console such as the Atari 2600 suggests that the widespread acceptance of rape and violence towards women in the gaming community and industry is nothing new.

Another piece that looks at the ways in which gender is portrayed in in-game content is "Shirts vs. Skins: Clothing as an Indicator of Gender Role Stereotyping in Video Games" by Berrin Beasley and Tracy Collins Standley (2002). This piece seeks to understand the ways in which clothing plays into gender in video games. The study examined 47 games from the Nintendo 64 as well as PlayStation consoles to examine how clothing differed between gendered video game characters. It was found that, not only did video games simply favor male characters with only 13.74% of coded characters being female, but they also found that female characters showed more skin than male characters a majority of the time when looking at the categories for sleeve length and neckline. Beasley and Standley conclude that, for the major game consoles of the time, women were underrepresented and highly sexualized when compared to male or gender ambiguous characters, suggesting that video games help to uphold and recreated gendered stereotypes. The objectification of female characters through hypersexualization leads to inequalities within gaming communities by creating inherent differences between male and female gamers.

One of the most well-known portrayals of a female character in video games is the character known as Lara Croft from the Tomb Raider franchise. Maja Mikula looks in depth into this character and her portrayal in her work titled "Gender and Videogames: The political valency of Lara Croft*" (2003). When it comes to female video game characters, Lara Croft is both well-known and unique because she breaks feminine stereotypes by being intelligent, independent, and strong, yet she also embodies what many would call an objectified fantasy in that she has a tiny waist, curvy legs, and infamously large breasts. This article works to highlight the feminist debate

16

that surrounds this popular character and her creation that was spawned by a male in a patriarchal industry. Mikula looks at the ways in which feminists and gamers alike attempt to make sense of this character who manages to embody multiple gender roles at once. Mikula highlights that to deal with this discrepancy, many gamers on forums discuss the sexuality or in some cases homosexuality of the character in order to make her fit into some defined role within the gendered world. The discussions that exist on these forums theorize about the ambiguous nature of Croft's sexual and gender identities, some arguing that, in a hypothetical world in which Croft retires from her adventures that she would take on more traditionally feminine roles such as being a housewife. Others theorize that Croft exhibits characteristics more often associated with homosexuality, particularly her breaking away from common gender roles. Arguably, regardless of what people believe would happen in Croft's hypothetical sex life, it is still possible to see that there are those in the gaming world who are attempting to either place Croft within the confines of traditional gender roles, or explain away her resistance to them by claiming she is homosexual. Either way, the fixation on Croft's identities works to show how women in the gaming world are often highly sexualized.

Similar to the ways in which it is difficult to ignore the portrayal of male and female characters in video games, it is also important to look at the ways that video games affect beliefs and attitudes of those playing them in order to further study how video gaming communities work as a culture. One piece that looks at this is "Violence Against Women in Video Games: A Prequel or Sequel to Rape Myth Acceptance?" by Victoria Simpson Beck, Stephanie Boys, Christopher Rose, and Eric Beck (2012). This piece looks at the ways media sources, including video games, can foster negative views towards women which can then turn to gender violence. Beck et.al. look at how many video games portray women as oversexualized and/or the victims of violence, and

are rarely the heroines of a story. Using a four-group experimental design, the authors studied whether the observation and participation in video games in which women are highly sexualized or victims of violence contributed to participants having a higher level of rape-supportive attitudes. Tests found that, for the entire population of the study, there was not a significant correlation between exposure to violent and sexist video games and negative attitudes towards women. That being said, it was found that when looking at whether exposure to video games increased rape myth acceptance among participants, it was found that there was a statistically significant increase of rape myth acceptance among men, but not women. Beck et.al. conclude that this finding helps to legitimize previous studies that found that sexual violence in media tends to lower the rate of sympathy towards women for male viewers. It is possible to see this lack of sympathy and negative attitudes towards women that culminate in rape myth acceptance permeate into gaming communities when looking at the ways female game designers have been attacked.

As with all forms of media, video games reflect and perpetuate attitudes and ideology within a society. This is something that begins at our earliest exposure to media, which typically occurs in childhood. One piece that focuses on the effects of video games on the attitudes towards women held by children is *Video kids: Making sense of Nintendo* by Eugene F. Provenzo (1991). This book is an early example of video game studies in his attempt to understand how video games come to impact the lives of the children who spend a large amount of their time playing them. Provenzo argues that video games show us what is valued within our society. When discussing the ways in which gender plays into the gaming world, Provenzo takes a critical stance towards the ways in which women are portrayed, arguing that gendered stereotypes are reinforced through gameplay as well as on game covers. He argues that in the few times that women are shown within video games they are often portrayed as victims or trophies, promoting the idea that

women are weaker than men and need protection. This amplifies these gender stereotypes that are then internalized by children and echoed back. Provenzo argues that this biased behavior escapes public scrutiny partly due to the fact that games at the time were often aimed towards children while parents remain relatively oblivious to the content of the games, as well as the fact that these games take place in the private sector. With video games now being market to adults and increasingly taking place outside of the private sector in online formats, it is important to look at Provenzo's arguments in this new context to understand how attitudes towards women are shaped in the gaming world.

An additional view of the ways video games affect the attitudes held by children about men and women comes from *Playing with power in movies, television, and video games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* by Marsha Kinder (1991). This book takes on a wide range of media topics to understand the ways in which children are socialized through media such as movies, television, and video games. While borrowing heavily from Althusser's understanding of ideology, Kinder argues that forms of media have come to shape the way we form our perceived reality, thus in themselves becoming an ideological state apparatus. When looking particularly at video games and gender, Kinder argues that there has been what she refers to as an oedipalization of video games, in that they are marketed to those with an "intense fear of castration" (101). Put another way, video games are marketed to boys to be used as an outlet for the fear they have of not measuring up to societal standards of masculinity, as well as a place to enact this role of hypermasculinity through the virtual world. This arguably reinforces the societal value of hypermasculinity. Kinder argues that it is because of this marketing at an early age that helps to solidify gender roles at an early age, as many kindergarten age children recognized that video games were meant for boys and Barbies were meant for girls. This creates a sense that

female gamers are "others" who do not belong and are more likely to be harassed in gaming culture.

A more recent take on how video games impact gender socialization comes from Valerie Walkerdine in her work *Children, gender, video games: Towards a relational approach to multimedia* (2007). This piece focuses on the ways in which video games work as an integral part of cultural development for many in the United States. According to Walkerdine, video games serve as a medium of meaning making in coming to understand what it means to be a gamer in today's society. To attain a better understanding of how children come to make meaning through video games, Walkerdine conducted a study in which she observed children playing games together and what meanings and perceived realities were constructed through this gameplay as well as conducting interviews with the parents of participants to get a sense of how media is being taken in daily. Walkerdine focuses first and foremost on the ways in which games impact masculinity and femininity as well as how these are regulated through gameplay. Walkerdine argues that masculinity is often presented as an achievement in video games, by getting the bigger guns, the higher points, and exuding all that is considered masculine. It is through these actions that femininity is framed as an Other to be distanced from and ashamed or afraid of if it intrudes upon masculinity. This is seen particularly when females enter the gaming world, as it is assumed that they will be unskilled in the game, thus promoting the idea that females are less than in this arena of child socialization. Walkerdine also looks at the ways in which violence within video games comes to promote the idea of hypermasculinity in which the male confronts problems with his fists while the female is either the victim of violence or the trophy to be won through violence.

While there has been a fair amount of academic work on femininity and masculinity within video game content and the effects this has on gamers, especially children, there is little

done on actual instances of violence and harassment towards women that take place within the gaming world every day. One work that does focus on a specific instance of this is "The position of women in video game culture: Perez and Day's Twitter Incident" by Sian Tomkinson and Tauel Harper (2015). This article looks at the backlash that can occur when women do enter the male dominated world of video gaming. Tomkinson and Harper take a critical look at a Twitter incident that occurred between gaming journalist Ryan Perez and video game celebrity Felicia Day when Perez attacked Day for the value of her work, referring to Day as nothing more than a "glorified booth babe." Tomkinson and Harper evaluate the ways in which gender has played a part in the video gaming community and the fact that women have encountered many obstacles in the past two decades. It is with this historic context that Tomkinson and Harper attempt to understand the status of women within the gaming world. They argue that the incident between Perez and Day, to many, seem to be a breaking point because Perez was fired from his job as a journalist shortly after his comments, something that may not have happened had the attitudes towards women not been shifting within the gaming community. Despite this, Tomkinson and Harper argue that there is still as significant way to go before the status of women in the gaming world is elevated to that of men for a few reasons, one of which being the continue gender disparity between men and women in the gaming industry. Tomkinson and Harper also discuss how the Perez/Day incident can be understood less as a triumph for women, and more of an outlet for people to no longer feel guilty about the position of women because Perez got what he deserved. Despite this attitude that is held by many, Tomkinson and Harper are skeptical, noting that Perez was able to find work within the industry quickly, suggesting that there is a long way to go in closing the gender gap in the gaming world.

Another work that focuses on a specific instance of harassment as well as hypermasculinity in gaming culture is "Hypermasculinity & Dickwolves: The Contentious Role of Women in the New Gaming Public," by Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett (2012). The event, known as the Dickwolves incident, caused "A particularly charged debate about gender representation within gaming [which] occurred in 2010 when a dominant gaming website [Pennyarcade] came under attack for making rape jokes with ramifications across the community" (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 405). These rape jokes came in the form of a comic centered around a beast that "is described as having phalli instead of limb" (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 405) and suggested that these creatures would then rape other characters. Protest to these rape jokes was met with sarcasm and retaliation from the creators of the web-series as well as others within the community, creating a sense of not having a safe space within the gaming community for those who spoke out against the jokes. Women are often silenced within the gaming community and "This rhetoric and silencing of marginalized voices is part of a larger trend in the hardcore gaming public" (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 411). This act of silencing women and rejecting femininity reflects hypermasculinity's presence within gaming culture. Salter and Blodgett define hypermasculinity as "an overemphasis upon masculine-gendered physical traits and/or behavioral patterns, particularly dismissal or hostility towards feminine displays" (Salter & Blodgett, 2012, p. 402). This emphasis on masculine displays and hostility towards feminine ones is important in understanding the violence and dismissal towards women in gaming culture that occur not only in well known cases such as this one, but also in the everyday interactions that take place between gamers online.

One look into how these incidences occur comes from the work of Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw titled "A Conspiracy of Fishes, or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying About

#GamerGate and Embrace Hegemonic Masculinity" (2015). In this work, Chess and Shaw discuss a case of what happens when the world of academia and gaming come together. At an academic conference in August 2014, Chess and Shaw hosted a Fishbowl format discussion centered primarily around feminism and gaming, during which a public Google Doc was created to take notes on the proceeding. This document was found by those who believe there is a conspiracy between what are referred to as Social Justice Warriors (SJWs), journalists, feminists, and even the government aimed at destroying the gamer identity and pushing a feminist agenda into gaming, a group Chess and Shaw refer to as "GamerGaters." The document was then used as "proof" that not only was this conspiracy real between people such as Zoe Quinn and Anita Sarkeesian, but that governmentally funded academics were in on it as well. While highlighting a misunderstanding of the amount of funding provided to the social sciences, Chess and Shaw also point out that there is something to be learned from these conspiracy theories. Chess and Shaw point out that conspiracy theories often stem from persecution and oppression; in this case, they argue that it is useful to look at the "combination of *perceived* persecution and an examination of the anxieties that the conspiracy is articulating" (2015). One of these anxieties is the fact gamers often feel they must defend gaming from those in academia who site video games as a source of violence and deviant behavior. Another anxiety can also be looked at connecting back to Kimmel's work regarding aggrieved entitlement, in that the base of the gaming industry is being shifted from largely male players to a more egalitarian space, which has the effect of feeling like oppression to those who previously dominated. This fear and anger at this change leads to the varying conspiracy theories that are being promoted and spread by GamerGaters, contributing to the harassment received by women such as Zoe Quinn and Anita Sarkeesian.

One way of understanding gaming culture and the attitudes that exist in this realm is to look at the varying ways people experience gaming based on their gender. Pam Royse, Joon Lee, Baasanjav Undrahbuyan, Mark Hopson, and Mia Consalvo examined the different ways women experience games and gaming culture in their work "Women and Games: Technologies of the Gendered Self" (2007). In this work, Royse et. al. found that, while not all female experiences with gaming can be neatly sorted, there was a pattern in which women could be placed in one of three categories: power gamers, moderate gamers, and non-gamers. Women in each of these categories had different experiences with how technology and gender meshed in their day-to-day lives. Royse et.al. describe power players as those who "place high importance on gaming and engage in it frequently" (563). It is important to note that, in the gaming population as a whole, men are more likely to be placed in this category. However, the women who can be considered power gamers are unsurprisingly those who are more comfortable with gaming technology as well as game themes. These women are more likely to play a wide range of games including those that feature violence, and do so with a sense of competitiveness. Female power gamers are also more likely to see gaming as a way to play with gender, by enacting masculine characteristics such as violence, yet also asserting their femininity when they can choose female avatars to play, mixing masculine strength with feminine bodies and sexuality. Moderate gamers are those more likely to view gaming as an escape from real life, in which they can control the computer environment. Women in this category were more likely to play game genres such as role playing games (RPGs), puzzle, and strategy games and reject hyper-violent games such as first-person shooters (FPS). While these women play video games, which is often considered a masculine activity, they are still more likely to separate games for men and games for women, as well as view gaming as a more male dominated space. Non-gamers, as the name implies, are those who reject games and

gaming culture entirely, most considering it a waste of time. Women in this category view it almost entirely as a male space and chose to spend their time in more traditionally feminine roles. While this article is important in showing that the interactions that women have with gaming technology and how gender plays into these interactions varies greatly, I would also argue that this article shows the ways in which women contribute to the reproduction of sexist ideals within gaming. Particularly looking at the non-gamers and the moderate gamers, we can see that women, while consciously or not, work to reinforce traditional gender roles that make gaming culture a male dominated space by perpetuating the distinction between male and female spaces in technology. Even female power gamers can be seen as contributing to the reproduction of these ideals in that, while they do create a female presence that challenges the notion of gaming, especially violent gaming, as being a male space, they still express some level of comfort with the hypersexualization of women in games. That being said, female power gamers are more likely to work against traditional gender roles in gaming as they play with gender and move against the gender binary in this traditionally masculine space.

Gender also plays a significant part in how people identify within gaming communities, as discussed by Adrienne Shaw (2011) in her work titled "Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity." Focusing specifically on Shaw's findings regrading gender and gamer identity, it was discovered that women were far less likely to identify as "gamers" than the men who had been interviewed. Shaw notes that, in this study she is focusing not on how people are labeled (e.g. people who simply play video games with any frequency are often labeled gamers, especially by marketing groups), but rather Shaw is focusing on those who take on the identity of gamer for themselves, whatever that may mean to them. Women gave multiple reasons for not identifying as a "gamer" including lack of experience, not enough time playing, and not

enough money spent on games. This shows that, even though all of the women interviewed do play video games, many still felt that they could not take on the identity of gamer which suggests that they do not feel they have a place in gaming culture, while their male counterparts were far more likely to feel comfortable taking part in gaming culture and self-identifying as gamers. These feelings that are engrained in women arguably contribute to gaming culture being heavily male oriented in that women do not make themselves visible in these spaces, thus perpetuating the belief that gaming is for boys and men.

While taking a slightly different approach than Royse et.al. and Shaw, Benjamin Paaßen, Thekla Morgenroth, and Michelle Stratemeyer (2016) also look at what it means to be a gamer, particularly looking at "gamer" as a label and stereotype in their work "What is a True Gamer? The Male Gamer Stereotype and the Marginalization of Women in Video Game Culture." This work highlights the fact that, while there has been a significant increase in the number of women playing video games, the stereotype of a "gamer" is still very much male. Paaßen, Morgenroth, and Stratemeyer note that, while the accuracy of this stereotype depends largely on how one defines a "gamer" based on criteria such as time spent playing games and skill, for the most part the stereotype that gamers are predominately men is false. The question then becomes, why does this stereotype persist? The authors argue that this is largely due to the lack of visibility for women in gaming. This includes visibility of female gamers themselves (women are far more likely to hide their gender by not using mics during game play) as well as the lack of visible women in the gaming industry. The perpetuation of the male gamer stereotype comes with consequences that work to marginalize women in gaming culture, particularly in that the lack of visibility for women in gaming means women are more likely to feel that they do not fit in, or do not take on the gamer identity. Due to the continued male gamer stereotype, some women even

avoid gaming altogether or only to certain genres of games that are perceived as being more suited for women, thus reinforcing both traditional gender roles as well as the male gamer stereotype. The male gamer stereotype also feeds back into game marketing, as companies are more likely to target this stereotypical group with more violence and hypersexualization of female characters. Arguably, the male gamer stereotype and the continued marginalization of female game players affects the perception of gaming culture as being by and for men, resulting in continued violence and harassment towards women in what are largely considered male gaming spaces.

While the discussion of video game content, its effects on gamers, the more well-known and publicized incidences of gender-based harassment in the gaming world, as well as gamer identity are important and need to be discussed more fully, one obvious gap in the academic literature is looking at the rape culture and violence towards women that occurs every day within online-gaming culture, not simply the instances that are widely publicized such as GamerGate. A commenter on an article by Briana Wu discussing the problems of GamerGate noted that this was no longer an issue, citing an article claiming that GamerGate was over. Yet the website known as fatsluttyorugly.com has an archive of hundreds of messages received from female gamers that contain harassment ranging from simple penis emojis to actual threats of rape and violence; this proves that violence and harassment towards women continues to be an issue in the gaming world, despite lack of media coverage. This research set out to understand the gaming culture and how it has led to the continuation of violence directed towards women who enter this virtual realm. This was completed by attempting to answer the research questions: In what ways do everyday women experience violence in gaming through interactions with other players? How do online spaces within gaming culture produce and reproduce misogynistic and hypermasculine

ideals that contribute to rape culture? In what ways do online spaces work to combat the

production and reproduction of such ideals?

METHODS

For this research, I used content analysis to better understand the experiences of female gamers. Content analysis can be described as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Specifically, this research will employ what is known as directed content analysis, which uses "existing theory or prior research," to begin "identifying key concepts or variables as initial coding categories" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). Using theoretical perspectives from Althusser, Beauvoir, Mannheim, Connell, and Kimmel as a guide, this thesis worked to find patterns of behavior in the gaming world, particularly looking at behaviors of violence and sexual aggression towards women in online gaming communities. This was completed by analyzing five different sources of data found on the internet: The website known as "fatuglyorslutty.com," videos of game play found on YouTube that specifically highlight the phenomenon of "rape mods," comment threads that can be found on both fatuglyorslutty.com and YouTube, along with message boards relating to rape culture in gaming. In the following sections, I further describe the data that was used, as well as my strategies for sampling and analysis of said data.

Data

One source of data that can be looked at when attempting to understand the experiences of female gamers in a male dominated arena is messages that women receive from men during and after gameplay. The website known as "fatuglyorslutty.com" works to expose these messages by posting them for all to see. The inspiration for the site is the common theme that occurs in messages to female gamers, that because they go against the perceived societal expectation for women and like video games, they must be fat, ugly, or slutty. The "about" section of this website

29

notes that "Some players like to send creepy, disturbing, insulting, degrading and/or just plain rude messages to other online players, usually women," and that the goal of this website is to laugh at rather than get offended by these messages. In addition to serving a humorous purpose, the creators also note that "If having these messages posted online makes someone think twice about writing and sending a detailed description of their genitals, great!" (2011). This site actively posted between January 2011 and October 2013, accumulating 472 messages received by mostly female gamers ranging from the profane to the violent. These messages were organized by the website using 15 categories: *Crudely creative, death threats, fat, jealous, much?, jeepers creepers, lewd proposals, pen15 club, repeat offender, sandwich making 101, slutty, Stepford mentality, ugly, unprovoked rage, wait, what?, and X-rated.*

Another piece of data that was utilized is YouTube videos, specifically those depicting what is known as a "rape mod." Mods, or modifications, are created by users and allow players to alter game play and redefine what is possible in a video game (Letzter 2015). This can be used to change the appearance of characters to commonly known figures in popular culture, or in the case of one mod that gained significant popularity, players are able to virtually rape other players (Grandoni 2014). Mods can be downloaded onto a console or PC in what are known as mod menus, which are a collection of mods created by mod developers. Mods with the same name, such as the rape mod, can look slightly different depending on the mod menu it comes from. The use of the rape mod as well as recording the incidents gained popularity and involved characters controlled by online players holding down and pelvic thrusting towards the characters of other online players. The players that fall victim to this mod are often unable to move and simply have to wait for this exchange to end to resume game play. A search through YouTube for rape mods in video games garnered over 115,000 results, many showing this phenomenon occurring in game

30

play. While these range in games as seemingly benign as Minecraft to the violent side with Mortal Kombat X, the bulk of these videos show this mod occurring in the game known as Grand Theft Auto 5 (V) which is the latest installment of the Grand Theft Auto series. Grand Theft Auto games, though extremely popular with fans, have long since been a source of controversy with the highly violent as well as sexual nature of the games (Lejacq 2013). While the rape mods were not developed or sanctioned by the creators of Grand Theft Auto, it seems that the graphic nature of the games have encouraged players to further push the boundaries of what is acceptable in gaming. Despite efforts made by the game company to eliminate all mods including the controversial rape mod, tech savvy players were able to work around these efforts to continue using mods, including raping other players.

In addition to the YouTube videos and Fat, Ugly or Slutty posts themselves, I also examined the comment sections for the posts and videos in my analysis. Comment sections allow users of a website to interact with others and give their opinions on a piece of media. While these interactions allow for dialogue and the expression of different views, comment sections have long since been a site of frustration for many who disagree and argue with others in these forums. The existence and perpetuation of rape culture has been evident in comment sections for a long time, something that caught the attention of researchers who examined the dialogue that took place on news articles relating to rape. Researchers found that of the over 4000 comments they studied on 52 different rape-related news articles, over 25% of them contained victim-blaming statements (Kingkade 2016). While some of these statements may be the work of what are known as "trolls" or "a person who intentionally antagonizes others online by posting inflammatory, irrelevant, or offensive comments or other disruptive content," (Merriam-Webster) these comments still work to perpetuate the acceptance of rape myths. Examining the comment sections of posts on

fatuglyorslutty.com rape mod videos allows for a look into how this phenomenon translates into the gaming world.

Finally, I also examined posts made on message boards found throughout the gaming community. Many game-centered websites incorporate what are known as message boards, which allow users to post different topics such as questions or comments about a game and to have other users comment on and have a conversation revolving around the initial topic. These are important sites in gaming culture because they allow gamers from all over the world and with different backgrounds to interact with one another and allow their voices to be heard. Similar to the comment sections for YouTube videos and Fatuglyorslutty.com, the anonymity of the message boards do allow for volatile interactions to occur, yet it is important to look at these spaces in order to get a sense of how those in gaming communities interact with one another and what dominant ideologies are present in gaming culture.

Sample

Fat Ugly or Slutty

For the purpose of gathering posts found on fatuglyorsluty.com to analyze, I employed a random sampling method to get a representative sample of the content in the messages found on this site. I began by looking at the ninth newest post (a number randomly selected by a colleague) and proceeded to gather ever fifth post going from newest to oldest. Occasionally the selected post was a blog post from the staff of the site or an audio message, in these cases I chose the next oldest message to analyze. This process was repeated until 100 messages were gathered. This number of posts allows for a wide range of content, while avoiding oversaturation. Data saturation occurs "when there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to

obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible" (Fusch and Ness, 2015, p. 1408).

Fatuglyorslutty.com Comments

The next source of data that I looked at was the comment sections that were present on the posts from fatuglyorslutty.com that I analyzed. I began by gathering every comment from the messages I examined through the use of screen shots. I then examined all of the comments on the first post, and continuing this way until I reached saturation. Due to the fact that many of the users commented on multiple posts, and often expressed similar views on each, I was able to reach the point saturation after examining the comments on 40 out of the 100 messages analyzed. This included 357 comments from a variety of users. By analyzing the comments from 40 of the posts, I was able to get a sense of how people responded to different types of messages, from the vulgar to the outright violent, which allowed different reactions to be examined and coded.

YouTube Videos

To narrow down the overwhelming number of videos on YouTube related to rape mods, I used what is known as initial sampling to define the criteria for what videos will be analyzed (Charmaz 2014). For this work, I focused specifically on videos that take place in the game Grand Theft Auto V because the bulk of rape mod videos appear to revolve around this game. This was done using the search term "rape mods GTA 5." Additionally, I limited the duration of the videos analyzed to between 2 and 10 minutes. I limited the videos to this timeframe because videos of game play can range significantly, and some longer videos (some going as long as one to two hours) that may come up in the search only contain a small amount of relevant data. One problem that arises with this category is that some videos have "rape mod" in their title, yet they have absolutely no mention or images of this phenomenon. This may be in an attempt to capture

attention to get more views. For this study, videos that do not contain any content related to rape mods, despite titles suggesting otherwise, were not analyzed.

When selecting which videos to analyze, I used the filter "most relevant" to aid in avoiding content that does not contain useful data. To gain a thorough understanding of the rape mod phenomenon and how it plays out in YouTube videos, I selected 20 videos to analyze. To complete this, I viewed the first 20 videos that appear with this search that fit into the allotted time. After viewing these videos, those that did not discuss or show rape mods were thrown out and new videos were chosen starting from where the selection process left off. The use of 20 videos allowed for a range of data, while just reaching the point of saturation in which no new data was being found.

YouTube Video Comments

Once videos were selected to analyze, I also examine the comments that went along with each video. Since videos can range in the number of comments, I looked specifically at those that mention or are about the rape mods. I did this to filter out extraneous comments such as those that reference a different part of the video or are requests for other players to "add" them to their gaming circles. This allowed more time to focus on data relevant to this research rather than attempting to code all comments or a portion of them found through random sampling. With this method, I selected and examined 262 comments that were found throughout the 20 videos.

Message Boards

Finally, in order to further understand the interactions that occur between gamers in online formats, I examined comments found on message boards. To more accurately compare the ways those in gaming communities interact with each other across varying online spaces, I only looked at message boards that discussed the use of the rape mod, particularly in Grand Theft Auto V.

This way, I was able to compare how interactions differed between message boards and sites such as the YouTube comment sections. To do this, I found message boards that discuss the topic of rape mods on three different gaming sites: the support page for Rockstar games (the company that makes the Grand Theft Auto Series), GTAForum.com, and Gamefaq.com. All together I examined 55 comments from across the three sites, 16 from Rockstar, 21 from GTAForum.com, and 18 from Gamefaq.com. This allowed me to get a range of reactions, while reaching the point of saturation.

Analysis

For this study, I conducted three cycles of coding to analyze the data collected. To begin, for all five forms of data collected I used what is known as "descriptive coding." Descriptive coding "Assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase…the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 387). This form of coding was particularly helpful in gaining a sense of patterns that emerge within each data category. I also used what is known as in vivo coding in which I directly quoted language used in the data (Saldaña, 2016). This was helpful in cases where attitudes and beliefs were best reflected in the language used, such as direct insults which will be discussed more later. For the first cycle of coding, I coded everything that was occurring within the data, resulting in a large number of unique codes for each source of data. When looking at the textual data, I highlighted the parts of the data that correspond with the codes using the qualitative coding software Atlas TI. Also in Atlas TI, I was also able to examine the visual and audio data found in the YouTube videos. I was able to separate the videos into different sections in order to code what was happening in each, both visually as well as through audio.

After the initial coding, I went back through the codes and was able to merge some that were similar, or those that expressed the same thing but I simply phrased differently. I was also able to eliminate outliers that only occurred once and did not reflect other themes found within the data. I also eliminated those that had no relevance to the topic at hand. This occurred often in the comment data, particularly the comment section on fatuglyorslutty.com due to the fact that users would begin to have conversations that strayed from the topic at hand. While fascinating, these codes often had nothing to do with the rest of the data and were thus removed from analysis.

Once I completed the first two cycle of coding, I then used what is known as "pattern coding" to complete the final coding cycle. Pattern coding "is a way of grouping [initial codes] into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 317). Due to the amount of data and codes that were generated, this strategy was particularly helpful in transforming the codes into more manageable units of analysis (Saldaña 2016). Reorganizing codes into smaller themes or categories was also beneficial in allowing me to further review the codes used, as well as highlight recurring themes that were not necessarily clear simply by looking at the codes themselves. These categories helped to guide further discussion on this topic as well as understand what themes cut across varying aspects of gaming culture.

This method was also useful in ensuring the validity of the analysis as it provides a triangulation of data. Triangulation refers to "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). By collecting data from multiple sources and formats, I was able compare the codes that emerge which allowed me to determine when themes occur across different aspects of gaming culture, rather than existing as an isolated phenomenon. This triangulation of data brings validity to conclusions that I draw from my initial coding and ensure my results are not skewed by inconsistent data.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Using content analysis as discussed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) I was able to code and analyze each source of data. For each source of data, I was able to sort the codes into 3 to 5 categories that allowed overarching themes to occur. In the following chapter, I break down each source of data to discuss the themes that emerge as well as the implications and theoretical connections. I begin by looking at the private messages that were featured on fatuglyorslutty.com, followed by an examination of the YouTube videos, the YouTube video comments, message boards, and finally looking at the comments found on fatuglyorslutty.com. An analysis of the data found that, in many online spaces within gaming culture, hypermasculinity and patriarchal ideals found in society were reproduced through the harassment and policing of women in this realm as well as the perpetuation of rape culture and rape myth acceptance. In this way, these spaces can be understood as serving as individual ISAs within a larger context, in that dominant ideologies such as hypermasculinity and misogyny are being perpetuated through violent rhetoric and the silencing of women. That being said, there is also a significant amount of resistance to these ideals found within online gaming culture, suggesting that, while gaming continues to be overwhelmingly masculine, other voices are being heard and dominant ideologies are being challenged within this space.

Private Messages

One virtual space enjoyed by gamers is the private messaging system that can be found on most gaming console networks as well as on PC games. This space allows players from all over the world to communicate, exchange ideas, form both platonic and romantic relationships, and engage in playful banter. Unfortunately, as can be corroborated by the messages found on fatuglyorslutty.com, this banter is not always playful, and in many cases, can be anywhere from

gross and annoying to horrifically violent. In my examination of 100 of these messages, I came up

with 66 unique codes that were used 277 times. After looking at the codes themselves, it was

discovered that most of them fit into one of 5 (occasionally overlapping) categories: Direct

insults, sexualization, entitlement, violence/anger, and misogyny. In the following sections, I will

break down these categories to understand how they operate within this space and contribute to

the production and reproduction of rape culture and misogyny in online gaming communities.

Table 1. Codes, Categories and Frequencies for Fatuglyorslutty.com Posts.

Category	Direct Insults	Sexualization	Entitlement	Violence/Anger	Misogyny
Codes	• "Asshole" (1) • "Bitch" (19) • "Cankles" (1) • "Cunt" (15) • "Dirty Slave" (1) • "Dumb" (8) • "Faggot" (1) • "Hoe" (1) • "Nigger" (1) • "Punk ass" (1) • "Retarded" (2) • "Skank" (1) • "Slag" (2) • "Slut" (3) • "Twat" (2) • "Whore" (4) • Fat (5)	• Reducing people to body parts (3) • Sexual advance (69) • Sexual Demands (7) • Sexual Questions (13) • Sexualization of a Family Member (2)	• Continued Harassment (14) • Entitled to Answer (4) • Pet Name (20) • Unsolicited Communication (16) • Short Game Play Prior to Contact (5)	• "Fuck you" (1) • "Mother Fucker" (1) • "Shut the fuck up" (1) • "Suck Dick" (3) • "You suck" (1) • Death Threat (5) • Homophobia (5) • Racism (2) • Rape Threat/Wish (5) • Stalking Threat (3) • Threat of Assault (5)	• Assume Female Player is menstruating (1) • Assume Male Help (1) • Female Gamers Don't Have Lives (1) • Negative Reaction to Female Gamers (15) • Video Games are Only for Men (3) • Woman's "Place" (2) • "Stupid Girl" (1)

Direct Insults

      To begin, I will examine direct insults that were found within the messages. These codes

consisted of names that the sender of the messages called the recipient, frequently including

vulgar language. Messages that contain insults ranged from simple and hilariously misspelled

such as Figure 1, to more complex multi-message rants that overlapped with other coding
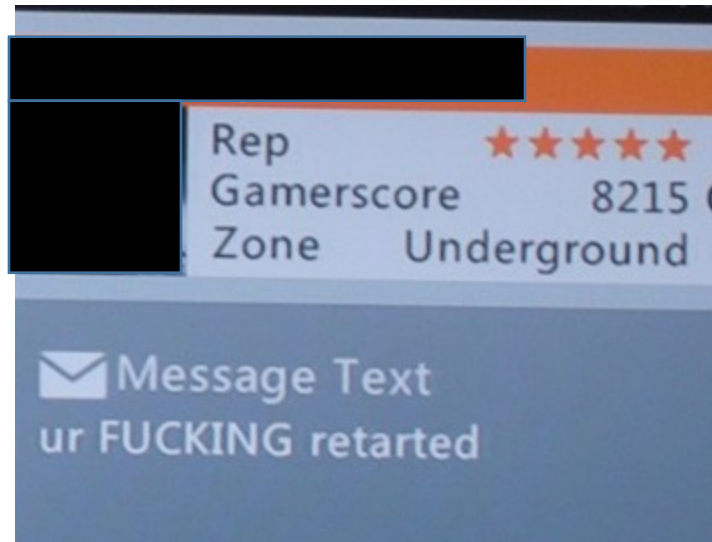
categories such as Figure 2.

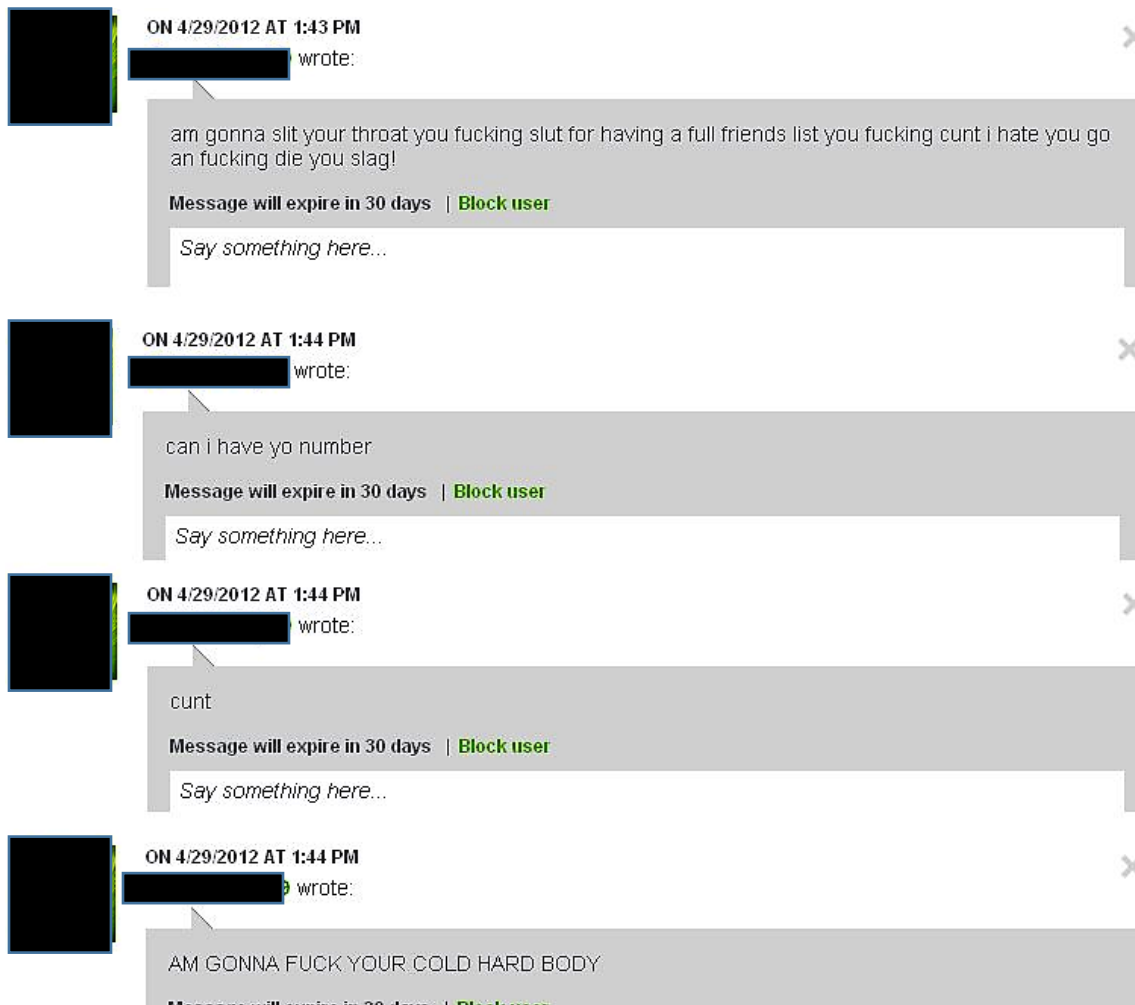Figure 1. Direct Insults Used in Private Messages 1. Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com

Figure 2. Direct Insults Used in Private Messages 2. Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com

This category of codes accounts for over a quarter of the unique codes found in this dataset and were used 75 times (22% of total) throughout the course of the data examination. These codes appeared in 30 of the messages that were reviewed, proving that direct name calling or insults is a prevalent problem in private messages. Of the insults found throughout the messages examined, an overwhelming number revolved around sexist motifs, namely through misogynistic language (such as the use of the word "bitch," "cunt," "twat," etc.) and sexualized insults ("slag," "whore," "slut," etc.) Of the 19 unique codes that made up this category, 10 use language that is either sexualized or misogynistic in nature and were used a total of 36 times in 100 messages. This suggests that these messages take a step beyond what is considered traditional "trash talking" and takes aim specifically on these players because they are (or are perceived to be) women.

One way to understand this phenomenon is through the work of Michel Kimmel (2010), specifically when looking at his discussion of how men use video games as an outlet in which they can act in a non-politically correct (PC) manner. The anonymity of the internet is a great thing when it comes to being able to share one's thoughts and opinions without the fear of persecution, however it also lends itself to people acting in a way and saying things that they never would in their day-to-day lives. Kimmel argues that one reason young men find sanctuary from our PC culture is so they may escape their "emasculating lives," (2010, p. 169) and enact the hypermasculinity that is so valued within our society. Looking at the insults that are received by female players, this makes sense. Most of the insults are ones that sexualize the recipient or use misogynistic language, which reflects the values of hypermasculinity that focuses largely on sexuality as well as the rejection of all things feminine. It is not surprising then, that the direct insult that is used most throughout the messages was "bitch" (found 19 times) followed closely by

"cunt" (found 15 times). Both insults, aside from being highly offensive in general, are misogynistic in nature and the prevalence of them within these messages shows the sexist and hypermasculine attitudes that are held and perpetuated by some within gaming culture. When looking at other direct insults found in these private messages, we can further see the departure from PC culture. While it is difficult to say if a politically correct insult even exists, there are those that result in more societal backlash than others, particularly those that relate to minority groups. Racist, homophobic, and ableist language in addition to misogynistic epithets were found throughout the message, again showing how video games are used as a way for men to escape being politically correct to enact hypermasculine traits.

Sexualization

The next major category of codes that were found within these messages is sexualization. Many messages examined included attempts to engage in some sort of sexual act with the recipient, sometimes without any prior contact. In fact, the code that was used most frequently throughout the messages was "sexual advances" which occurred 57 times throughout 100 messages. This code was used in instances where sexual acts were requested (sexting, performing on camera, sexual acts for video game currency, etc.) as well as when the sender described their genitalia or scenarios they would like to see happen with the message recipient. While it is impossible to tell for all of the messages that included sexual advances, many came without any prior communication between the sender and the recipient according to the person who submitted the message to fatuglyorslutty.com. An example of this is Figure 3 which includes a quote from the person who submitted the message, noting that they had been playing Modern Warfare 3 on PlayStation and had no prior known contact to the person who sent the message.

41

"I was doing a clan ops on MW3 on PSN when I get this random message. No idea if he had played against us or not. He got reported and blocked."
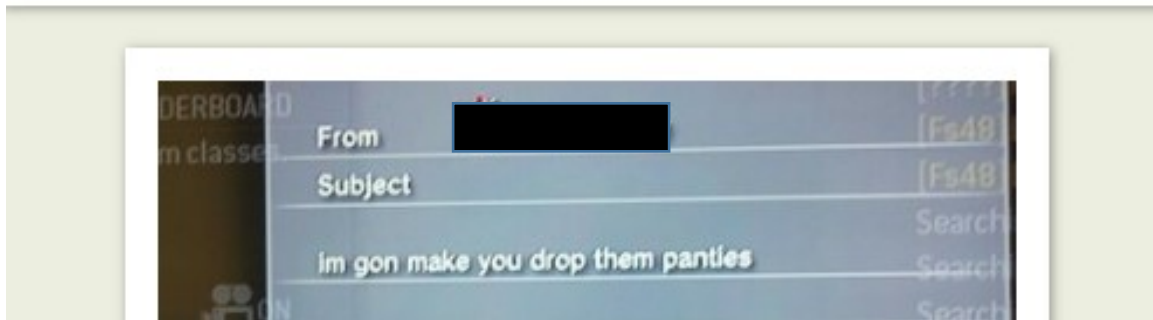

Figure 3. Sexualization in Private Messages. Source: fatuglyorslutty.com

This means that, for several of these sexual advances, they were sent strictly on the basis or belief that the person who received them is a female, suggesting that women in video gaming communities are only there for sexual purposes. Another code that appeared repeatedly in this category is "sexual questions" which occurred 13 times. This code was used when the senders of messages asked the recipients questions that were sexual in nature such as what color underwear they were wearing or the size of their breasts. Arguably, this goes beyond what is considered "normal" trash-talking, in that it specifically degrades women to being sexual objects within this space.

We can understand this theme that emerges within these messages through the work of Simone de Beauvoir and her work *The Second Sex* (1989). De Beauvoir discussed how in society women are considered the "Other" and her existence was always in relation to a man. This transcends into the world of gaming, which can be illustrated through these messages themselves. These messages perpetuate the idea that women are, above all else, sexual objects that are to be seen in relation to what they can do for men. Over half of the messages examined included some

reference to sexual acts that the senders would like to engage in with the recipient, suggesting that women are viewed first in their relation to men rather than as people who engage in video games. In many ways, we can view this inherent otherness of women as being a weapon that is used against women in this realm to make them feel that they do not belong in the world of gaming. Unfortunately, this weapon can be highly effective, which is highlighted by the fact that many of the submitters of messages who provided context to the posts noted how they would avoid gaming or revealing their gender while gaming to evade being sexualized by other players. In this way, messages that work to sexualize female players contribute to the reproduction of this "otherness" as women continue to lack visibility in the gaming world despite the evening numbers of female and male players (Paaßen et al. 2016).

Entitlement

A theme found within the codes that links closely with sexualization is entitlement. These codes focus specifically the message sender feeling entitled to the recipient in some way, often sexually. The most common code in this category is "pet name" which was found 20 times throughout the messages and described instances in which those who send the messages feel entitled to address other players in overly familiar and often belittling ways such as calling women "sweetie," "babe," etc. The use of pet names was often associated with sexual advances as discussed previously. This overly familiar, and in some cases misogynistic, language works to express entitlement in a few ways. First, it shows that men in gaming communities feel a sense of entitlement over women in this space by addressing them in familiar and sexualized ways, usually without prior contact. The second part of entitlement we can see here is the fact that men feel entitled to the gaming space in that they feel they have the authority to address women as

subordinates. By doing so, men can arguably be viewed as expressing dominance in online gaming culture and making women feel less than or disrespected in this space.

Two other prevalent codes that exist within this theme are "continued harassment" (found 14 times) and "entitled to answer" (found 4 times). "Continued harassment" was used when the message recipient noted that the sender continued to send messages with little or no response, or when multiple messages were presented in the post. One could argue here that this is simply the work of internet trolls who enjoy getting a rise out of people for the fun of it, and while this is most likely true, I would also argue that this shows a sense of entitlement to other people as sources of entertainment, especially women in this realm. Often this continued harassment was sexual in nature and involved the sender attempting multiple times to make a sexual advance despite being rejected or ignored by the message recipient, an example of which can be seen in Figure 4. Part of this continued harassment came in the form of the sender feeling entitled to an answer from the recipient, and would occasionally become angry when they were denied, leading to many of the more vulgar direct insults or name calling. In addition to sexualizing women and expressing entitlement to them as sexual objects, these messages (especially those from trolls simply wanting to annoy) work to make women uncomfortable and more likely to leave or be less visible in gaming. This of course shows a sense of entitlement over the gaming world as being masculine or only for men and attempting to police women who enter this space.
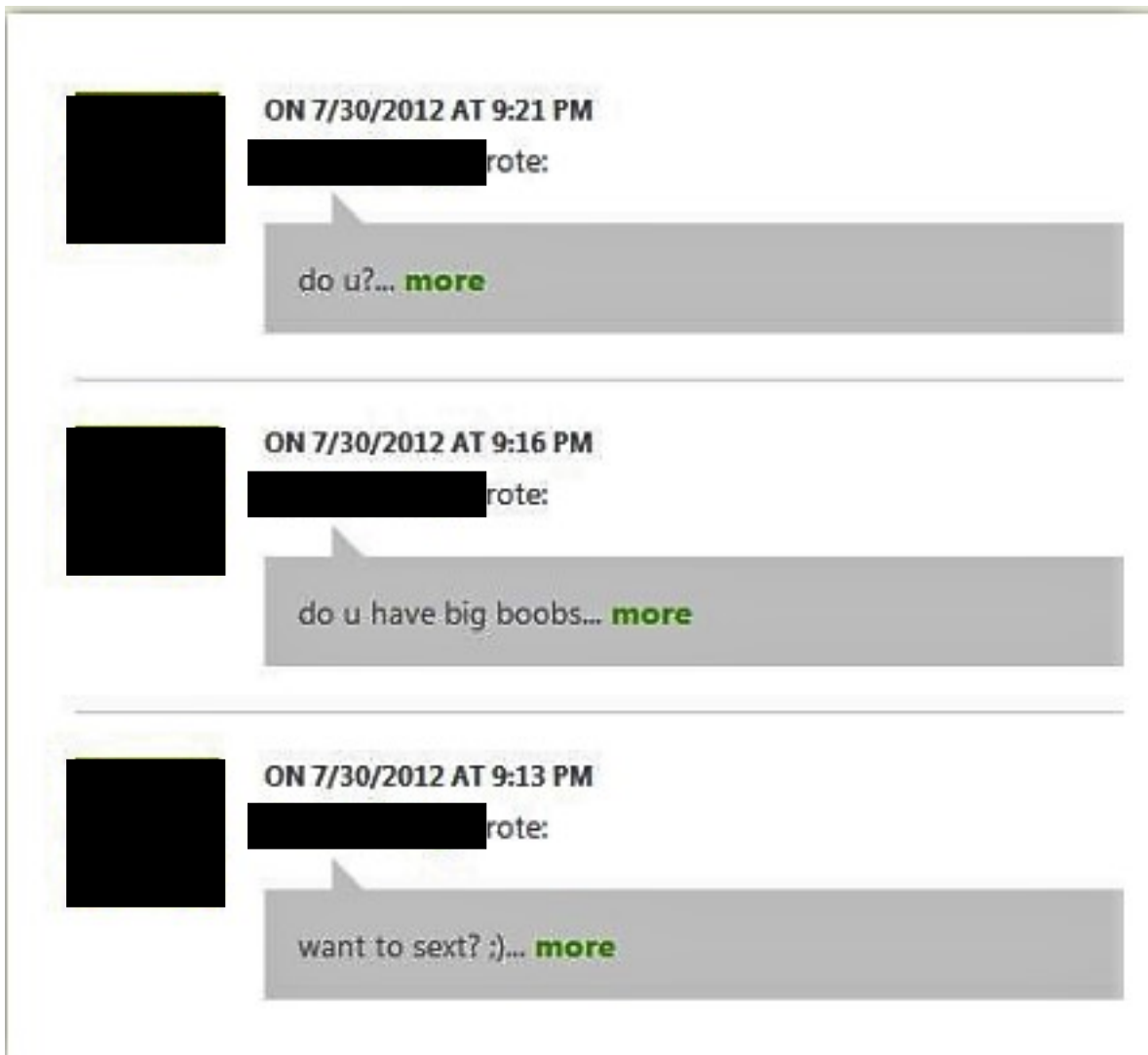
Figure 4. Continued Harassment in Private Messages. Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com.

One way we can understand this finding is through the work of Karl Mannheim (1936).

Mannheim noted that our social knowledge and the attitudes and language that come with it do

not simply appear out of thin air, but rather we "speak the language of the group." People

(particularly men in patriarchal society) feeling they have a certain amount of entitlement over a

space is in no way new nor is it unique to gaming communities (Kimmel, 2010). The patriarchal

society in which we live no doubt has a significant impact on the attitudes presented within

gaming culture, yet I would also argue that there are elements of the gaming world that contribute

to this shared knowledge that forms the base of male entitlement in gaming. One aspect of this is the fact that video games themselves often contain female characters that are highly sexualized and serve to be forms of entertainment for men, both in the games as well as the players (Burgess et al, 2007; Dickerman et al, 2008, Beasley and Standley, 2002). Exposure to this content for men has been shown to lower the level of sympathy towards women (Beck et al, 2012) which suggests that the social knowledge men possess in the form of entitlement in this space reflects attitudes put forth in the video games themselves. This social knowledge is also perpetuated through game play with others who hold feelings of entitlement in this space, as well as through communication such as message boards, both of which will be explored in further depth in later sections. This socially reinforced feeling of entitlement and superiority could explain why some male players feel they have the right to treat women in this space as sexual objects, rather than fellow players.

Violence/Anger

Another category of codes that ties closely to entitlement, especially aggrieved entitlement, is violence/anger. This category contains 20 unique codes that were used 30 times throughout the posts. Messages containing intense anger or threats of violence came in a variety of scenarios, some after playing a game with the recipient (and losing), some after the recipient ignored the sender, and some were completely random in which the person who received the message had no clue who the person was or why they were being targeted with such animosity. One example, found in Figure 3, is a player getting irate because the woman he sent the messages to was unable to add him as a friend on Xbox Live. When looking specifically at codes that indicated anger, without necessarily suggesting violence, they often worked in conjunction with direct insults previously discussed. This included the use of all capitalized letters to suggest yelling, as well as phrases that convey fury such as "fuck you" and "shut the fuck up."

That being said, the codes in this category that were used most frequently were those that not only conveyed intense anger, but also incorporated violence typically in the form of threats. 13 unique codes were created to represent this phenomenon in the private messages and they occurred 20 times throughout the messages. Disturbingly enough, the code that occurred most often in this category was "death threat" (Figure 5) which occurred 5 times followed shortly by "rape threat/wish" (Figure 6) which appeared 4 times. The threat of stalking, either in real-life or virtually also came up in multiple messages. Other codes in this category communicate more general acts of violence such various forms of assault.

> shut the fuck up cunt ive got 3.24 k/d ratio u aint shit i will hunt u down in real life and kill u wanna fuck with me bitch we can do it for real see who gets taken out u wanna talk like ur a badass fuck ive served 5 tours in iraq and afghanistan i will
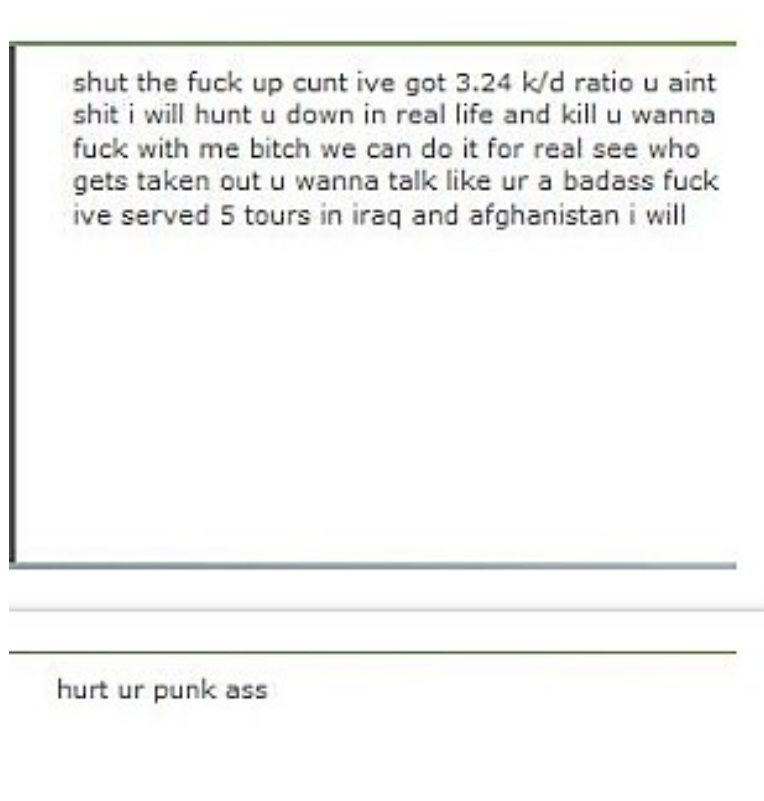
> hurt ur punk ass

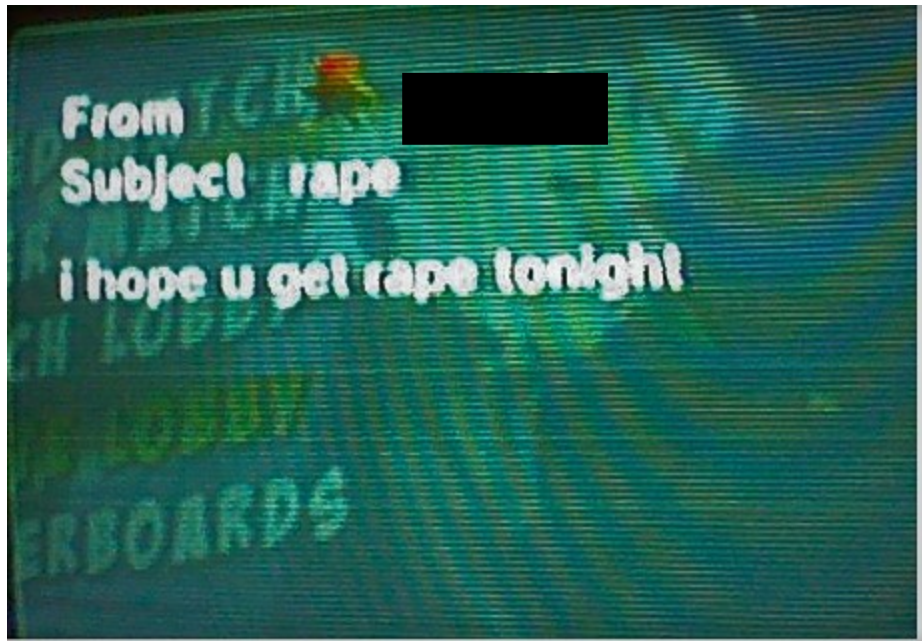Figure 5. Death Threat in Private Messages. Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com

Figure 6. Rape Wish in Private Messages. Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com

The anger and violence that is displayed through these messages can be shocking to many, particularly when this level of rage is not routinely seen in day-to-day life. One way to understand why this fury exists and is spewed towards other players is through the work of Michael Kimmel (2010, 2013). Like the direct insults that were hurled at players, largely for the crime of existing, the violence and intense anger that were displayed in the messages flew in the face of PC culture. By acting in a non-PC manner within this space, particularly through the means of aggression and violent rhetoric, men are able to act in hypermasculine ways that they may not otherwise be able to express in day-to-day life. Many of the threats were extremely graphic and appeared to be for pure shock value rather than an actual serious threat, yet were nonetheless disturbing to read. In this way, men who sent these outlandish threats could enact hypermasculinity through the portrayal of the strength and power it would take to carry out such threats, as well as violent imagery that is often associated with hegemonic masculinity.

We can also understand the violence that is displayed through this medium of gaming culture by looking at these actions as representing Kimmel's concept of "aggrieved entitlement"

(2013). Since the beginning of video gaming, this world has often been a largely masculine space in which women have been underrepresented or portrayed as sexual objects (Burgess et al, 2007; Dickerman et al, 2008, Beasley and Standley, 2002). This of course has shifted in recent years as the number of women in gaming, be it players, journalists, or developers, as well as their visibility and representation has increased. As we can see with the conspiracy theories that claim women are attempting to take over the gaming world, (Chess and Shaw, 2015) there are those who are resistant to equal representation in gaming. Men who express such views can be seen as acting on "aggrieved entitlement" through these messages in that, the intense anger and violence displayed were frequently directed specifically towards femininity. This occurred in many of the more violent threats that involved graphic descriptions of acts involving elements of female anatomy such as the mutilation of breasts. Additionally, while rape is something that can occur regardless of sex and gender, the rape threats can be viewed as attacking femininity within the gaming realm. In this way, men can be understood as attacking that which threatens their entitlement within gaming to preserve their dominance over women in this space.

Misogyny

While each of the previous categories are laced with misogynistic rhetoric, there were several codes that existed that expressed more specific and direct misogynistic attitudes. This category consisted of 11 codes that appeared 27 times throughout the messages. These largely included attacks on women for their involvement in gaming, particularly having negative reactions to women who were good at games, assuming women's in-game accomplishments were actually the result of efforts on the part of the woman's male partner (Figure 7), or making the argument that women who are good at gaming and identify as gamers have no life and are sexually undesirable. Others argued that video games are only for men and insinuated that women

belong in the kitchen. One even attempted to put women down based on the pay gap that exists in society at large (Figure 8).
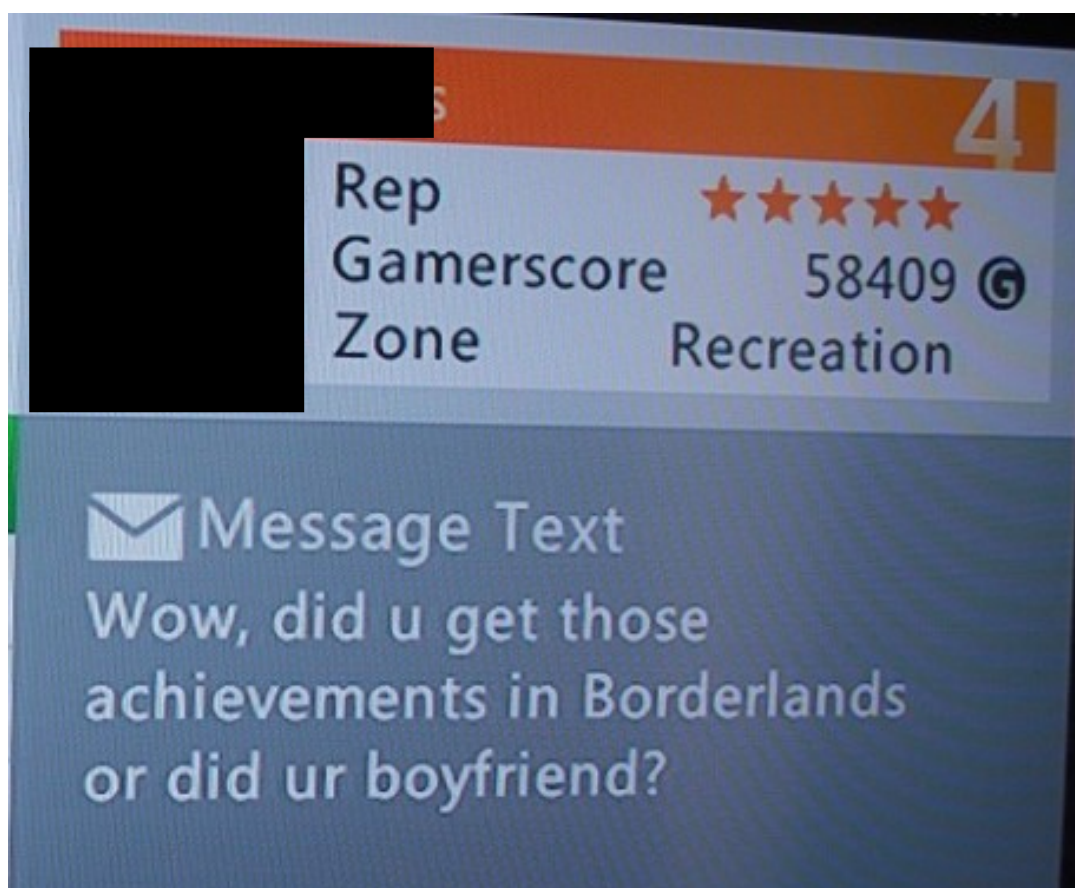
Figure 7. Misogyny in Private Messages 1. Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com.
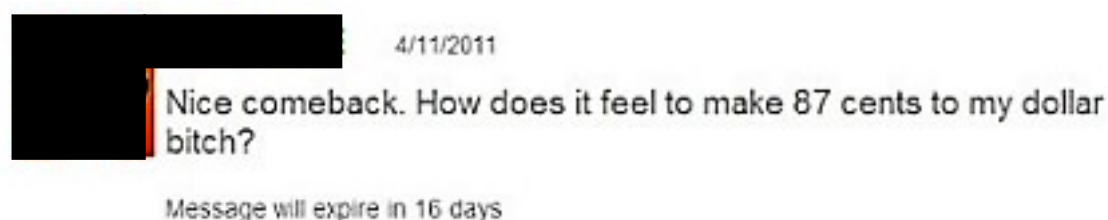
Figure 8. Misogyny in Private Messages 2. Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com

There are a few ways to interpret this phenomenon of unapologetic misogynistic attitudes in these messages, the first again relating back to Michael Kimmel and his concept of "aggrieved entitlement." Like the more violent and rage filled messages directed at women, the ones that contain open misogyny can also be seen as an attack on femininity in this primarily masculine

space. As previously noted, there are those within the gaming community believe that there is a conspiracy to infiltrate the gaming world with feminists, which would work to threaten the sense of entitlement men have within gaming culture. It makes sense then, that those who feel their earned entitlement is threatened by women, especially strong women who reject misogynistic ideals, would attack women for their femininity. The harassment towards women to make them feel unwelcome, in addition to just being a form of entertainment to troll people, can arguably be viewed as an attempt to intimidate and eliminate women from this arena so gaming can continue to be a male space. As previously noted, this tactic is working as many women either avoid public gaming or avoid revealing their gender in public games to defend against misogynistic rhetoric. The lack of visibility of women in gaming helps to preserve the male sense of entitlement over this space.

We can also interpret the misogynistic nature of these messages again through the work of Simone De Beauvoir. Similar to the ways women are sexualized in private messages, the misogynistic rhetoric found in many of the message also serve to make women "other." When looking specifically at the codes that displayed explicit sexism, many referred to the female gamer's position in relation to men. Particularly, the language that women belong in the kitchen or that they could not gain such gaming skills without the assistance of men works to perpetuate ideals that place women as subservient to men or at the very least reliant on them. Thus, women are portrayed as having no real place in gaming culture that does not relate to men in some way, always placing them as the "other" in this realm. Like other aspects of these message such as the violence and sexualization, the "otherness" that is placed on women works to make women uncomfortable as they feel unwelcomed in gaming which can also be seen as contributing to the lack of visibility of women in gaming culture (Paaßen et al, 2016; Shaw, 2011).

All of these categories contribute to online gaming culture serving as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) that reproduces ruling ideologies, particularly patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity (Althusser, 1972; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The language and violent rhetoric that is used within these messages can be understood as a reflection of the dominate ideology in society that values masculinity. This is true especially when looking at the fact that these messages often attack femininity, either by reducing women to sexual objects or by through more direct attacks such as the misogynistic language and insults that were used throughout. The messages sent also work to reproduce this ideology in a few ways. The first way being that, when others see and hear this type of language being used in game play it becomes normalized and thus the ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy are reproduced. Additionally, many of the women who receive these messages avoid gaming or revealing their gender while they game in order to avoid such attacks. When women avoid being visible in gaming communities, hypermasculine and patriarchal ideologies are further reproduced because these ideologies remain dominate and are not being challenged.

YouTube Videos

Another source of data examined was YouTube videos featuring game play from the game Grand Theft Auto V. These videos showed players engaging in online play on both public and private servers, and all showed what is known as the rape mod. Game play and the videos of game play that can be found on YouTube and other sites make up a significant part of gaming culture, and the fact that a rape mod exists within this space proves that rape culture and hypermasculine ideologies are perpetuated through these modes of game culture. I examined both the audio and video of 20 of these videos to understand how these incidences occur in game play, as well as the reactions from the players witnessing the use of this mod. Many of these videos are

compilations made up of different gaming scenarios, or can be broken up into different scenes. I coded each of these scenes as unique incidences, meaning some codes appear multiple times in one video. Additionally, I coded visual and audio elements separately due to the fact that there can be a significant divide between what is happening in the video as opposed to the audio. An examination of the visual components of these videos garnered 10 codes that were used 137 times, while the audio element of the videos had 20 codes that were used 125 times. Due to the nature of the video search, the visual aspects of the data were consistent throughout the videos which resulted in one common theme of perpetuating rape culture. The audio aspect of the data was a bit more diverse and produced three themes: Positive reactions, negative reactions, and departure from PC culture. The following section works to break down the codes and themes that exist both in the video and audio aspects of these data.

Table 2. Codes and Frequencies for YouTube Videos.

- Cop Having Sex with Inmate (1)
- Forcing Player's Avatar to Simulate Sex with in-game character (4)
- Forcing Player's Avatar to Dance Provocatively (7)
- Forcing Players' Avatars to Simulate Sex with Each Other (8)
- Give Player Money/Guns (9)
- Mod Used with Random Game Play (25)
- Use of Non-Rape Mod on Other Players (31)
- Use of Rape Mod in Private Server (2)
- Use of Rape Mod in Public Server (40)
- Visual Rape Joke (10)

Visual

One major visual component of the videos that is obvious because of the videos selected is the use of mods on other players. As previously noted, all videos analyzed included the use of what is known as the rape mod that involves the modder forcing simulated sex on another player (Figure 9), which occurred 42 times throughout the videos. However, the rape mod was not the only sexualized mod that was used during these videos. Other codes were used to force other

players to perform sexual acts such as forcing other player's avatars to simulate sex with characters from the game (found 4 times in videos), forcing players' avatars to simulate sex with each other (found 8 times), as well as forcing other players' avatars to dance provocatively (found 7 times). Additionally, a majority of these videos also included the use of non-rape mods on other players as well, appearing 31 times throughout the videos. These mods included things such as attaching items to the players' avatars, teleporting players, and tazing other players.

Figure 9. Use of Rape Mod in Grand Theft Auto V. Source: Youtube.com.

It is also important to note the nonchalant way these rape mods are used. Many of these videos include the rape mod in addition to random game play, which occurred 25 times in the videos. By this I mean that the use of the mod was not necessarily the focus of the video but rather something that occurred in conjunction with other aspects of the game. While a video focusing solely the rape mod is disturbing, I would argue that these videos that show the mod being used in addition to other aspects of the game work to normalize the mod as simply another part of the game that is to be expected. Another component of this nonchalant handling of the mod is the fact that it is common for modders to pay those they use the rape mod on by using another mod to drop money at the other player's feet, a phenomenon that was present in 8 of the

54

20 videos. As will be discussed in more detail in later sections, many in the community argue that the use of the rape mod is acceptable if the modder compensates the other players for wasting their time. This suggests that issue with the use of this mod is not the fact that it simulates rape, but rather that it is simply annoying and is acceptable if the person being modded gets something out of it. This of course significantly downplays the reality of rape and in many ways is a parallel to attitudes about rape in real life.

Another important way these videos help to perpetuate rape culture is through the way rape is significantly downplayed with visual rape jokes. I categorize visual rape jokes as elements of the video that show things that are meant to be funny or make light of rape. These occurred 10 times throughout the videos and included text that was laid over the video, such as the words "He blew up my prostate!" as well as the words "Rape Commencing" which appear when players use a certain version of the rape mod (depending on which mod menu it is a part of), seen in Figure 9. One important instance of visual rape jokes that is important to note actually occurs in the game and has not been altered by players. A reoccurring element of Grand Theft Auto V is funny billboards that can be found throughout the city. One of these billboards advertises a television show called "Prison Bitches" and features the words "Break out before they break you in" and a picture that suggests an inmate is being or will be raped by a correctional officer. One of the videos examined featured the avatars of an inmate and a police officer having sex on this billboard as part of the introduction to the video. These elements are meant to make fun of rape in prison, which is a common motif in adult comedy, however they work to downplay the seriousness of rape in any circumstance.

Figure 10. Rape Joke Billboard in Grand Theft Auto V. Source: gta.wikia.com

The visual aspects as well as simply the videos themselves can be understood as a departure from PC culture as well as a reflection of hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel, 2010: Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The mods themselves take a step further away from PC culture than what typically occurs in video games. I argue this because, while video games and online interactions allow for a level of political incorrectness not generally accepted by society, the mods go against what is considered PC by video game standards by giving players an unfair advantage or creating a level of violence that was not intended by the game makers. As Kimmel (2010) notes, the use of entertainment is a way for some men to escape PC culture that is viewed as emasculating; the fact that gamers, men especially, are using a mod that embodies hegemonic masculinity through violence and sexuality seems to prove Kimmel's point. With the use of mods and rape jokes, men can act in a way that is perceived as macho and devaluing of femininity which shows men acting in hegemonically masculine ways in this space. The rape mod and rape jokes can perpetuate hegemonic ideals within society as they make light of rape and the trauma faced by those who have experienced it, which continues to place hegemonic masculinity in a position of dominance over femininity and non-hegemonic masculinity.

Table 3. Codes, Categories and Frequencies for YouTube Audio.

Category	Positive Reactions	Negative Reactions	Anti-PC Culture
Codes	• Bystanders Laughing at Rape Mod (5) • Describing What's Happening (Joking) (11) • Encourage Mod (5) • Modder Laughing at Rape Mod (3) • Mod Victim Laughing (17)	• Complaints about Modder (11) • Confused about Mod (5) • Disgusted by Mod (6) • Request for Help (3) • Tell Modder to Stop (14) • Threaten Modder (2) • Mod Victim Crying (1) • Mod Victim Angry (7) • Mod Victim Screaming (4)	• Homophobic Language (4) • Misogynistic Language (2) • Mod Victim Young (10) • Rape Joke (8) • Young Player in Session (6)

Audio

Another important element of the videos is the audio that takes place over microphones during gameplay. This type of audio was present in 18 out of the 20 videos examined and allowed me to assess the reactions other players had to the mods being used. This allowed me to understand the attitudes of those featured in these videos to gauge the acceptance level of modders using the rape mod. Unlike the visual elements of the videos which showed a consistent pattern throughout the videos, there was a clear split in the reactions people had to the use of the rape mod and other sexualized mods.

Positive Reactions

One reaction that was found frequently was a positive one in which players found the rape mod humorous. This included laughter from bystanders who were in the same session but were not being having the mod used on them (found 5 times in videos), laughter from the person being modded (found 17 times), as well as the modder laughing which occurred 3 times (the modders often did not speak into the mic so they were heard laughing less often). Additionally, those being modded would often describe what was happening ("I'm getting raped," "He's raping me," etc.) and would do so in a happy or laughing tone, suggesting they found the situation funny. Players in one video also explicitly discussed how funny they found rape mods to be. Arguably, the fact that

many people found the rape mod humorous suggests that the significance of rape is being downplayed in this space.

In addition to players finding the rape mod humorous, positive reactions also came in the slightly more disturbing form of encouraging the rape mod to continue. This occurred 5 times throughout the videos and included players using language such as "rape him" and "get raped." In one video this worked in conjunction with a modder threatening to rape another player if that player killed him in the game (a threat which was followed through excessively). A friend of the modder worked to encourage this behavior by telling his friend to rape the player that had tried to kill him. This type of encouragement works to further normalize rape as an element of game play, as well as to perpetuate the use of the rape mod. Like the visual aspects of these videos, the audio that reflects enjoyment and encouragement of the rape mod are also expressions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Negative Reactions

While there was a significant amount of positive reactions to the use of the rape mod, there were also negative reactions as well. The most prominent of these reactions came from those having the mod used on them telling the modder to stop, which occurred 14 times. Often the modder would not listen this request and continue using the mod anyway. In one video the modder continuously used the rape mod on a player for over 2 minutes after the player had told them to stop. This of course draws disturbing parallels to rape in real life and further works to normalize rape. An even more distressing reaction that was occasionally seen was the person being modded crying or screaming which occurred 5 times throughout the videos. Some players also requested assistance from other players in the server which occurred 3 times. Again, the fact that the modders would continue after hearing these reactions, and in some cases, seek them out,

58

works to normalize the reality of rape within this space. Other negative reactions to the use of the mod included disgust, which was displayed 6 times, and anger, which was seen 18 times. Angry reactions included complaints about the modder, as well as threats to the modder. It is important to note, however, that many of the angry reactions to the modder were not directly related to the fact that they were using the rape mod, but rather that they were using mods at all. This further suggests that the existence of rape in the game has become normalized and the outrage is less with the fact that rape is being perpetuated, but rather that modders are ruining the gaming experience.

Anti-PC Culture

Another distinct theme that emerged from the audio data, like the video data, was a departure from PC culture, as discussed by Michael Kimmel (2010). As has become expected with the anonymity of the internet and gaming spaces, many use this space to say and do things they would not normally. An example of this that is found throughout the audio data is the use of language that is typically frowned upon in society, particularly derogatory language. Homophobic, misogynistic, and racist attitudes and language were all perpetuated by men in this space which can be understood as acting in a hypermasculine way. These types of speech are not uncommon in our online world and gaming provides a space where these ideas and feelings can be expressed with relatively little societal backlash. Additionally, as would be expected with the type of videos examined, rape jokes also appeared 8 times within the audio. Similar to the coding for visual rape jokes, comments that made fun of or made light of rape were categorized as rape jokes. An example of this in one of the videos is the YouTuber LispyJimmy discussing the rape mods and notes that men should get ready to be "plumaged in the butt," and women should get ready to "take it like a man." These comments are of course ones that would not be taken well in many contexts, yet seem appropriate in the gaming world. This suggests that by being able to go

against PC standards, this space works to perpetuate attitudes that turn rape into a joke and contribute to rape culture.

Another important element that came up in a surprising number of videos is the young age of those being modded. While it is impossible to tell the exact ages of those playing in a session, it was clear through their voices that many of the players in the sessions, especially those being targeted by modders, were roughly between the ages of 10 and 15. Young players were the targets for the rape mod in at least 10 incidences, while young players were heard in the same session witnessing the event at least 6 times. Many in this case argue that it is acceptable to target children in this way and that any harm that may come is to be blamed on the parents who allow kids this young to play the game. While I would agree that children should not be playing this game, the targeting of children with the rape mod is entirely the responsibility of the modder. The fact that kids are targeted in this way can be understood as a further (and rather disturbing) departure from PC culture that attempts to shield children from adult content. Like the adults who are targeted with this mod, children also had two distinct reactions to being modded in this way which was to laugh and find it funny, or to become deeply upset. Both reactions are upsetting in their own way; when looking at the negative reactions children had to this mod (screaming, crying, etc.) it is upsetting that the modder would continue after hearing this reaction, but the positive reactions were also disturbing in that kids at a young age are finding rape and the use of the rape mod funny. This helps to perpetuate rape culture within this space by making it out to be joke, especially in the minds of the younger generation.

Here, we can understand game play and videos of game play as elements that form video game culture as a cultural ISA. The Grand Theft Auto series works to perpetuate hypermasculine ideals by normalizing violence as well as working to sexualize and minimize female characters.

This of course contributes to the continuation of the dominate patriarchal ideology that exists within our society. However, the game itself is not the only place where these ideals are reproduced as the way people play the game also contributes to these ideals. The use of the rape mod works to normalize rape as simply another element of game play. Beck et al. (2012) found that exposure to sexualized violence in video games had the effect of minimizing sympathy towards rape victims and increasing the rate of rape myth acceptance in men, which suggests that men who are exposed to the rape mod may be more likely to further perpetuate hypermasculine ideology. This can be seen in the fact that many of the videos included people having positive reactions to the rape mod. In this way, imagery of hypermasculinity are consistently reproduced which works to further dominant ideology.

Althusser also points out that while ISAs serve as a site of dominant ideological reproduction, they also serve as a site of conflict. This means that, while the dominant ideologies are reproduced in this space, there are also those that combat this reproduction. This can be seen in the negative reactions that were had to the mods in these videos, particularly the expressions of anger. By expressing anger at the use of the rape mod, ideologies that fight against rape culture and its reproduction are also allowed to thrive. While it is important to note that many of the negative reactions to the use of the mod had less to do with the representation of rape and more to do with the interruption of game play, I would argue that these reactions still serve to battle hypermasculine ideology in that the mods are being portrayed as unacceptable in this space, regardless of the reason for the opposition.

YouTube Video Comments

Another component of internet and gaming culture is the ability to interact with other players. One way of doing this is through comment sections, specifically I will be looking at the

61

comment sections of the YouTube videos previously analyzed. I examined 262 comments or comment threads found in the comment sections of all 20 videos examined. I focused specifically on the comment sections for these videos to gauge the response those in the gaming community had to the rape mod, and how individuals interacted with each other in regards to this topic. An examination of these comments garnered 30 unique codes that were used a total of 303 times. These codes were able to be sorted into 5 distinct categories: Positive reactions to the rape mod, defense of the rape mods, negative reactions to the rape mod, homophobia, and rape culture/misogyny. In the following section I will focus on each of these categories to better understand the attitudes and ideologies that are perpetuated through this space in gaming culture.

Table 4. Codes, Categories and Frequencies for YouTube Comments.

Category	Codes
Positive Reactions to Mods	• Encourage Mod (14) • Rape Mod Sexually Appealing (6) • Desire to Use Mod (6) • Rape Mod is Funny (15) • Reactions to Mod are Funny (1) • Request to Have Mod Used On (4) • Video is Funny (15)
Defense of Rape Mod	• Rape Mod Not Serious (16) • Attacking Other Commenters (6) • Rape Mod Part of the Game (4) • Don't Like It Don't Watch (1) • Cash Drop Makes up for Mod Use (4) • Making Fun of Negative Reactions to Mods (27) • Rape Mod Acceptable on Private Server (4)
Negative Reactions to Mod	• Speaking Out Against Mod (20) • Avoiding GTA Because of Mod (4) • Against Modders (8) • Question Why YouTube Allows Videos (1) • Rape Mod Not Funny (13)
Homophobia	• People Who Use Mod are Gay (6) • Homophobic Language (14)
Rape Culture/Misogyny	• Misogynistic Language (11) • Rape Mod Acceptable on Female Players/Avatars (5) • Rape Myth Acceptance/Victim Blaming (12) • Rape Joke (97) • Rape Mod Acceptable When Done by Female Players/Avatars (4) • Rape/Rape Mod Threat (3)

Positive Reactions

To begin, one of the prominent categories that was present throughout the comments was positive reactions to the use of the rape mod. This category consisted of 7 different codes that appeared 61 times. Most of the positive reactions were to find either the rape mod itself or the video of the rape mod funny. This was portrayed in the comments using language such as "lol," "lmao," etc. as well as simply stating that they found the mod or the video funny. In addition to finding the mods funny, many comments also encouraged the use of the mod. Similar to the way bystanders would encourage the use of the rape mod in the videos themselves, people in the comments would use phrases that encouraged the action such as "rape him," "get raped," "do it again," etc. An example of this can be found in Figure 11. This type of encouragement was found 14 times throughout the comments. Another reoccurring theme that worked to encourage the use of the rape mod was for commenters to request that the modders use the rape mod on them. This would often include the commenter adding their gamer tag to invite the modders to attack them personally. Finally, some commenters also expressed the desire to use the mod after witnessing it in these videos. This of course works to further encourage the use of the rape mod by introducing it to new potential modders.
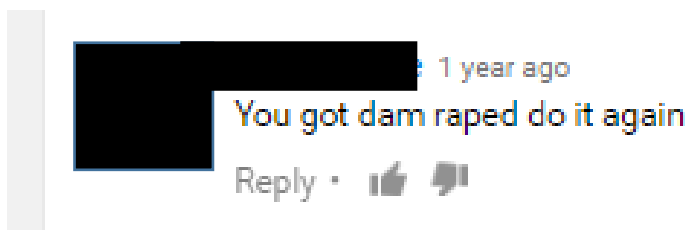

Figure 11. Encouraging Rape Mod in YouTube Comments. Source: YouTube.com

One way to understand the positive reactions to the use of the rape mod and the videos that show it, is through Michael Kimmel's work regarding entertainment as a place to depart from PC culture. Like the messages that are sent to female gamers as well as the use and

64

documentation of the rape mod, the comments that can be found on the internet often contain attitudes and language that most people would not use in real life interactions. Kimmel argues that entertainment, such as video games, allows men to escape the emasculating PC culture that is present in our society and act in a way that matches hypermasculine ideals. This is reflected particularly in the positive reactions to the rape mod because we can see the celebration of violence and sexuality which are both highly valued within hypermasculinity. This celebration works to perpetuate hypermasculine values in this space by showing them in a positive light.

Defense of Rape Mod

Like the positive reactions that were had to the use of the rape mod, many comments also worked to defend the use of the rape mod. This category consisted of 6 codes that were used a total of 65 times. One of the common themes found in this category was the sense that the use of the rape mod is not a big deal. Particularly, many commenters noted that the violent nature of the game lends itself to including rape as an element of gameplay and that the rape component is no worse than the murder or torture that are also featured in the game. In addition to minimizing the significance of the rape mod, many comments also worked to shame or make fun of the negative reactions that people do have to the use of the rape mod. This occurred in the form of directly attacking commenters who expressed discontent with the rape mod. These attacks were seen 6 times throughout the messages and included insults such as suggesting the person who complains about the mod has a small penis, or telling the commenter to "shut the fuck up." Shaming and making fun of the negative reactions that people had to the rape mod also came in the form of indirect insults which occurred 27 times throughout the comments. These included aspects such as saying people who feel the rape mod is or should be illegal are stupid or making fun of people for being "butthurt" about the use of the mod.

Figure 12. Defending Use of Mod in YouTube Comments. Source: YouTube.com

Other attitudes that were presented in these comments that contributed to the defense of the rape mod had to do with the context of the rape mod. As previously noted, at least two of the videos examined featured the use of the rape mod in a private server between friends. The comments that accompanied these videos also highlighted this fact, with 4 comments stating that the use of the rape mod is acceptable when it does occur on private servers between friends. While this is not the most common context for these videos, it does arguably change the nature of the mod when it is between friends rather than done to a complete stranger without prior consent. Another context that is highlighted in the comments is the compensation of the rape mod through what are known as cash drops. As previously noted, it is common for modders to use a mod that drops in-game money which the players they use the mods on can then collect as a form of compensation for the inconvenience of the mod. Four different commenters made the argument that the use of the rape mod is acceptable when the modder pays the other players. These arguments work to portray the attitude that the rape mod is acceptable in certain contexts which defends the existence of the mod in general.

The diehard defense of the rape mod within the content of the comments can also be understood through the work of Michael Kimmel, particularly with his concept of aggrieved entitlement. This can be seen particularly when we look at the prevalence of attacks, either direct or indirect, on those who speak out against the use of the rape mod. The anger that is displayed can be understood as stemming from people, especially women, questioning the entitlement to express hypermasculine attitudes that has been taken for granted by many in the gaming world.

66

For control over this space to be questioned can be viewed as an attack on the freedom and sanctuary that the gaming world represents for those wishing to act in hypermasculine ways. In response to that perceived attack we can see men in the gaming community lashing out through the insults and shaming that take place in these comments.

We can also look at the act of attacking those who question the use of the rape mod though Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) understanding of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is expressed throughout these comments as well as the gaming world at large through the emphasis on violence and sexuality which are reflected in the use of the rape mod. Connell and Messerschmidt also note that "the concept of hegemonic masculinity presumes the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities" (p. 846). The subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities is highlighted in these comments through the direct attacks on people who question the use of the rape mod. This can be seen in one specific instance in which a presumed male commenter questioned how YouTube would allow videos depicting the rape mod. This question was met with several negative retorts, the most notable of which is a commenter saying the person who questioned the videos has a small penis. The insulting of the original commenter's genitalia can be understood as a way of questioning his manhood and in this way, we can understand the attack as shaming the person for acting in a way that goes against hegemonic masculine ideals. Additionally, it is possible to understand the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities when looking at the fact that there are men in the gaming world who may not necessarily agree with or actively use the rape mod, but also do nothing to challenge its existence. In this way, we can see how some of those who embody nonhegemonic ideologies act in subordination to hegemonic masculinity by taking a passive stance which allows hegemonic masculine ideals to continue.

Rape Culture/Misogyny

Another reoccurring theme within the comments was the perpetuation of rape culture and misogynistic attitudes. This category consisted of 6 codes that appeared 139 times and was by far the most common theme throughout the comments. The code that occurred most often, both in this category and in the comments at large, was the presence of rape jokes which were seen 97 times. Like the visual and audio rape jokes that were found in the videos themselves, comments that were coded as rape jokes were those that made fun or made light of rape. These attitudes were evident in language such as "Rape is love. Rape is life," "take it like a man," "Grand Theft Anal," etc. Other comments joked about the rape mod being sexually arousing, making comments such as "I got a boner," or suggesting they masturbated to the rape mod. These comments work to minimize the impact of rape, both in game and in real life situations.

An additional component that was found in the comments that contributes to rape culture in the gaming world is the use of language that perpetuates rape myths and victim blaming. This occurred 12 times throughout the comments and consisted of comments such as "she liked it," "she wants to get raped [in real life]," etc. as well as language that blamed the victims of the rape mod by arguing the player should have just turned the game off or change sessions if they didn't like it. One commenter also went as far as to say that the use of the rape mod is not rape because "you can say no, but instead you sit there and let it happen." These comments of course work to reinforce attitudes that are present in real life that place blame on the victims of rape rather than the perpetrators.

Similar to the positive responses garnered by the use of the rape mod, it is possible to look at the use of rape jokes as a departure from PC culture. Rape jokes are one of the more controversial forms of humor, especially in our society that appears to becoming more conscious

of being politically correct in general. Yet, it is clear by the prevalence of rape jokes in the comment sections of these videos that this space serves as an escape from PC culture that allows for the expression of hypermasculinity that values sex and violence. Additionally, the use of victim blaming tactics is a form of aggrieved entitlement. I argue this because the comments that include victim blaming are often done so in anger and defense of the right to use the rape mod. Specifically, the tendency to blame the victim would often come after people in the videos had negative reactions to having the rape mod used on them. Many commenters make the argument that if someone doesn't like the rape mod that they should turn the game off or switch sessions. This tactic works to defend the entitlement of modders to use the rape mod and expresses anger towards those who are perceived as threatening the right to use this mod.

Other common themes that work to contribute to rape culture in this space largely have to do specifically with rape and gender. Five comments examined noted that the use of the rape mod is more acceptable when it is used on female characters. This involved language that specifically targeted women with this mod such as saying modders should rape "all the girls in the lobby" and noting that certain modders like to "rape females all day." The use of this language specifically targets female characters for use of the rape mod and works to reinforce the idea that women are the only targets for rape. Additionally, 4 comments noted that it would be funny to see female characters rape male characters. This attitude contributes to the idea that women cannot rape men, and if they do it is something that is comical rather than serious. Finally, one commenter expressed the feeling that it would "be cool" if female modders/characters raped other females. This again contributes to the myth that rape is somehow more acceptable or less serious when it is perpetrated by a woman.

Another component that contributes to rape culture in this space is the misogynistic language that was found 11 times throughout the comments. Specifically, most of the comments containing this type of language focus on the negative reactions people have in regards to the rape mod, as can be seen in Figure 13. One common occurrence of this is for commenters to say that feminists are overreacting to the rape mod, or that the people who click the dislike button on the video are all girls. Some even call those who react negatively to the use of the rape mod as "feminazis." Not only are these comments derogatory towards women, they also contribute to the idea that rape is a female issue. This also works to perpetuate hypermasculinity in that to act in a way that goes against the use of the rape mod and the enjoyment of sexualized violence is inherently female, which is very much painted as a negative quality throughout the comments.

all the feminists exploded at the sound of rape oh wait no they didn't o still hear there distant cries "IM SO TRIGGERED RIGHT NOW"
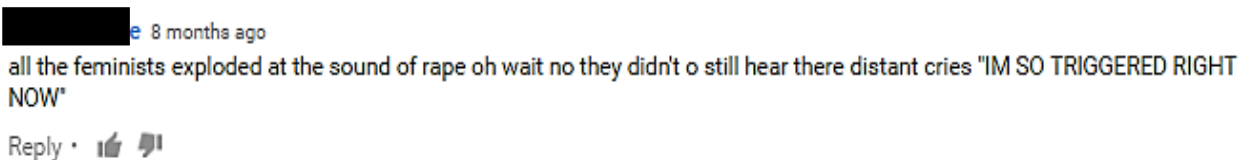
Reply ·

Figure 13. Argument that Feminists Overreact to Rape Mod in YouTube Comments.
Source: Youtube.com

The use of gender as a variable in the acceptability of the use of the rape mod as well as the misogynistic language that is used throughout the comments can both be understood through the work of Simone De Beauvoir (1989) and her understanding of women as the "Other" within society. Beauvoir notes that a woman in our society is "determined and differentiated in relation to man," (p.6) which is something we can see in the way women are treated in relation to rape within these comments. Most notably is the fact that multiple commenters made the argument that the use of the rape mod is more acceptable when it is done to a female character. In this way, women (even if they are only virtual ones) are seen as acceptable targets for male aggression and are thus portrayed "in relation to man." Additionally, the use of misogynistic language, especially

70

when it is to attack those who question or argue against the rape mod, can be understood as a way of portraying women as "other" within gaming culture. The ways in which commenters attack those who object to the rape mod as being feminists or "feminazis" portrays women and feminist ideals as unwanted guests in the gaming world who ruin the fun of the game. In this way men and masculinity are portrayed as the default in the gaming world and women, especially women who make themselves heard in this space, are "other."

Negative Reactions

Positive reactions and comments that help contribute to rape culture were not the only ones seen, however. A significant number of reactions about the use of the rape mod were negative, a category that consisted of 5 codes that were seen 46 times throughout the comments. The most prominent code that was found in this category was "speaking out against the rape mod" which was seen 20 times throughout the comments. This included commenters expressing disgust and anger with the mod, as well as saying things such as "that's horrible," and "What's wrong with you?" Others expressed dismay at the fact that rape was being made into a joke (Figure 14), with some arguing that rape is not funny and neither is the rape mod. These reactions work to fight against the overwhelming number of comments that cast the rape mod and its use in a positive light which allows for different ideologies regarding rape to be heard in gaming communities.

> 2 years ago
> That's great to know some of us find showing rape funny. It's even better that people can troll you and there isn't anything you can do. I hope Rockstar takes care of this ASAP. I was in a whole lobby of people doing this, it's ruining the game!
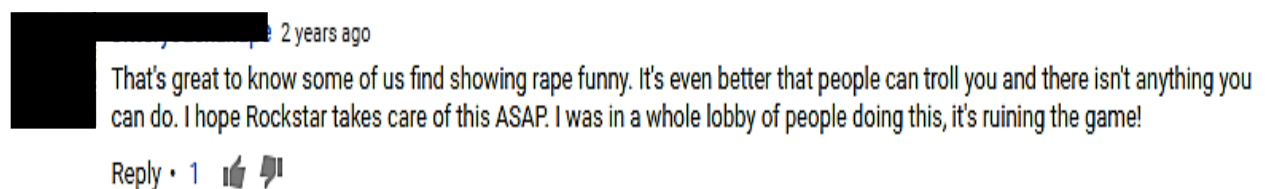> Reply · 1 👍 👎

Figure 14. Negative Reaction to Rape Mod in YouTube Comments. Source: Youtube.com

In addition to speaking out against the use of the rape mod itself, many commenters also spoke out against modders in general. Eight comments focused on how modders ruin the game by harassing other players and are simply annoying rather than funny. One commenter expressed the desire to see modders banned from playing the game online. It was also revealed by four commenters that they have stopped playing Grand Theft Auto Online because of the influx of modders who continually use mods on other players. While these attitudes do not directly reflect negative reactions to the rape mod itself, I would argue that these comments also work to counter those that applaud the use of the rape mod by allowing a different point of view to be heard in this space.

Homophobia

While the negative reactions to these mods challenge the dominant ideology that celebrates the use of the rape mod, there is an unfortunate side to the objection of such mods. This comes in the form of homophobia that is seen 21 times throughout the comments. In addition to the commenters who object the use of the rape mod because they find the representation of rape in a video game to be appalling, there are also those who find the rape mod offensive not because it shows rape, but because it represents perceived homosexuality. Most often, this objection came in the form of commenters calling modders "faggots," (Figure 15) and arguing that those who use this mod, especially when it shows male-on-male rape, must be gay. These reactions are problematic in a few ways, the first being that the use of homophobic language, such as calling people faggots, helps to contribute to the culture of hypermasculinity that exists within gaming that often rejects and vilifies homosexuality. Additionally, these reactions further the belief that the only men who rape other men are gay, a rape myth that works to contribute to the persecution of homosexuality in our society.
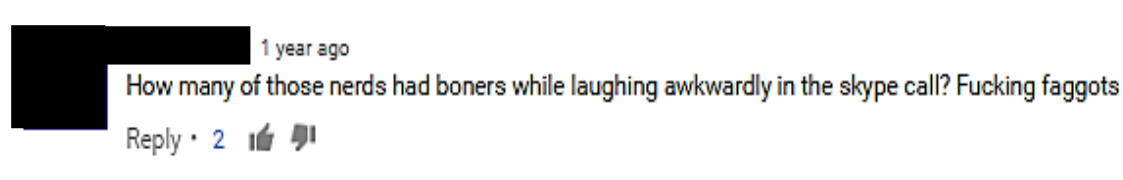
Figure 15. Homophobia in YouTube Comments. Source: Youtube.com

Two other themes that appear within these comments that do not necessarily fit into the above categories but are important to note are commenters asking how to use the mod, as well as commenters sharing their experiences with the rape mod. Throughout the comments, 9 people asked how to use the mods that were featured in the videos. These questions did not seem to necessarily be positive or negative reactions to the mods, yet they are important in that by explaining how to rape other players and getting people interested in the topic, these videos work to perpetuate the use of the rape mod and reproduce the ideologies that make its use acceptable in the gaming world. Additionally, commenters would also share the fact that they have had the rape mod used on them, which was seen 15 times. Again, in these cases there was not a positive or negative tone to the comments, rather a matter-of-fact statement. This is interesting in that, not only does it show that this is a phenomenon that happens outside the confines of these videos, but also that the statements occur in a nonchalant manner which suggests that the use of the rape mod has become normalized for many.

All of these components that make up the interactions that take place over YouTube comment sections work to contribute to gaming culture as an ISA that perpetuates dominant ideology (Althusser, 1972). Specifically, through these comments we can see hegemonic masculinity held up and reproduced. This is seen through the positive reactions that commenters had to the videos, which works to further encourage the use of the rape mod and acting in hypermasculine ways. Hypermasculinity is also reproduced by the perpetuation of rape culture and misogynistic language that can be seen throughout the comments. The continuation of rape

myths works to further the ideology that women are sexual objects that men are entitled to which continues to hold men up dominant within our society. The misogynistic language also works to devalue women thus continuing male dominance. Furthermore, the use of homophobic language also works to uphold hypermasculinity. Male homosexuality is often seen as feminine in our society, so we can understand the use of derogatory language towards gay men as a further expression of hegemonic masculinity. That being said, it is still important to note, as Althusser (1972) has pointed out, that ISAs are not always homogenous and can serve as a site of conflict. This can be seen through the negative reactions that commenters had to the use of the rape mod. While the positive reactions that uphold hypermasculine ideology significantly outnumber the negative reactions, there is clear contention within gaming culture in regards to these hypermasculine values.

Message Boards

In addition to YouTube comments, there are several sites within gaming culture where gamers can interact with one another; one of the most prominent sites of online interaction is message boards. Message boards can be found on many websites that focus on gaming culture and have been home to thousands of discussions ranging from the mundane to the controversial, such as the birth GamerGate. While message boards can focus on any topic within gaming, I have looked specifically at those that discuss the use of the rape mod in Grand Theft Auto V. I did this to compare the ways people approach this topic in different spaces. I examined 55 comments from three different message boards found on GTAForum.com, Gamefaq.com, and the support page for Rockstar games, the company that produces the Grand Theft Auto series. This examination garnered 16 codes that were used a total of 74 times throughout the messages. Most of these codes were able to fit into one of three categories: Defense of the rape mod, perpetuation

of rape culture, and negative reactions to the rape mod. The following section will break down

each of these categories to better understand how they work within gaming culture.

Table 5. Codes, Categories and Frequencies for Message Board Comments.

Category	Defense of Rape Mod	Rape Culture	Negative Reactions to Mod
Codes	• Nothing Can Be Done About Mod (2) • Violence in Game Justifies Mod (5) • Rape Mod Not Serious (14) • Defending Rockstar (2)	• Rape Joke (8) • Rape Mod Acceptable on Female Avatar (1)	• Calling Out Rockstar (14) • Disbelief/Disgust (3) • Negative Emotional Effects of Mod (1) • Rape Mod Should be Illegal (6) • Mod Not Funny (1) • Mods Ruining Game (6) • Rape Mod is Offensive (8)

Defense of the Rape Mod

Similar to the comments that are found on the YouTube videos featuring the use of the

rape mod, these message boards also contained arguments in defense of the mod. This attitude

was represented in 4 codes that appeared 23 times throughout the messages. The most prevalent

of these codes was the expression that rape mods are not serious which was found 14 times. Like

many of the arguments found in other spaces in gaming culture, many make the point that rape

mods are just a joke and are not to be taken seriously, often arguing that there are more important

problems that need to be taken care of in gaming. Another popular argument that appeared 5

times within the discussion boards is the idea that the violence in the game justifies the use of the

rape mod (Figure 16). Many believe that, because the game already features murder and torture,

that the rape mod is simply a natural addition to the game and to be offended by the mod but

accept the other violence shown in the game is hypocritical. Arguably, while it is completely true

that the game features intense violence, the argument that this violence justifies the use of the

mod overlooks the issue of consent. Gamers who buy and play the Grand Theft Auto series can be

seen as consenting to the violence that takes place within the game, not the use of mods that exist separately. Like the arguments for the use of the rape mod that exist in the comment sections of YouTube videos, we can look at the defense of the rape mod in this space as a form of aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel, 2015) as the anger that is expressed towards those who react negatively to the mod is done so in an attempt to protect the right to act in a hypermasculine way.

I understand, it's pretty sick. However they have not added anything to the game. This is using everything already in the game.

Also offence can only be taken. I'm sure there's people been scarred for life by a bad auto theft in traffic. Should we remove the ability to steal cars?

You miss the point and create a new argument against the game entirely. The real problem is the mods existence in public lobbies and not what is being done with it.

Figure 16. Argument that Violence in Games Justifies Rape Mod.
Source: support.rockstargames.com

Rape Culture

Another component of the message boards that can be seen throughout gaming culture is the perpetuation of rape culture. While not as prevalent in the message board as it is in the comment sections of YouTube, the perpetuation of rape culture was represented by 2 codes that appeared 9 times throughout the message boards. Like the comment sections, the main way this occurred in the message boards was through the use of rape jokes which appeared 8 times. As with past data, comments were categorized as rape jokes when they made fun or made light of rape or the use of the rape mod. This was seen in comments such as "always wear protection in a public lobby." Another occurrence that works to perpetuate rape culture that was seen in both the message boards and the YouTube comments was the argument that the mod is acceptable when the victim of the mod is a female character. This of course furthers the idea that women are the

only people who are raped and that it is to be expected. Similar to YouTube comments, the perpetuation of rape culture on discussion boards can be understood both as a departure from PC culture (Kimmel, 2010) as well as an expression of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Negative Reactions

While the categories of codes and the attitudes that are portrayed through online message boards reflect the comments found on YouTube videos featuring the rape mod, it is important to note that the frequency in which they appear varies greatly. Specifically, while negative reactions to the rape mod were present in YouTube comments they were significantly in the minority when compared to the positive reactions to the rape mod. In the case of the message boards, we see the opposite effect. Negative reactions to the rape mod consisted of 7 codes that were used 40 times throughout the messages, almost doubling that of the positive reactions. One common argument, which appeared 8 times throughout the messages, was that the rape mods are simply offensive, with multiple people citing them as childish or annoying. Other arguments included the feeling that mods ruin the gaming experience and should not be allowed to continue, as well as the argument that the rape mod can have negative and lasting emotional effects on players. However, the most prominent instance of negative reactions to the rape mod was the calling out of Rockstar Games, the company responsible for the Grand Theft Auto series, which occurred 14 times throughout the messages. By this, I mean many commenters made the argument that Rockstar is to blame for the mod by not acting, or being slow to respond to the problem. Multiple commenters claimed that Rockstar has lost control of the problem, while others argue that Rockstar simply does not care about the rape mod and in this way, they are passively condoning

it. Regardless of the belief in Rockstar's ability or willingness to act, several people in the gaming community are calling on Rockstar to end the use of the rape mod once and for all.

The stark differences in the dominant attitudes between the YouTube comments and the message boards shows the argument made by Althusser (1972) that ISAs can serve as a site of conflict. While the overarching ISA that is gaming culture works to perpetuate the dominant hypermasculine ideologies that exist within our society, it is clear by the overall negative reactions to the use of the rape mod that are present in online discussion boards that other ideals and attitudes are being expressed. We can see how ISAs work as a site of conflict further on the micro level of the message boards themselves in that, while negative reactions are dominant in this space, there is still the conflict with those that have positive reactions to the rape mod. In this way, while discussion boards work against the rape mod and the attitudes and ideals that created it, we can still see the messages as a vehicle for the perpetuation of dominant ideologies through those that paint the rape mod and violence in a positive light.

Fatuglyorslutty.com Comments

The online discussion boards revolving around the issue of rape mods in Grand Theft Auto V are not the only spaces in which the majority of the voices heard were condemning the hypermasculine and misogynistic attitudes present in gaming culture. Another space that works against the dominant ideology in gaming is the site fatuglyorslutty.com. While the messages found on this site show hypermasculine and misogynistic attitudes, the point of the site as previously noted is to make fun of the private messages that might otherwise have the power to intimidate those who receive them. In the comment sections of posts, it is possible to see how users online are able to come together to support one another and make the horrific messages that are sent seem humorous rather than intimidating through their interactions. I examined 357

comments found on 40 of the posts I previously analyzed to understand the reactions that people

had to the messages and how they interact with one another in this space. I came up with 14

unique codes that appeared 354 times. These codes followed four main codes: Community,

humor, negative reactions to messages, and defense of messages.

Table 6. Codes, Categories and Frequencies for Fatuglyorslutty.com Comments.

Category	Community	Humor	Negative Reactions to Messages	Defense of Messages
Codes	- Discussing Problems in Gaming Culture (42) - Male Voice (6) - Positive Reaction to Site (4) - Sharing Similar Experiences (22) - Suggesting What to Do (9)	- Joking Response to Message (155) - Making Fun of Sender (14)	- Negative Reaction to Message (30) - Negative Portrayal of Senders (7) - Shock at Messages (5)	- Defending Message (9) - Defending Sender/Behavior (28) - Finds Message Funny (10) - Negative Reaction to Site (7) - Shaming Reactions to Messages (6)

Community

Overwhelmingly, this site lived up to its goal of being a place of community for those

against the hypermasculine and misogynistic ideology that is perpetuated through gaming. This

was seen largely in the fact that the comment sections of the posts allowed for the open discussion

of the problems that exist within gaming culture. These comments included discussions regarding

women in gaming, sexist themes in games, as well as how to go about changing gaming culture

and were seen 42 times throughout the comments (Figure 17). These discussions work to open a

dialogue about the different experiences people have within gaming, and by doing so allows for

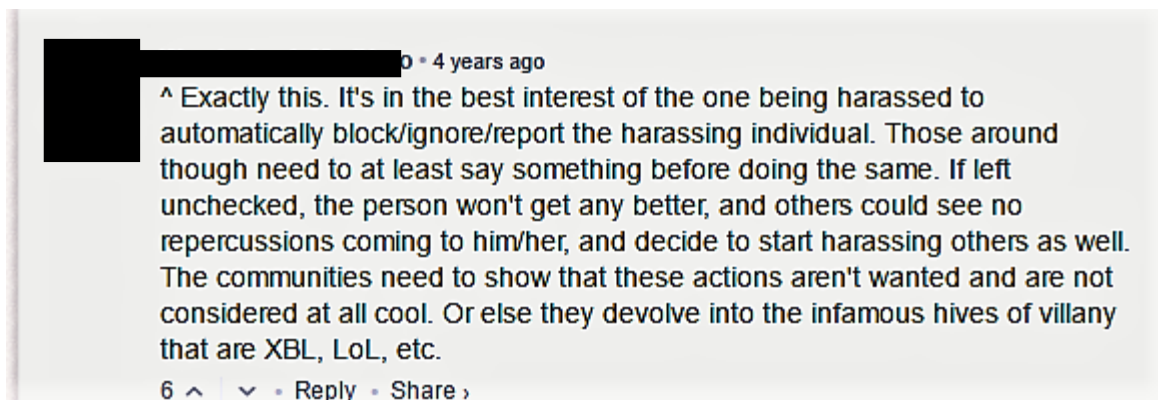multiple voices to be heard in this space within gaming culture.

Figure 17. Discussing How to Combat Harassment in Online Gaming Communities.
Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com

Another major aspect of these comments that portrayed this website as a space for

community is the fact that many people shared similar experiences they've had while interacting

with other players online. This was seen 22 times and shows that this site allows people within the

gaming community to come together and share negative experiences they have had in gaming and

work to make these experiences humorous rather than threatening and powerful. Others showed

support for those who had experienced negative attention through these messages by suggesting

ways to help the situation such as blocking and reporting the perpetrator. While this arguably does

not solve the problems that exist within gaming culture, the ability to take the power away from

the attacker can be valuable. It is also important to note, that men came forward in this space

multiple times throughout the comments to express their frustration with the problem that largely

effects women as well as to lend support. While some in the comments argue that men who do

this are trying too hard to be "nice guys" and gain praise from a female audience (which may be

true in some cases) I would argue that presences of male voices speaking out in this space is

important in that it shows and allows for a form of masculinity that goes against the hegemonic

norm that exist in gaming culture. Finally, praise for the site, especially when it is attacked which

will be discussed further in a later section, can also be seen as a form of community and

connection that exists on this site. Particularly, there are those who argue that the site is valuable

in its ability to show the problems that exist within gaming culture and call out those who perpetuate hypermasculine and misogynistic ideals.

Humor

A related theme that was also found throughout the comments was that of humor. As previously mentioned, the site stated that the purpose was to make fun of these messages that are sent in online gaming. By looking at the comments that are present on this site, it is clear that this goal was reached, as the most common theme found throughout the site was sarcastic or joking replies to the messages. This occurred 155 times and was present in every post made on the site. These responses often included comments that served as sarcastic replies to the messages themselves, as well as making fun of the absurdity of the messages. One amusing series of comments also featured poems inspired by someone who sent another player the word "cunt" repeatedly, which many commenters were quick to liken to a haiku (Figure 18). Another popular element of this site being used for humor is comments that make fun of the senders of the messages themselves. This included things such as making fun of the sender's gamer tag which identifies the user on a certain gaming system (Xbox Live, PlayStation Network, etc.) as well as making comments meant to humiliate the sender, including stating that the sender was angry because they had been beaten by a girl. The making fun of both the senders themselves as well as the messages they send undermines the hypermasculinity that is being displayed in the messages by taking away the power of the messages and making them comical and embarrassing rather than tough and menacing.

Figure 18. Poem Inspired by Trolls on Fatuglyorslutty.com. Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com

Negative Reactions to Messages

Another common theme that occurred when looking at the comments was users having negative reactions to the messages. These reactions were seen 30 times throughout the comments and largely consisted of users expressing their disapproval for the messages by calling them gross, disgusting, disturbing, etc. Others portrayed the senders in a negative light by calling them idiots and sore losers. I coded this type of language as separate from the humorous "making fun of sender" because these negative portrayals are not necessarily meant to be funny but rather simply insulting to the senders. Like the humorous reactions that were seen, as well as likeminded comments in other spaces, these negative reactions can also be understood as working against the

dominant ideology within gaming culture. While many elements in gaming culture, from the portrayal of men and women in games themselves to the interactions players have with each other online, replicate the hypermasculinity and misogyny that exists in society as a whole and dominates gaming, the fact that there are those willing to speak out against expressions of dominant ideologies show that there are struggles within gaming culture as an ISA. Sites that work against hypermasculinity and misogyny such as fatuglyorslutty.com are thus working to change the landscape of ideology within gaming as they allow for multiple voices to be heard and the dominant ideologies to be challenged.

Defense of Messages

While the active struggle against dominant ideologies is clearly displayed in spaces dedicated to pointing out the harsh reality of being a woman in gaming such as fatuglyorslutty.com, hypermasculine and misogynistic attitudes still managed to find their way into these spaces as well. This came largely in the form of negative reactions to the website itself as well as shame tactics that were used against those who had negative reactions to the site, particularly men on the site telling people to "stop crying" and that people are exaggerating or should just let the messages go (Figure 19). These attitudes that are expressed can be understood as reflecting the rape culture that exists in society at large because they work to discourage and shame those who speak up and share their experiences of being sexualized, which allows the behavior to continue unchecked. Others put blame on the website itself for shaming the people who send vulgar messages and looking down on them. Finally, there are those who defend the messages themselves by calling them funny, or stating that, compared to the rest of the messages on the site they are actually nice and people shouldn't be upset by them. Again, these attitudes are taking blame off those who send these messages and placing it on those who react and attempt to

83

do something to battle the dominant ideologies that exist in gaming culture. This arguably

portrays the behavior of those who send the messages as acceptable which works to encourage the

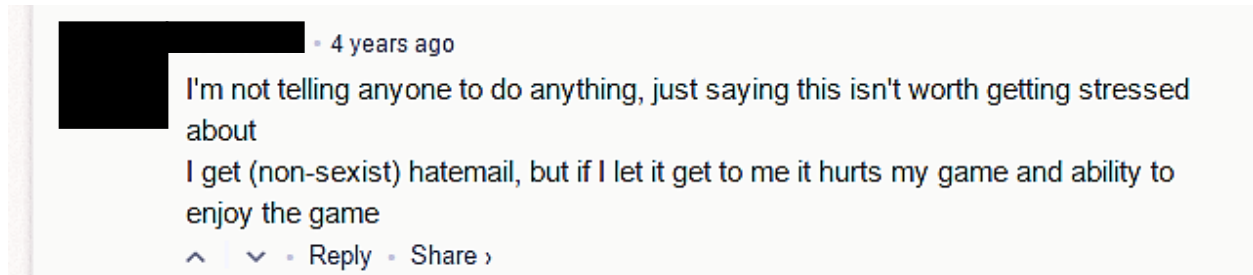behavior in the future, perpetuating hypermasculine and misogynistic rhetoric within gaming.

Figure 19. Shaming Others for Negative Reactions to Messages on Fatuglyorslutty.com.
Source: Fatuglyorslutty.com

Similar to those who put blame on the website or those who react to the messages, there

are also those who work to defend of make excuses for the senders. While not usually painting the

sender in the best light, many in the comments attempted to dismiss the behavior of the senders

by saying the messages were just sent by stupid kids or that the sender is mentally disturbed.

While these are both insulting towards those who send the messages, I would argue that these

comments work to excuse the behavior by assuming that those who send the messages are

unaware of the consequences of their actions and therefore don't know any better. In doing so, the

fact that people who send these messages are everyday people who are parroting real life attitudes

and ideals is significantly diminished and the problem is reduced to simply being immature or

mentally ill. This again works to take blame away from those who send these messages which

allows people to do so and thus continue without consequences. I would also argue that the

comments stating these messages are sent from kids and shouldn't be taken seriously do not get

the rather disturbing root of the problem; that even if all the messages analyzed were sent by kids

(as some obviously are) this shows an even bigger issue of children picking up and expressing

hypermasculine and misogynist ideals and working to replicate them. In this way, we can truly

understand how gaming culture works as an ISA that perpetuates the dominant ideologies within society and allows them to be learned and further expressed by the younger generations.

While this space does contain some language and attitudes that both reflect and defend the hypermasculine and misogynistic attitudes, the majority of the interactions that took place on this site work to fight against the dominant patriarchal ideology that is present in gaming culture. Like the messages boards and other interactions that fight against hypermasculine and misogynistic rhetoric throughout gaming culture, this site strongly shows what Althusser (1972) argued in that ISAs serve as a site of struggle. Specifically, if we look at gaming culture as an ISA we can see how sites such as fatuglyorslutty.com, message boards, and individuals who brave backlash from their peers to speak out against the dominant ideology, work to allow for other voices to be expressed. While gaming culture currently serves as a site of replication for hypermasculinity and misogyny that are taken from society we can see through the struggle that takes place within this ISA that the dominant ideologies are not the only ones that exist and there is hope for a shifting of rhetoric that allows for more equality and inclusion in gaming.

CONCLUSION

Though the use of content analysis and data from five different spaces within gaming culture, this thesis set out to answer three main questions: In what ways do everyday women experience violence and harassment in gaming through interactions with other players? How do online spaces within gaming culture produce and reproduce misogynistic and hypermasculine ideals that contribute to rape culture? In what ways do online spaces work to combat the production and reproduction of such ideals? The following section works to more thoroughly answer these questions using the findings elicited from all five sources of data.

Question 1: In what ways do everyday women experience violence and harassment in gaming through interactions with other players?

When looking at the past research as well as news reports, it is clear that there are cases in which women experience a great deal of violence and harassment in gaming communities through means such as death threats, rape threats, and cyber stalking. That being said, most of the writing that has been done on violence and harassment towards women in gaming spaces has revolved around women in the gaming industry, such as Zoe Quinn, Brianna Wu, and Anita Sarkeesian, all of whom are well-known and vocal about issues of feminism in the gaming world. Unfortunately, being outspoken about feminist issues in any male dominated arena comes with the heightened risk of being targeted with violence or hate; so, while it is disheartening, it is not entirely surprising that all three of these women have experienced violence and harassment in the gaming world (this is not to say that their positions in gaming excuses the behavior of the perpetrators). For me, this begged the question: What about everyday women who simply want to play video games, especially in online formats? Does violence and harassment in gaming happen to them or is it isolated to those who are more well-known in the gaming community?

What was found, especially through the site fatuglyorslutty.com, is that violence and harassment that women receive in the gaming world is not reserved for those who speak out about problems in gaming, but rather it seems that anyone who is perceived as being a woman is open to being a target for harassment and violent rhetoric. We can see this clearly when looking at the private messages that women received from male players. As previously mentioned, fatuglyorslutty.com featured 472 posts containing messages received from other players. Some posts included multiple messages that a single recipient had received, occasionally from multiple other players in a single evening. The variety of users posting these messages suggests that harassment and violence through this medium is not simply a problem that is happening to a select number of female gamers, but rather that it is common for many women in gaming communities. This was also seen when looking at the comments found on these posts which often involved female users sharing their own experiences with harassment in the gaming world. Similarly, while there are some repeat offenders featured on the site (those who sent multiple messages that managed to end up on the site) for the most part there is a variety of people sending these messages, suggesting that it is not simply the work of a select few mentally disturbed or angry individuals, but rather the attitudes present in and the violent nature of the messages are common in the gaming community as is the feeling of entitlement to send such messages to random strangers.

It is also important to note, that harassment and violence that is directed towards women in the gaming world is not always as easily documented as the private text or audio messages that women receive, but that it also occurs during game play, usually over microphones. During the early phases of working on this thesis, I was playing Grand Theft Auto V online and personally experienced being sexually harassed over the microphone. I am not a well-known player, nor was

87

I acting in any way other than simply playing the game as it was made (not cheating or using mods), so there was nothing to differentiate or place a target on me other than the fact that I am a woman who was using a mic. Nonetheless, within a short amount of time I was being harassed by male players. The fact that I was only playing for a short time and was not outstanding in any way suggests even further that this type of harassment occurs frequently in this space simply based on one's perceived gender. This was further confirmed by the fact that every single time I mentioned what I was conducting research on to another female gamer she confirmed that something similar had happened to her, often multiple times.

Question 2: How do online spaces within gaming culture produce and reproduce misogynistic and hypermasculine ideals that contribute to rape culture?

Gaming culture serves as an ISA that produces and reproduces dominant ideologies that exist in society, such as hypermasculinity and misogyny. It is possible to see this across all sites within gaming culture that were examined throughout this thesis. This is seen in the private messages that are sent to female gamers that serve to harass or threaten them. The highly sexualized and violent rhetoric that is used throughout the message reflect hypermasculinity and shows that many within gaming culture express themselves in hypermasculine ways in this space. Additionally, while it is not clear whether the goal of any or all of these messages is to get women to stop playing or stop being visible in this masculine space, that is what is happening for many women who simply do not wish to deal with the constant barrage of harassment (Paaßen et al, 2016; Shaw, 2011). This suppressing of female visibility in the gaming world allows for hypermasculine and patriarchal ideals as well as the notion that gaming is a primarily male space to be further reproduced.

We can also see the reproduction of hypermasculine and patriarchal ideology through online game play as seen through the YouTube videos examined. The sheer number of videos that show the use of the rape mod prove that it is a popular aspect of gaming culture. The mod works to perpetuate hypermasculinity in that it exhibits violence and dominance over others as something that is funny or desirable. The depiction of rape as comical as well as the positive reactions to the mod from others also works to contribute to rape culture in that sexual assault is not seen as a serious theat. This contributes to patriarchal ideals and hegemonic masculinity in that it disregards the experiences of rape survivors which further oppresses women and men who are not seen as living up to hegemonic masculinity. Disturbingly, these violent and oppressive ideologies are being reproduced in game play, not only among adults who play the game, but also in the large number of children that are present throughout the YouTube videos.

Hypermasculinity and misogynistic ideals can also be seen in public interactions that occur in different spaces within gaming culture. This is especially true for interactions that took place in the comment sections for the videos examined. The overall positive reactions to the use of the rape mod, as well as the defense of the mod and attacking of those who questioned it show that the dominant ideologies within this space align with hypermasculine and misogynistic ideals in that they value the violence that is being portrayed and devalue those who are seen as acting feminine. Hostility towards femininity is also seen through the use of anti-feminist rhetoric such as saying feminists are over reacting to the use of the rape mod as well as the use of the term "feminazi." This shows open hostility towards those (especially women) who would speak out against the dominant ideologies that are on display, which further suppresses women's voices within the gaming realm as well as reproducing the dominant ideologies by attacking views that do not align with them. Similar to the use of the rape mod itself, the comments also make light of

rape through rape jokes. Again, this works to perpetuate rape culture by disregarding the seriousness of rape, and contributes to hegemonic masculinity by devaluing those that are seen as feminine or not matching with the tough, invincible image of what it means to embody hegemonic masculinity.

The perpetuation of dominant ideology can also be seen in other online interactions to a lesser degree. While both the message boards as well as the comments that are found on fatuglyorslutty.com tended to lean away from dominant ideology, there were still comments in both sites that expresses these ideals. In the message boards, there were multiple comments that defended the use of the rape mod as well as made rape jokes. Again, this expresses hypermasculinity by valuing and condoning images of violence, as well as making light of rape and supporting rape culture. Similarly, while the comments on fatuglyorslutty.com were largely in opposition to the harassment women receive, there were still those who defended the messages and shamed women for reacting negatively towards the harassment. This perpetuates the dominant ideology that places men in a position of dominance over women by discouraging women from speaking out against said dominance. This shaming works to silence those who speak out against the ideologies that value men over women in gaming, which contributes to women's invisibility in this space and is a reflection of how rape culture operates in society.

Question 3: In what ways do online spaces work to combat the production and reproduction of such ideals?

While many aspects of the data examined work to perpetuate the dominant ideology that values masculinity above femininity, there are still ways these ideals are being challenged within gaming culture. We see this at the game industry level in that, despite the multiple violent attempts to silence them, Zoe Quinn, Brianna Wu, and Anita Sarkeesian continue to be vocal and

active within the gaming world. That being said, we can also see the struggle against dominant ideologies take place in the online spaces examined throughout this thesis. This is true in interactions that occur in public spaces such as YouTube and online message boards, as well as the existence of sites such as fatuglyorslutty.com.

While the YouTube comments largely supported dominant ideologies by defending and celebrating expressions of hypermasculinity and misogyny, there were still those in this space who spoke out against the use of the rape mod. Even though some who spoke out were attacked by other commenters, the existence of resistance to dominant ideologies allows this space within the larger ISA that is gaming culture to serve as a site of struggle in which these ideologies are being challenged at the same time they are being reproduced. This is seen to a larger extent in the message boards which were predominately against the use of the rape mod, and thus spoke out against dominant ideologies. While they were still reproduced in this space through the defense of the rape mod and the use of rape jokes, this space still allows for the expression of beliefs that go against the hypermasculinity and misogyny that exists within gaming culture.

Finally, the existence of sites like fatuglyorslutty.com work to fight against the dominant ideologies within gaming. This is done largely in that the posts as well as the comments, strip the men who send these messages of their power in that, by sharing and making fun of these rather disturbing messages women are able to transform them from threatening to funny. The posts themselves, as well as the comments that share similar experiences, also allow the problems women in the gaming world face to be visible and thus be taken seriously. While the site is no longer being updated, I would argue that the fact that it remains visible to the public still contributes to the struggle against dominant ideologies by showing that women are in fact a part of the gaming community and can have a voice within this space.

The gaming world continues to serve as an ISA that reproduces hypermasculine and misogynistic ideals that are present in society and contribute to rape culture. This is done through the harassment of women, both in the gaming industry and those who simply want to take part in the community by playing games online, as well as the perpetuation and celebration of sexualized violence and male domination. Yet, there are still those within gaming that are fighting against these dominant ideologies by allowing other voices and experiences to be heard. While it will take a significant amount of time and effort, the struggle that exists within the gaming suggest the possibility that dominant ideologies could shift, allowing for femininity and non-hegemonic masculinity to exist peacefully in the gaming world.

Future Research

The gaming world is vast and encompasses many facets, from the gaming industry itself to website forums to massive conventions filled with diehard fans in elaborate costumes. This thesis was only able to examine as small sample of what gaming has to offer researchers in looking at how dominant ideologies are reproduced in this space. Further research should focus on other elements of gaming culture, particularly the gaming industry itself. It is here where game content that can either fight or reproduce dominant ideals that trickle down into other interactions within gaming culture is created. Thus, it is important to understand the dominant ideologies that exist in the industry and whose voices are being heard and oppressed in this space.

Additionally, while this thesis focused specifically on dominant ideologies regarding gender and masculinity, an examination of the data also found racist, homophobic, and ableist ideologies as well. A more in-depth look into these ideologies would also be highly important in understanding how dominant ideologies are taken from society and reproduced within the gaming world, as well as understanding who is being represented or silenced in gaming culture.

REFERENCES

Althusser, Louis. 1972. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation)." in *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Anon. 2011. "About." *About | Fat, Ugly or Slutty*. Retrieved March 21, 2017 (http://fatuglyorslutty.com/about/).

Anon. 2013. "Pong." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pong).

Anon. 2014. "Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry." *theesa*.

Anon. 2014. *GTA 5 Online - Players Getting RAPED In GTA V Online ! (GTA 5 Mods Gameplay)*.

Anon. n.d. "Troll." *Merriam-Webster*.

Beasley, Berrin and Tracy Collins Standley. 2002. "Shirts vs. Skins: Clothing as an Indicator of Gender Role Stereotyping in Video Games." *Mass Communication and Society* 5(3):279–93.

Beauvoir, Simone de and H. M. Parshley. 1989. *The Second Sex*. South Yarra, Vic.: Louis Braille Productions.

Beck, V. S., S. Boys, C. Rose, and E. Beck. 2012. "Violence Against Women in Video Games: A Prequel or Sequel to Rape Myth Acceptance?" *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27(15):3016–31.

Burgess, Melinda C. R., Steven Paul Stermer, and Stephen R. Burgess. 2007. "Sex, Lies, and Video Games: The Portrayal of Male and Female Characters on Video Game Covers." *Sex Roles* 57(5-6):419–33.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage.

Chess, Shira and Adrienne Shaw. 2015. "A Conspiracy of Fishes, or, How We Learned to Stop

    Worrying About #GamerGate and Embrace Hegemonic Masculinity." *Journal of*

    *Broadcasting & Electronic Media*59(1):208–20.

Cobos, April. 2014. "'Rape Culture' Language and the News Media: Contested versus Non-

    Contested Cases." *Journal for Communication Studies* 7(2):37–52.

Connell, R. W. and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity." *Gender &*

    Society 19(6):829–59.

Dickerman, Charles, Jeff Christensen, and Stella BeatrÃz Kerl-Mcclain. 2008. "Big Breasts and

    Bad Guys: Depictions of Gender and Race in Video Games." *Journal of Creativity in*

    Mental Health 3(1):20–29.

Dill, Karen E. and Kathryn P. Thill. 2007. "Video Game Characters and the Socialization of

    Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions." *Sex*

    Roles 57(11-12):851–64.

Fusch, Patricia and Lawrence Ness. 2015. "Are We There Yet? Data Saturation in Qualitative

    Research." *The Qualitative Report* 20(9):1408–16.

Grandoni, Dino. 2014. "The Disturbing New Trend In 'Grand Theft Auto' Is Virtual Rape."

    Retrieved (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/12/grand-theft-auto-

    rape_n_5671400.html).

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. 1972. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass

    Deception ." in *Dialectic of enlightenment*. New York: Herder and Herder.

Hsieh, Hsiu-Fang and Sarah E. Shannon. 2005. "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content

    Analysis." *Qualitative Health Research* 15(9):1277–88.

Jason, Zachary. 2015. "Game of Fear: The Story Behind Gamergate." *Boston*, May.

Johnston, Casey. 2016. "How 4chan Manufactured the #GamerGate Controversy." *WIRED UK*.

    Retrieved (http://www.wired.co.uk/article/gamergate-chat-logs).

Kafai, Yasmin B., Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner, and Jennifer Y. Sun, eds. 2008. *Beyond Barbie and*

    Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kimmel, Michael S. 2010. *Guyland the Perilous World Where Boys Become Men ;* New York:

    Harper.

Kimmel, Michael S. 2015. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. New

    York: Nation Books.

Kinder, Marsha. 1991. *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: from*

    Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kingkade, Tyler. 2016. "Comment Sections Are Cesspools Of Rape Culture, Research

    Finds." *The Huffington Post*, August 18.

Lajacq, Yannick. 2013. "'Grand Theft Auto V'Torture Episode Sparks Controversy." *NBC News*,

    September 17.

Lecher, Colin. 2016. "Lucasfilm Games' Forgotten 1986 Online Game Is Making a Surprising

    Return." *The Verge*. Retrieved (https://www.theverge.com/2016/7/9/12134996/lucasfilm-

    games-habitat).

Letzter, Rafi. 2015. "Online Communities Are Changing Video Games to Make Them Better,

    Weirder, and Much More Wonderful." Retrieved (http://www.businessinsider.com/video-

    game-modding-2015-7).

Mannheim, Karl, Louis Wirth, and Edward Shils. 1936. "Preliminary Approach to the Problem ."

    in *Ideology and utopia; an introduction to the sociology of knowledge*. London: K. Paul,

    Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.

Maxwell, Joseph A. 2013. *Qualitative Research Design: an Interactive Approach*. Thousand

    Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Mikula, Maja. 2003. "Gender and Videogames: The Political Valency of Lara

    Croft." *Continuum* 17(1):79–87.

Paaßen, Benjamin, Thekla Morgenroth, and Michelle Stratemeyer. 2016. "What Is a True Gamer?

    The Male Gamer Stereotype and the Marginalization of Women in Video Game

    Culture." *Sex Roles* 76(7-8):421–35.

Parrott, Dominic J. and Amos Zeichner. 2003. "Effects of Hypermasculinity Oh Physical

    Aggression against Women." *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 4(1):70–78.

Provenzo, Eugene F. 1991. *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard

    University Press.

Royse, Pam, Joon Lee, Baasanjav Undrahbuyan, Mark Hopson, and Mia Consalvo. 2007.

    "Women and Games: Technologies of the Gendered Self." *New Media & Society* 9(4):555–

    76.

Saldaña, Johnny. 2016. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Los Angeles, CA:

    SAGE.

Salter, Anastasia and Bridget Blodgett. 2012. "Hypermasculinity & Dickwolves: The Contentious

    Role of Women in the New Gaming Public." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic*

    Media 56(3):401–16.

Shaw, Adrienne. 2011. "Do You Identify as a Gamer? Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Gamer

    Identity." *New Media & Society* 14(1):28–44.

Spohn, Dave. 2016. "The History of Online Gaming 1969 - 1990." *Lifewire*. Retrieved

    (https://www.lifewire.com/internet-game-timeline-1983536).

Tomkinson, Sian and Tauel Harper. 2015. "The Position of Women in Video Game Culture:

    Perez and Day's Twitter Incident." *Continuum* 29(4):617–34.

Tretkoff, Ernie. 2008. "APS News." October.

Valenti, Jessica. 2015. "Anita Sarkeesian Interview: 'The Word 'Troll' Feels Too Childish. This Is

    Abuse'." *The Guardian* , August 29.

Walkerdine, Valerie. 2007. *Children, Gender, Video Games: towards a Relational Approach to*

    Multimedia. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wu, Brianna. 2014. "Rape and Death Threats Are Terrorizing Female Gamers. Why Haven't Men

    in Tech Spoken out?" *Washington Post*, October 20.