Ideological Parallels Between Gamergate and White Supremacy: A Thematic Content Analysis

By

Jordan Etherington

A thesis submitted to the

School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Art in Criminology

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities

University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

September 2018

THESIS EXAMINATION INFORMATION

Submitted by: **Jordan Etherington**

Master of Arts in **Criminology**

Thesis title: Ideological Parallels Between Gamergate and White Supremacy: A Thematic Content Analysis

An oral defense of this thesis took place on August 29, 2018 in front of the following examining committee:

Examining Committee:

Chair of Examining Committee	Dr. Christopher O'Connor
Research Supervisor	Dr. Steven Downing
Examining Committee Member	Dr. Aziz Douai
External Examiner	Dr. Andrea Slane

The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Abstract

The subject of this thesis is the main online hub of the alt-right video game movement Gamergate, for the purpose of examining if the discourse of Gamergate possesses significant ideological parallels with explicitly White Supremacist movements. Data gathered from a variety of Kotaku in Action threads were analyzed using thematic coding. The results of the analysis indicated a preoccupation with common elements of White Supremacist discourse regarding persecution, gender, and race. The application of Merton's Insider/Outsider dynamics revealed an extremely rigid ideological divide between those who identify as Gamergate supporters, and those who are external to Gamergate, which are held in deep suspicion as being engaged in a wide-ranging and ill-defined cultural conspiracy. Overall, the discourse of Gamergate supported the hypothesis that Gamergate possesses significant ideological parallels with White supremacy, although Gamergate had a larger emphasis on gender rather then race.

Keywords: Gamergate; video games; gender; White Supremacy; race

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The research question of this thesis is to examine parallels between White Supremacist ideology and the discourse present in the Kotaku in Action subreddit, which has acted as the main hub of Gamergate since Gamergate discussion was banned from 4Chan (Kotaku in Action, 2018). This will be done by a qualitative thematic analysis of posts gathered from the Kotaku in Action subreddit. The theoretical perspective used for this thesis will be Insider/Outsider dynamics as described by Merton (1972). This thesis will engage in a reflexive narrative approach which will be further expanded upon in the Methods section.

A Short History of Gamergate

Before the thesis proper begins, a brief overview of the events of the Gamergate movement itself will be helpful to contextualize the research. First of all, it should be noted that tensions regarding the influence of women, progressive values, and feminism had been simmering for a long time among subsets of male video game consumers. However, Eron Gjoni's August 2014 "Zoe Post" is generally considered to be the inciting incident for the Gamergate movement (Jane, 2017; Mantilla, 2015). In this blog post, Gjoni, an ex-boyfriend of video game designer Zoe Quinn, falsely implied that Quinn's game, *Depression Quest*, had gotten positive reviews from video game critics because she had been in a sexual relationship with video game reviewer Nathan Grayson at the time (Jane, 2017). It should be noted that this accusation was false for two reasons. First of all, Grayson had never reviewed *Depression Quest*, and secondly, the only article published by Grayson that mentioned Quinn was written before the relationship had begun (Jane, 2017).

Nonetheless, the blog post was taken as confirmation of what many of those who would become part of Gamergate already believed. Women and social progressives, already seen as intruders into the video game subculture, were now shown (to Gamergaters) to be achieving their aims through unethical journalistic practices, ie. By giving positive reviews in exchange for sex (Jane, 2017; Braithewaite, 2016; Salter, 2017). Interestingly, the term #Gamergate was actually coined by actor Adam Baldwin on Twitter (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Heron, Belford, & Goker,

2014) soon after the Zoe Post was published. Before that, the movement was internally referred to as "the Quinnspiracy" (Jane, 2017).

From this point, dates, events, and specific personages within Gamergate become hazy due to the anonymous, leaderless, and at times contradictory nature of the Gamergate movement. What is known is that after the "Zoe Post" was published, Zoe Quinn, who had already faced online harassment due to the critical success of *Depression Quest*, now experienced a literal thousandfold increase in online harassment (Salter, 2017). The specific kinds of harassment that Quinn experienced set the method for what other Gamergate targets would be exposed to. These included doxing, hacking of social media, death threats, sexual threats, doxing of family and friends, to name only a few. (Salter, 2017; Braithewaite, 2016; Heron, Belford, & Goker, 2014). Eventually, Quinn was forced to flee her home after her home address was repeatedly publically posted, often with accompanying death threats.

The targets of Gamergate quickly expanded to a few distinct categories. The primary targets were those who were known "SJWs" or "social justice warriors" that were in league with the intruding feminists and social progressives and were somehow involved with the video game industry. Then there were those who were vocally critical of Gamergate due to the ideology of Gamergate and/or their methods. The third were those who were believed to be connected to a rapidly compiled and incredibly far-reaching conspiracy to infect Western society with feminist or socialist ideology (Chess & Shaw, 2015). For example, Anita Sarkeesian, the creator of the Youtube series *Tropes vs Women in Video Games*, had always been considered an intruder due to her status as a prominent feminist media critic, was almost immediately subjected to an increase in online harassment, and even offline harassment such as when she had to cancel a speaking engagement at Utah State University in October 2014 due to the school receiving three anonymous violent threats. She too was eventually forced to flee her home after her private information was posted online, also accompanied by threats of a violent and/or sexual nature. On the other hand, Brianna Wu, another female indy video game developer, became a target of Gamergate after publically mocking it online. Much like the previous targets, she was also eventually forced to flee her home after being doxed and repeatedly threatened with violence.

This pattern of online harassment of critics of Gamergate, and socially progressive voices in the video game subculture has never really stopped, as the continued existence of the

Gamergate subreddit Kotaku in Action proves. However, Gamergate has wound down significantly from it's height in late 2014. There was no real single incident that broke the significance of Gamergate. Instead, a variety of factors likely led to Gamergate's inability to legitimize itself within mainstream society or even the video game industry. First, the tendency to employ tactics such as doxing, swatting (a fraudulent 911 call that is used to send a SWAT team to the target's residence) (Enzweiler, 2015), and threats of physical or sexual violence were all but guaranteed to turn public opinion against them. Indeed, the vast majority of mainstream attention was focused on the harassment campaigns rather then any rhetoric that Gamergate supporters wished to discuss (Salter, 2017).

This weakness was further exacerbated by the anonymous, decentralized, and unorganized nature of Gamergate. While this helped to shield individual Gamergate supporters from any overall culpability in the harassment campaign, it also prevented Gamergaters from being able to formulate a coherent agenda that could be presented for external consumption (Nieborg & Foxman, 2018). In other words, while Gamergate's collectivist decentralized nature helped to create a sense of plausible deniability, because any Gamergate member could deny that harassment was carried out by "real" Gamergaters, it also meant that Gamergate could not define itself. Therefore, those outside Gamergate were free to define that movement by it's most visible actions and consequences, which was harassment of critics and women in the video game industry (Salter, 2017; Nieborg & Foxman, 2018).

Another factor is that, to those who did not have the same emotional investment in video games, Gamergate would have appeared to be an incredibly exaggerated response to what would be a very insignificant issue to those outside Gamergate subculture. How, for example, would someone who has never played a video game perceive someone saying that feminists are ruining video games and that they should therefore be retaliated against? By the same note, the incredibly strong Outsider/Insider dichotomy present in Gamergate ideology made it very difficult for those unfamiliar with 4Chan "meme" culture to actually read and understand Gamergate communication in the light that Gamergate supporters may have intended (Salter, 2017). For example, slurs are often used as a term of endearment, orracist imagery may be posted "for the lulz". Anyone who expresses offense to these actions are thus quickly distinguished as outsiders due to their unfamiliarity with what these messages are "supposed" to

mean. While that is useful for maintaining group cohesion and identity, it is counter-productive when that same style of communication is used to try to communicate with outsiders.

While these factors led to Gamergate being easily dismissed as a quagmire of angry geeks that were afraid of women by mainstream culture, Gamergate still poses a risk due to the close ideological parallels that Gamergate holds with White Supremacist and other forms of "alt-right" thought. Due to its position as a so-called "gateway" to more extreme forms of White supremacy (Kelly, 2017), Gamergate remains worth investigating. relevant due to the risk of these members committing violent acts and other forms of hate crime if radicalized into more explicit forms of White Supremacy.

Note on the term SJW:

Due to the importance of the term SJW in Gamergate discourse, a brief explanation is required for those who are unfamiliar with it. SJW is short for "social justice warrior" and is used in Gamergate and alt-right circles to describe anyone who is engaged in activism for socially progressive causes, such as anti-racism, anti-facism, pro-LGBTQ, etc. It is an extremely broad label that can be applied to anyone who disagrees with Gamergate ideology. It is also used to describe the largely undefined conspiracy of academics, politicians, feminists, media figures, etc., that Gamergate perceives themselves as opposing. They are generally constructed as being simultaneously weak-willed, easily offended, and afraid of confrontation, yet eager to 'corrupt', censor, or destroy any institution or subculture that does not follow their own progressive ideology.

Literature Review:

This literature review will examine previous research on subjects that are relevant to both Gamergate and White Supremacist ideology. his review will start with a broad overview of White Supremacist ideol This section will take a broad overview of previous research on White Supremacist ideology. It will also examine previous writing on topics more specific to Gamergate's ideology, and then explain the similarities to White Supremacist ideology. These topics include the performance of "Geek Masculinity", how websites like Reddit encourage the

growth of toxic subcultures like Gamergate or White Supremacy, and finally how and why both White Supremacist groups and Gamergate engage heavily with conspiracy theories.

Ideologies of White Supremacy

The ideological underpinnings of Gamergate show certain parallels with specific common ideological beliefs of various white supremacist groups, in particular the identity of white/European ethnicities, xenophobic perspectives on immigration from non-Western countries, sexism and transphobia, and persecution paranoia (Perry, 2001). While Gamergate does present some notable divergences of thought compared to so-called mainstream White supremacy, it is useful to describe what those schools of thought are for later analysis.

The racial facet of White supremacy can appear in different forms and can be given different rationales. Many white supremacists believe that race is not a form of abstract categorization, but that each race carries an innate 'essence' that creates essential and inescapable differences within these racial groups (Perry, 2001; Brown, 2009). White Supremacists use these differences as justification for their desirefor a so-called 'natural hierarchy', with the "superior" White race at the top of the racial pyramid. This belief also undergirds their fear of miscegenation, or race-mixing, as White Supremacists believe white people marrying and having children with those of other races can only result in a dilution of their superior white essence with that of the lesser races (Schmitz, 2016; Wong, Frank, & Allsup, 2015; Brown, 2009). White Supremacists commonly claim that white people are wholly responsible for 'western civilization', which is seen as an inherently good and progressive force, albeit for a very narrow definition of progress that almost always favours white men (Perry, 2001; Brown, 2009). American White Supremacists define their belief in the superiority of the white race by contrast with what they see as an inferior Black race (Diversi, 2016). Black people are believed to be incapable of independently creating culture or civilization beyond some form of stereotypically portrayed savagery (Perry, 2001; Brown, 2009). Archaeological evidence to the contrary is often rationalized with beliefs in secret white cultures that created that evidence, or even aliens from space, as in the case of conspiracy theories around the Egyptian and Mesoamerican pyramids. Perry (2001) notes that this relationship of white people being in a position over superiority to black people is at the root of much white supremacist resentment towards the gradual advancement of the status of non-white people in various segments of

society (Brown, 2009; Kelly, 2017). Black people are viewed as taking advantage of the fruits of white labour without having contributed anything to civilization (Perry, 2001; Schafer, Mullins, & Box, 2014), and being forced to work with or even for non-white people is experienced as not only humiliating, but aberrant to what White Supremacists view as the natural order of human existence.

White identity in the United States, which is where Gamergate is largely based, is centred on the control of Black physicality, portrayed in the form of stereotypes of Black people as being big, strong, stupid, and inherently violent (Ferber, 2007; Diversi, 2016; McKernan, 2015).This creates a specific discourse around violence towards Black people, particularly state violence such as in cases of police brutality (Diversi, 2016), in fact, this could be considered a part of white supremacist ideology that has actually entered the dominant ideology of mainstream culture (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017). Specifically, Black victims are always retroactively portrayed as having broken some rules, even unwritten 'common-sense' ones rather then actual laws, and in doing so their deaths are justified (Diversi, 2016). This echoes the view that minorities (and Black people in particular) have to be tightly controlled. Black people being given the opportunity to act in a disruptive manner, be it through crime, anything that appears to be a crime, or actions that merely disrupt routine activities or challenge dominant ideologies is perceived as a threat (Ferber, 2007; Levitt, 2016; Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017). As every Black person is considered to be a potential threat, they have a much narrower range of permissible actions compared to White people when they act in a way that society considers deviant or merely abnormal.

An example of the parallels between this mainstream white supremacist ideology and the more fringe versions is found in the White supremacist discourse around Black athletes. Ferber (2007) notes that there is a seeming paradox between White supremacists who purport to hate Black people and other minorities, but still cheer for sports teams that often have predominantly black players, echoing a culture that shows white supremacist tendencies as well, albeit to a lesser extreme. White supremacist ideology rationalizes this paradox by metaphorically reducing Black people, both men and women, to their bodies. One may note that the previously described attributes that are constructed to justify White supremacy are based upon those of the mind. White people are portrayed as the best, or sometimes only, inventors, teachers, leaders,

strategists, etc. They win through discipline and intelligence, ascribing the victories of the so-called lesser races to traits that are more associated with animals, such as savagery, strength, a sort of low cunning, or hypersexuality (Brown, 2009). Although it is no longer 'fashionable' in many white supremacist circles to openly describe other races as biologically inferior, the same stereotypes are used but instead attributed to culture (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015; Gold, 2004; Kelly, 2017). All of this is to say that intensely masculine activities like sports are engaged with by White supremacists from the perspective of having that same control over Black physicality, albeit used for sport instead of manual labour. This renders what they see as animalistic, aggressive, and hypersexual beings as 'domesticated' and under control. Black athleticism becomes a celebration of White control over the threatening bodies of Black people, as a common theme in White supremacist thought is that Black people should be 'tamed' (Ferber, 2007; Ezekiel, 2002). It also helps to reinforce their belief in essential racial differences by using Black athleticism as proof that Black are naturally more athletic then White people, both erasing the significant amount of training that these athletes would have undergone and reinforcing the stereotype of Black people as possessing purely physical rather then mental attributes (Ferber, 2007). This may also partially explain why there is so much backlash when non-White athletes act in a way that is dissonant with that sense of control, such as Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the anthem. It is not merely a political statement to them, but an animal resisting control (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017). Even though mainstream conservative rhetoric does not consciously invoke the idea of Black athleticism as a method of control, their end-points are often remarkably similar (Kelly, 2017).

Gamergate does not generally subscribe to the idea of races as being biologically or essentially inferior, but instead echo fears of foreign minorities weakening current American/European culture (Kelly, 2017; Schmitz, 2016; Ferber, 1999; Keskinen, 2013; Schmitz, 2016; Ezekiel, 2002). This is a common refrain in white supremacist rhetoric. There may be those who do not subscribe to an idea of genetic inferiority, but instead that non-European foreigners are instead culturally inferior (Perry, 2001; Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015). While this may seem to be a significant difference in ideology, it should be noted that the actions that these Supremacists support is often more similar to those that believe in biological supremacy then not. The way in which foreign cultures as opposed to assimilated cultures are defined and how they have led to white/European culture being damaged are often vaguely

described beyond the belief that minorities are draining the economies of nations by disproportionately using social assistance programs and taking advantage of affirmative action initiatives (Perry, 2001; Keskinen, 2013; Schafer, Mullins, & Box, 2016). These beliefs are also often inherently contradictory. For example, Mexicans and others of Latino descent are simultaneously stereotyped as being lazy workers and willing to work longer hours for lesser pay, allowing them to steal jobs from white workers. Both of these contradictory images are used to justify the belief that the advancement of the white race, and by extension their families, communities, etc. depend on the removal of non-white ethnicities (Perry, 2001; Brown, 2009).

Unfortunately, these stereotypical and misguided beliefs are not solely held by a niche group of extremists. The relatively recent change from biologically-based to culturally-based 'colour-blind racism' has made inroads within mainstream white society (Ferber, 2007; Kelly, 2017; Futrell & Simi, 2017; Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015). For example, a 2001 survey in the United States by the National Opinion Research Center found that "…more then half of white respondents believe that Blacks are more likely to prefer to live on welfare than support themselves" (Ferber, 2007, pg. 14). Beliefs like this are more in line with the Gamergate data gathered for this thesis. Mainstream racist rhetoric and ideology is far more covert and coded then the explicit racism that people are taught to identify (Ferber, 2007; Kelly, 2017; Brown, 2009; Gold, 2004; Diversi, 2016; Mckernan, 2015).

Xenophobic images are often used to encourage fear of foreign cultures and peoples. Perry (2001) points out that the language used around non-European peoples and cultures is often tinged with negativity in a way that is not readily explicit (Gotsbachner, 2001; Cap, 2018). For example, by using the term "illegal alien" rather then "illegal immigrant", a sense of inhuman otherness is created. This is in contrast to the use of the more relatable term "immigrant" as many white supremacists would likely have relatively recent ancestors that were immigrants themselves. White Supremacists also describe the increasing proportion of minority populations compared to the hegemonic white populations within western nations with intentionally dire language. Demographics do not shift, but instead 'darken', and cultures are not merely foreign, but 'alien' (Perry, 2001; Cap, 2018; Gotsbachner, 2001).

The gathered data indicated more focus on misogynist and transphobic rhetoric then explicitly racist rhetoric within Gamergate (Braithewaite, 2016; Gray, Buyukozturk, & Hill,

12

2017; Heron, Belford, & Goker, 2014; Lockhart, 2015; Nieborg & Foxman, 2018; Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017; Salter, 2017; Proctor, 2017). However, White Supremacist ideology has a gender focus that parallels the views expressed by self-identified Gamergate members. White supremacy is, from a gendered perspective, often presented in a hyper-masculinized manner (Kelly, 2017; Ferber, 2000; Schmitz, 2016; Blee, 2012). Regardless of a group's actual gender make-up or actions, White Supremacist groups often represent themselves as virile warriors that stand ready to battle against the non-White hordes (Blee, 2012; Brown, 2009). However, it should be noted that these groups are not necessarily entirely male. In fact White supremacist organizations are increasingly seeking female members because they feel they will attract less police attention (Blee, 2012) and as part of a continuing effort to further mainstream White supremacist ideology (Apple & Messner, 2001).

The ideological factor that Gamergate shares the most with White Supremacist thought is what Perry (2001) refers to as 'persecution paranoia', a reaction to the manner in which White privilege has been contested since the Civil Rights movement. There are some differences in how individual White supremacist groups have constructed the reasoning behind this feeling of unease towards the challenging of White privilege (Schmitz, 2016; Schafer, Mullins, & Box, 2014; Wong, Frank, & Allsup, 2015). The more extremist groups believe that White privilege is not a mistake at all, but rather the most beneficial and natural outcome for society, as they believe that Whites are intrinsically superior to all other races (Perry, 2001; Brown, 2009; Ezekiel 2002). The loss of the unfettered authority to oppress and brutalize what they see as lesser races puts the security of their definition of 'civilization' at an unacceptable risk due to greater influence from people they see as inherently chaotic and animalistic (Perry 2001; Brown, 2009; Ferber, 2007; Diversi, 2016).

Gamergate ideology more closely parallels the belief that White people are being oppressed as retribution for the sins of their past, which have been exaggerated beyond any historical accuracy. Oh (2016) describes this feeling of persecution as a result of colour-blind racism that has formed as a reaction to frustrations over multiculturalism and feminism. He traces its origin to the 80s and calls it 'White backlash culture' (Oh, 2016). In this paradigm of paranoia, racism and white privilege are wrong, and no longer exist due to them no longer being explicitly enshrined in law (Oh, 2016; Douglas, Saenz, & Murga, 2015). However, non-White

races have taken this opportunity to weaponize White guilt, causing courts, governments, and all other sectors of society to turn a blind eye to non-White crime and violence due to a perceived fear of being called racist (Perry, 2001; Brown, 2009), especially when the victims of said crime are White.

The endpoints of both of these White supremacist perceptions of persecution are the same. They both perceive a continuous and serious danger to White people from angry and violent minorities, as well as from a society that is at best willfully blind to the plight of the White male due to a sense of white guilt and a fear of being perceived as racism. At worst society is intentionally carrying out a campaign of White genocide, often at the behest of their secret Jewish masters (commonly called the ZOG or Zionist Occupied Government) who will then be able to control a society of non-White lesser races that are simultaneously inherently uncivilized, savage, and chaotic yet also docile and easily led (Perry, 2001; Brown, 2009; Wong, Frank, & Allsup, 2015). Some (such as the Christian Identity group) believe that the mechanisms through which this persecution occurs is done through demographic displacement via immigration policies, legislating minority dominance through civil rights, hate-crime laws, drug legalization, and affirmative action initiatives, and even through White people being secretly rounded up and murdered (Perry, 2001; Ezekiel, 2002; Apple & Mesner, 2001). The fact that mainstream society constantly disagrees with them and that membership in White supremacist organizations is seen as being socially taboo if not illegal is perceived as proof that their conspiratorial beliefs are accurate (Brown, 2009; Douglas, Sutton, & Cichoka, 2017). An example of this ideology is the manifesto of Anders Breivik, which described his belief that society has intentionally been weakened into degeneracy by a vague conspiracy run by the Frankfurt School. This weakening was done to overthrow the current social order by spreading the ideology of 'Cultural Marxism' to create a classless society composed of minorities and victims while oppressing the White men who could potentially stand up to them, whoever 'they' were (Cotti, 2015; Keskinen, 2013).

Geek Culture Masculinity

As Gamergate is an expression of what Braithewaite (2016) refers to as "geek masculinity", it is important to evaluate how Gamergate constructs its idea of performances of

masculinity, why they feel that the masculinity of their space is 'under siege' and how their reactions risk falling in with/already have absorbed white supremacist ideologies.

There is a wide consensus that the perspectives on gender within Gamergate are deeply misogynist (Braithewaite, 2016; Massanari, A., 2015;Perrault & Vos, 2016; Lockhart, 2015; Heron, Bellford, & Goker, 2014; Nieborg & Foxman, 2018; Salter, 2017; Chess & Shaw, 2015; Proctor, 2017; Kelly, 2017; Robinson, 2014; Tekobbe, 2015; Gray, Buyukozturk, & Hill, 2017). But the questions of "why now?", "why through videogames?" and "Why did they decide to be so misogynistic?" require more detail. Braithewaite (2016) concludes that those participating within this movement constructed their identification as "Gamergaters" as a way for them to perform masculinity (2016; Salter, 2017; Proctor, 2017), an opportunity that they often feel denied to them by mainstream society(Lockhart, 2015; Tekobbe, 2015; Bell, 2013). Merton's work (1972) on the Insider/Outside dichotomy present in many social movements can be applied here. For example, Braithewaite (2016) explicitly pointed out that the Gamergate movement viewed the so-called 'intrusion' of 'fake gamers' as part of an ongoing plot from shadowy outsiders to twist the purpose of video games away from fun and 'objective quality' into a vehicle for social justice rhetoric (Chess & Shaw, 2014; Salter, 2017). The core of Gamergate does not see social criticism as a normal dialogue between differing viewpoints. Instead it is a vicious siege upon the video games which many of them feel are a part of their social identities and one of the few ways they feel they can experience or perform what they perceive as masculine actions, even if it is through something like being the best fighting game, or killing the most enemies (Proctor, 2017; Lockhart, 2015).

Merton is also relevant when examining Gamergate discourse describing those who think that the larger video game subculture has work to do regarding cultural/social portrayals and coding as malicious outsiders (Braithewaite, 2016; Salter, 2017). This is an inaccurate perspective even if one were to disregard the arbitrary ways in which games are often divided between being "real video games" and "casual games" (Paaßen, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017). For example, Anita Sarkeesian is one of the most demonized figures in Gamergate circles because of a series of web videos she made called "Video games against Women", where she discussed common sexist or sexist-adjacent video game tropes such as "the damsel in distress" or the way women were often dressed in far more revealing clothes then men, or how women that

were sexual were often portrayed as somehow villainous. However, watching the videos reveals that she clearly does play video games and understands them. Regardless, the fact that she is discussing ways in which video games are flawed paints her as an 'outsider' who is intrinsically unable to truly understand video games as an 'insider' would (Merton, 1972). Therefore, her arguments are at best flawed, and at worst malicious attempts to slander a subculture that already feels under siege. Even if she is knowledgeable about video games, she is now merely an infiltrator trying to twist the video game subculture that has always been about white straight males (Salter, 2017; Lockhart, 2015).

The question then becomes what Gamergate would see as a way for female gamers to enter that gaming space without threatening the form of the subculture through which they perform masculinity? Gamergate discourse very rarely says that no women should play video games. Instead they prefer to rationalize their rhetoric by claiming that women simply do not play a lot of video games (or at least 'real video games') which would make trying to appeal to them in mainstream video games economically unviable (Paaßen, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017; Euteneur, 2016). Therefore, their logic goes, women who do wish to play games that would appeal to them should stick to so-called 'girl games' (Shaw, 2011; Vermeulen, Van Bauwel, & Van Looy, 2017), which are made exclusively to appeal to demographics that are outside of the hegemonic white male mainstream. However, Shaw (2011) also points out the flaws with this approach. First of all, those games are often hamhanded attempts to appeal to alternative demographics through heavily stereotypical activities, such as horse-riding girl games. Secondly, by their very nature as titles that are produced to not appeal to mainstream audiences, they are pushed into the outskirts of the video game industry, almost always lacking the financial and creative support that AAA games get (Johnson, 2013). Therefore, their idea of female (or other demographics) gamers being able to operate in a separate but equal sphere is at odds with a reality where the vast majority of resources and visibility still go to mainstream games that are currently made to appeal to hegemonic masculine roles (2011; Johnson, 2013). However, the important thing to gamergate ideology is not that separate but equal spheres are created, but simply that the white male dominated mainstream remains undisrupted. Similarly, female criticism of video games should be restricted to completely apolitical contexts that does not in any way challenge the game industry or it's male dominance. Gamergate depictions of "real gamer girls" vs "fake gamer girls" emphasize desirable women as showing a willingness to

completely sublimate their identities into being "just one of the guys", so to speak. "Real" gamer girls will only discuss games as isolated pockets of entertainment, rather then how they relate to the rest of society, as that would introduce uncomfortable questions and challenge masculinity.

People within Gamergate often describe video games as being a very important part of their lives, and the way in which they speak out about video game subcultures and how they act to defend that subculture is consistent with that claim. Therefore, it is useful to consider how the portrayal of women in video games may have influenced what they see as being normative representations of female subjects, if not in real life, then at least within video games themselves. Near's (2013) analysis of box-art depictions of women compared to sales of different video games found that there was a positive relationship between depictions of sexualized women on a cover as long as they were not a central focus of the box-art. The implication is that the most popular and widely-bought video games are those that feature hypersexualized portrayals of women, and none of them have women in a central position, which is normally used to indicate the protagonist or at least a significant character or focus of the game. These results support the conclusion of an older study by Dunlop (2007), which found that of the covers of the 20 most popular games released at the time, 10 of them showed non-human subjects such as an animal or car as the dominant subject, 9 showed men as the dominant subject, and none showed a woman as the dominant subject of the cover-art. In fact, only 2 had any women on the cover at all, one a submissive anthropomorphic animal and the other a dancer at a strip club (Dunlop, 2007). Furthermore, Dunlop (2007) found that the premises of those games were almost all in line with masculine tropes, ie. Male heroes saving female victims but none with female heroes. Female characters were consistently hypersexualized and subject to the male gaze. Black characters were usually depicted as criminals or athletes, and the majority of playable characters were either white males or defaulted to white males in games where the character is customizable (2007; McKernan, 2015).

The manner in which different people are portrayed in the culture that one consumes will inevitably and subtly alter how that person perceives those different people. For example, if all of the media that one consumes portrays Muslims as terrorists, then that viewer will be more likely to presume that any given Muslim is a possible terrorist in real life as well, which influences reactions to instances of police brutality and other instances of race-based violence

(Dixon & Williams, 2014). Furthermore, the manner in which people are portrayed becomes normalized. For Gamergaters, the depictions of women and minorities in videogames has been normalized through decades of exposure, making them at the very least skeptical of anyone saying that there has to be a change when they have grown up with these white-masculine tropes and likely absorbed them into part of their self-identity (Euteneur, 2016).

The manner in which Gamergate perceives feminist critiques of games parallels the responses to feminism exhibited by White Supremacists, albeit from different directions. White Supremacist thought regarding gender is mostly motivated by what they perceive as the need for white women to serve as mothers and housekeepers of white children (Ezekiel, 2002), and less commonly as fighters in an upcoming race war (Castle, 2012). White Supremacy sees the natural place of white women as being dependant upon a white man. From their point of view, feminism has caused women to "forget their place" as childbearers (Perry, 2001; Ferber, 2000; Schmitz, 2016). As a result, women have begun to forego having children, either through birth control or abortion, leading to a decrease in the white population, while increasingly choosing to start families with non-white men. Gamergate thought also believes that feminism has led to women 'forgetting their place' through a gendered analog to 'colour-blind racism', described as 'gender-blind sexism' by Stoll, Lilley, & Pinter (2017). Their discourse often describes a time when feminism was needed, which was conveniently before most of them were born, but now that explicitly sexist practices are illegal on paper, equality has been achieved and any further feminist thought is either useless philosophizing and complaining or a malicious attempt for women to become even more powerful then men within society.

Both express a great deal of anxiety around what they see as the loss of traditional gender identities with the rise of feminism, LGBTQ rights, etc. (Perry, 2001; Blee, 2012; Ferber, 1999). Gamergate fears games being made more "feminized" and twisted to support "SJW" agendas to further turn society away from traditional male-dominated gender roles, particularly within video games. In other words, they fear another threat to the arena through which geek masculinity is performed (Braithewaite, 2016; Robinson, 2014; Salter, 2017). Meanwhile, white supremacist hate groups fear that women will no longer be controlled by men, and instead will refuse to birth more white children, allowing the non-white races to outnumber them. Another fear is that feminism encourages women to pursue their own careers rather then wholly devoting themselves

to childcare, allowing children to be corrupted by mainstream society through media, daycare centres, etc. (Perry, 2001; Ezekiel, 2002).

Interestingly, while both groups essentialize gender, i.e. believing that some actions and tendencies are intrinsically feminine and others are masculine, Gamergate rhetoric sees feminism as causing women to *intrude* upon the cultural space of video games, while white supremacist thought sees feminism as causing women to *abandon* their proper cultural roles as subordinate childbearers. In other words, while Gamergate is fine with women who 'just want to play games' and don't challenge their perception of video games, their social/political implications, or anything outside of the gameplay, they see most women as being suspicious, or at least interlopers into an essentially male space (Vermeulen, Van Bauwel, & Van Looy, 2017; Euteneur, 2016; Robinson, 2014). Because they believe that gender is an essentialist trait, a woman who does want to play video games will still likely want to feminize them to make it more comfortable for women to play. Gamergate mostly wants women or at least anything that carries feminine traits to stay away from video games, which they have constructed as an essentially masculine space. This may be connected to Massanari's (2015) comments on what facets of hegemonic geek masculinity valorizes. For example, geek masculinity does valorize "…intellect over social or emotional intelligence. At the same time, geek masculinity rejects other hypermasculine traits…and may also demonstrate awkwardness regarding sexual/romantic relationships" (pg. 332).

Internet/'Geek' Culture relevancies to Gamergate and White Supremacy

Previously written articles and studies give insight into how the structure of Reddit can help to support the creation of toxic subcultures like Gamergate and White supremacist organizations. Massanari (2015), in addition to writing about Gamergate masculinity, also describes how the organization and administration of Reddit indirectly nurtured the growth of Gamergate and similar subcultures due to various structural factors. These factors include the ability to very quickly and easily make new accounts, the anonymity factor of said accounts, and the lack of willingness on the part of the greater Reddit administration to properly moderate the subreddits (2015).

Actual overall moderation of the Reddit website by non-volunteer mods would be incredibly time-consuming and resource-intensive. Furthermore, monetary interests often

override social interests. This is shown in "the fappening", an incident where a large cache of stolen celebrity photos was posted onto 4Chan and quickly found their way to Reddit, specifically the subreddit /r/thefappening, which was quickly created to act as a discussion and media hub for the images. Even though numerous complaints, reports, and DMCA infringement statements were issued about the subreddit, the administration of Reddit did not actually act to shut down that subreddit until it was shown that a number of photos were sexualized images of a minor, forcing their hand due to it being a violation of their policy that prohibited sexualized images of underage people (Massanari, 2015). The reason they took so long was likely due to the massive influx of subscribers and visitors that the website experienced, with Massanari (2015) noting that within 6 days there were enough new subscribers to pay for running the site for a month, indicating that monetary concerns overrode concerns regarding ethics or legality. All of this is to say that Reddit's administration likely could gain the capability to more heavily prevent what Massanari refers to as toxic technocultures (2015) from forming, but that monetary interests continue to represent a higher priority then ethics.

The use of the "karma" system also represents a way that subcultural norms are reinforced and alternative views are obscured. The karma system is a rating system for comments or threads. It is a fairly basic system. Each user can either add 1 positive karma or 1 negative karma. However, those comments that have higher karma are listed higher then other comments. Therefore, users are incentivized to post content that is in line with both the culture and norms of the subreddit they inhabit, and those of Reddit as a whole, often (but not always) involving a form of cyber/technolibertarian political bent as well as common geek sensibilities with respect to gender and race (Massanari, 2015; Salter, 2017; Robinson, 2014; Lockhart, 2015). Furthermore, volunteers that are drawn from a subreddit are often the only moderators of that same subreddit. Therefore, a moderator for a white supremacist subreddit is likely to only moderate comments that run counter to the white supremacist ideologies of that board. Unless an amount of negative exposure is turned to toxic subreddits sufficient that it represents an issue to Reddit as a whole, it is unlikely that these subreddits would face any interference from those outside the subreddit itself. The amount of time it took for the Reddit administration to shut down /r/thefappening in the face of considerable legal and public pressure would imply that only significant risks to the site as a whole would be sufficient.

Conspiratorial Thinking in Gamergate and White Supremacy

There is a considerable conspiratorial bent to both Gamergate (Chess & Shaw, 2015) and White Supremacist ideology (Perry, 2001; Ezekiel, 2002). This is likely connected to the significant degree of persecution perceptions that both subcultures describe, both as cause and effect for their actions and rhetoric. Fear surrounding academia are a common thread in Gamergate and alt-right/white supremacist circles, as shown in Chess & Shaw's (2015) experience with Gamergate implicating them as members of an academic conspiracy to destroy both video games and the video game industry as a whole. These conspiracy theories often involve significant misunderstandings of subjects such as how research funding is allocated, the goals of critical theorists, the magnitude of the relationship between cultural criticism and actual cultural change, among many others (Chess & Shaw, 2015). For example, one member of Gamergate believed that Adrienne Shaw, one of the writers of the article being discussed, was a powerful figure in a feminist conspiracy to terrorize and paralyze the video game industry, funded and lead by Communist intellectuals (Chess & Shaw, 2015). Similarly, White supremacist/alt-right spheres often feature conspiracy theories (Ezekiel, 2002; Perry, 2001; Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet, 2015; Apple & Messner, 2001) with figures like Alex Jones often proclaiming conspiracies that fly in the face of any real evidence.

Much has been written on the reasons and motivations behind conspiratorial thinking, particularly attachment to conspiracies that fly in the face of common sense and evidence, such as the so-called Flat Earth movement or the anti-vaxxers (Edy & Risley-Baird, 2016). There are various levels on which conspiratorial thinking can be analyzed, both on the individual psychological level (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017) and on the collective macro-level (Aupers, 2012). Aupers (2012) argues for the creation of an important distinction regarding conspiracy theories and culture. While individual conspiracy theories are fringe elements in mainstream cultures by nature, society as a whole has normalized the *paranoia* that breeds them (Aupers, 2012). After all, narratives of conspiracy both fictional and real permeate society, from movies like *The Matrix* to the President of the United States referencing malicious "deep state" actors in the administration he is supposed to be leading. A convincing reason for the manner in which conspiratorial thinking has further penetrated society, and one that is actually echoed broadly in Gamergate discourse, is ontological insecurity (Aupurs, 2012). Much like prehistoric

people felt like they were at the mercy of unknowable and uncontrollable natural forces, so to do most members of modern society experience the social forces which exist around them (Aupurs, 2012; Marasco, 2016). The systems that govern society are increasingly opaque and perceived as careless and amoral. Consider how complex the stock market is and how quickly it can rise or fall, as a single example. Conspiratorial thinking from Aupers' (2012) point of view is an attempt to create both understanding and *meaning*, as society has become an *ouroboros* of attempts to package truths and package reasons for doubting those same truths through ever shifting cultural narratives. Conspiratorial thinking serves as an avenue for producing new meanings in a society where disenchantment has long removed authority from traditional sources such as religion and state. The Gamergater and White Nationalist constructs webs of intentionality where others see coincidence to recapture meaning in a world that seems inherently chaotic and unknowable.

Moving from Aupers' (2012) discussion of how modern society has become a fertile ground for conspiratorial thinking, one must consider that there are still degrees of conspiratorial thinking. There is a difference between someone who believes that extraterrestrials exist and the government knows more then they say about them, and someone who believes that the videogame industry is a target for a powerful Communist conspiracy of social scientists or that an all-powerful Jewish council is attempting to bring about the genocide of White people. On a psychological level, Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet (2015) analyzed four studies on the relationship between political ideology and conspiracy beliefs, concluding that there is a strong association between political extremism and openness to conspiracy theories regardless of spectrum due to what they describe as "…a highly structured thinking style that is aimed at making sense of societal events" (Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet, 2015, pg. 570). It is notable that they describe an association, but state that they are not certain which variable is independent (Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet, 2015). In other words, they are uncertain whether it is openness to conspiracy theories that predicts political extremism or if it is political extremism that predicts openness to conspiracy theories. Their study concludes that the relationship is likely "bidirectional and self-reinforcing" (Prooijen, Krouwell & Pollet, 2015, pg. 576).

Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka (2017) also reviewed the findings of various studies on motivations for the adoption of conspiratorial beliefs, their conclusions are broader then Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet's (2015). Instead of focusing on a single causal relationship, this

work divides the psychological motives for conspiratorial belief into three categories, epistemic (understanding of one's environment), existential (safety and security within one's environment), and social (reinforcing a positive image of both the self and one's in-group) (Douglas, Sutton, and Cichocka, 2017). Their epistemic motives are consistent with Prooijen, Krouwell & Pollet's (2015) conclusions, referring to works that connect conspiratorial beliefs with mindsets that either habitually seek meaning and patterns in events around them (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017), and is also consistent with Auper (2012) by finding that conspiracy beliefs are more common during experiences of distress due to uncertainty (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017; Marasco, 2016; Apple, & Messner, 2001). It is also correlated with "…lower levels of analytic thinking (Swami, Voracek, Stieger, Tran, & Furnham, 2014) and lower levels of education (Douglas, Sutton, Callan, Dawtry, & Harvey, 2016). It is also associated with the tendency to overestimate the likelihood of co-occurring events (Brotherton & French, 2014) and the tendency to perceive agency and intentionality where it does not exist (Douglas et al., 2016)" (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017, pg. 539). Therefore, conspiracy theories fulfil epistemic motives by allowing the believer to preserve their understanding of their environment by providing information where none is available, reducing anxiety from conflicting information, finding meaning in random events, and defending beliefs from falsification (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017; Apple & Messner, 2001).

The existential motives for conspiratorial beliefs are the preservation of a sense of security and safety in their environment, as well as an ability to exert control over that environment, whether as an individual or as part of a group. Research has found strong correlations between conspiratorial belief and feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, a perceived lack of sociopolitical control and empowerment. On the other hand, openness to conspiratorial belief systems is reduced when people's perception of control is increased (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017). Disturbingly, while exposure to conspiracy theories may provide a short-term experience of greater control due to a belief in the possession of secret truths, research indicates that exposure tends to suppress autonomy and control. For example, people that believe in conspiracy theories are less likely to engage in mainstream political processes such as voting or other forms of participation that could actually allow them to exert some form of autonomy or control over their political environment (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017). This will likely create a self-perpetuating circle of perceptions and experiences of powerlessness leading to even

more focus on conspiratorial beliefs, which will create deeper perceptions and experiences of powerlessness, and so on.

Finally, social motives are generally straightforward. They act to provide explanations for negative outcomes that shift the blame to other groups while simultaneously valorizing the holder of the beliefs and those that are within their group (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka, 2017). For example, White Supremacist ideology explains negative outcomes by saying that White people are so superior that a secret all-powerful conspiracy must constantly engage in sabotaging them or they would be unable to stand against the innate excellence of the White race (Perry, 2001; Ezekiel, 2002). Therefore, variables associated with conspiracy theories include experiences of ostracism, membership in groups that have low status due to ethnicity or income, being on the losing side of a political process, prejudice against those in power, and those who are perceived as enemies (Douglas, Sutton & Cichocka, 2017). Furthermore, conspiratorial belief is associated with both individual and collective narcissism, deployed to defend against threats to inflated views of collective or individual greatness, such as the previous White Supremacist example, used to explain their disadvantages as the results of other groups or people not sufficiently appreciating their 'greatness' (Douglas, Sutton & Cichocka, 2017; Ezekiel, 2002; Perry, 2001). Unfortunately, as with research on outcomes of conspiratorial beliefs with existential motives, research on the outcomes of socially motivated conspiratorial beliefs often conclude that holding these beliefs tend to be self-sabotaging, as they result in further erosion of social capital and greater social isolation for the believer.

Overall, Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka's (2017) research review found that while conspiratorial beliefs are often attractive to those of certain mindsets, they also tended to result in further harm to those same motives that drew people towards them in the first place. For example, while conspiratorial beliefs may be existentially motivated through a desire for the ability to exert control over one's environment, holding those beliefs tended to result in people being less likely to try to participate in processes that could result in control due to beliefs that often centre around the impotence of collective control in the first place. As Douglas, Sutton & Cichoka (2017) explain it, "…conspiracy theories have some attributes that do not lend themselves to the fulfillment of these motives—for example, they are generally speculative and

contrarian, represent the public as ignorant and at the mercy of unaccountable powers, and impute highly antisocial and cynical motives to other individuals" (pg 540).

The Internet is a significant factor in the increased spread of conspiracy theories in recent decades. Various online 'rumour communities', as described by Edy & Risley-Baird (2016), are able to provide an environment that reinforce that particular community's conspiracy narrative. This is accomplished through anecdotal evidence such as individual testimonies from other community members and gathering sources that are perceived as supporting their ideology and debunking outsider opinions. An example of a rumour community would be a Facebook group for anti-vaxxers. Furthermore, because conspiracy theories by their nature create a very well-defined border between insiders/outsiders, people within the community can quickly acquire greater status and credibility within a rumour community then an outsider with legitimate credibility on a subject, making debunking attempts very difficult (Edy & Risley-Baird, 2016).

The previously discussed research is relevant to how Gamergate ideology and community is constructed and performed by those who consider themselves members of that group. From the perspective of Merton's Insider/Outsider dynamics (1972), Gamergate and White Supremacist ideology heavily relies on an insider/outsider dichotomy to explain their feelings of persecution, to rationalize their negative experiences, and create a sense of social identity. Their conspiratorial thinking tendencies also tend to create a widening web of Outsiders that wish them harm, further isolating them from mainstream society and forcing them to rely more and more on fellow members for social identity and ideological reinforcement.

Gamergate members often fulfill the factors described by Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka (2017) as being associated with openness to conspiracy theories. Gamergate discourse presents gamers as having low status in society, to the point where some say that there is prejudice against those who play videogames (Massanari, 2015; Braithewaite, 2016; Shaw, 2011; Almog & Kaplan, 2015). Interest in so-called "geek" activities is often correlated with experiences of bullying and ostracism in childhood (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Lehman, 2015; Peterson & Raye, 2006; Bell, 2009; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2016; Bishop, et al, 2003). An important part of Gamergate ideology is that they are on the losing end of a political process (although they often do not express it that way) in the form of "social justice warriors" slowly taking over the video game industry (Proctor, 2017; Braithewaite, 2016; Chess and Shaw, 2015). Furthermore, they

perceive those same shadowy social justice warriors as being the ones in power, ie. The "liberal media". Gamergaters perceive themselves as being in a struggle for their very sense of self-worth with these social justice warriors. Members of Gamergate, much like many White Supremacists, also feel a sudden sense of the loss of control over mechanisms that were used to feel control and empowerment for them (Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2016; Braithewaite, 2016; Proctor, 2017; Bell, 2009). For White Supremacists, it is the erosion of White privilege (Schmitz, 2016; Schafer, Mullins, & Box, 2014; Wong, Frank, & Allsup, 2015), while for Gamergaters, it is anxiety at no longer being exclusively catered to by the video game industry (Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017; Near, 2013; Chess, Evans & Baines, 2016; Dunlop, 2007; Shaw, 2011; Salter, 2017).

METHODS

Sample

The research focus of this paper was the examination of the rhetoric used by Gamergate supporters for the purpose of whether it would indicate parallels with White Supremacist ideology. As Gamergate was a mostly online-based movement (Massanari, 2015; Perrault & Vos, 2016.), it was decided that it would be most efficient to gather information from online sources.

The subreddit "Kotaku in Action" (https://www.reddit.com/r/KotakuInAction/) was chosen as the source from which data would be gathered for this thesis. The reason why this online source was chosen was due to a variety of factors. Primarily, it represents an extremely large pro-Gamergate social forum, as the self-described "almost-official Gamergate subreddit" (Kotaku in Action, 2018). The main welcome blurb starts by describing the subreddit as "the main hub for Gamergate on Reddit" (Kotaku in Action, 2018). Furthermore, even four years after the beginning of the Gamergate movement, and significantly past it's peak, Kotaku in Action (from now on abbreviated as KiA) remains a significantly active subreddit forum. At the time of this writing, KiA has over 90 000 followers (Kotaku in Action, 2018), and a stable rate of activity, with new threads being made on an hourly basis and large amounts of comments. For example, a thread made 18 hours ago at the time of writing called "One Angry Gamer: Certain Devs Whine That Twitch and Youtube Are Killing Single-Player Games" (Kotaku in Action, 2018) had 75 comments. While there are, of course, variations on the rate of thread creation and thread activity, Kotaku in Action has consistently remained an active subreddit board for years.

Another factor that makes Kotaku in Action a useful source of primary data is that it is open to anonymous viewing. Someone without an account can still enter the subreddit, view threads and read the comments, albeit without any ability to post. This allows researchers to bypass possibly thorny ethics issues related to data gathering, and also any risk of unintentionally altering the data itself due to the observer effect. The observer effect is a term used to describe the manner in which observing a subject of study can alter that subject. For example, something cannot be seen with the human eye without light, but if one were to study an ecosystem that exists in a lightless underground cavern, the introduction of light would clearly alter that ecosystem and risk invalidating the data. That same thing can happen in sociology, which is

called the "Hawthorne Effect" (Barnes, 2010; Chiesa & Hobbs, 2006). The Hawthorne Effect describes the tendency of research subjects to change their behaviour in reaction to the knowledge that they are being observed. This can be motivated by many different factors. In the original study which the Hawthorne Effect takes its name from, it was theorized that the workers increased their productivity due to perceiving themselves as being closely observed by their managers, which motivated them to work extra hard rather then the experimental changes in work conditions (Barnes, 2010). It's also been used to explain placebo effects in clinical trials, where the subjects are motivated to present themselves as improvement in exchange for the attention paid to them by researchers or research assistants (Chiesa & Hobbs, 2006). The members of Kotaku in Action would be very unlikely to react positively to the knowledge that they are being observed when one considers their perceptions of academics (Chess & Shaw, 2015). However, the fact remains that they would still be likely to change their behaviour, which would naturally alter research results. Because of the risk of the Hawthorne Effect altering the results, I have decided that it is better to merely read Reddit comments without actually announcing myself or interacting with the community in any way.

There is precedent for using Reddit comments as a source of research data on a variety of different topics. Singer, et al. (2016) utilized a massive database of over 55 million Reddit comments posted in April 2015 to study how Reddit users' performance as commenters on the Reddit platform deteriorate over the course of extended session lengths. The results of the study found that as session length extended, the performance of the user decreased in factors such as comment length, comment complexity, and ratings of the comments by other users (Singer, et al., 2016). A different study, done by Ethayarajh and Rudzicz (2017) used Reddit comments to gauge the degree to which Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) effects users of that platform. The authors explained their decision to use Reddit as opposed to the more commonly used Twitter as being due to the relative anonymity of Reddit in comparison to Twitter, as well as the opportunity for users to write beyond the 140 character limit characteristic of tweets (Ethayarajh & Rudzicz, 2017). Furthermore, that same anonymity tended to facilitate greater openness from the users in discussions related to mental health (Ethayarajh & Rudzicz, 2017). Another novel example of research using Reddit as a source was Chang-Kredl & Colaninno's (2017) use of Reddit comments with inductive analysis to construct what their data sample perceived as the qualities that make good and bad teachers. The best qualities indicated by the comments included

teachers that were supportive, treated students "like people", or were more like friends (Chang-Kredl & Colaninno, 2017). This is found in opposition to the worst qualities, which were teachers that were uncaring, unsupportive, discouraging, and physically or verbally abusive (Chang-Kredl & Colaninno, 2017).

Of special note is a study by Craig (2014), that used Reddit comments as a source of data to analyze the way in which Reddit itself tended to function in practice. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to examine the correlation (if any) between age and gender, and Reddit commenting success (Craig, 2014). An informal survey posted on Reddit that included questions about the respondent's age and gender got 734 responses, and while the gender data was incomplete, the study was able to conclude that older users tended to have more success on Reddit due to a correlation between age and more complex writing in their comments, therefore enjoying higher karma ratings from others (Craig, 2014).

Together, these studies reveal a clear precedent for the validity of Reddit comments as a valid data source for academic literature and research.

Method

Actual data gathering occurred from May 30th to July 6th, 2017. The KiA subreddit was evaluated for threads that appeared applicable to the White Supremacist ideology hypothesis. At first it was assumed that data would need to be gathered on threads that happened to imply an intersection between video games and political ideology. However, the actual content found on the subreddit required a reassessment of what would be considered relevant for the purposes of this thesis. The initial assumption had been that the vast majority of the threads would be on the subject of video games and perhaps related subjects within the general geek culture sphere, and ideological perspectives would have to be subtly analyzed from within that context. Instead, the content of the subreddit was discovered to be far more slanted towards directly political discussion then expected. It was decided that care should be taken to try to get a balanced amount of geek or video-game related discussions as opposed to only gathering data from overtly political threads. This was due to concerns regarding the possible creation of an inaccurate picture of Gamergate users from "cherrypicking" specific threads that support this article's hypothesis.

Out of all of the threads that were examined, 142 separate threads on the KiA Subreddit were selected and saved to a folder labelled "Gamergate Reddit Data" in HTML file format. A back-up folder was also saved to Google Drive in case technical errors or mishaps led to the data being lost on the main research laptop. The threads were chosen by a variety of different criteria. First of all, there had to be a reasonable number of comments within the thread; generally, more then 50 was considered ideal. Secondly, it had to in some way actually be relevant to the research hypothesis, although care was taken not to cherry-pick threads that exclusively supported the research hypothesis, the threads still had to be in some way relevant to it. For example, one of the chosen threads was "[Games] Nier_Automata hits #1, sells three times as much in it's first week at 184 000 copies and outsells original game's lifetime sales in Japan by 50 000". At first glance this may have seemed irrelevant to the research hypothesis. However, Nier: Automata was a game known for having a lot of female characters that were purposely constructed to be sexually attractive. The comments are largely discussions about how those sales represent proof that trying to pander to "SJWs" is unnecessary, because games with scantily-clad women are still selling well. Thus, it was important to not only examine the thread titles, but the comments as well. This is because the specific context that KiA exists in can result in social significance being attributed to events, quotations, and actions that would otherwise be considered not significantly political to other groups.

Analytical Approach

After a sufficient number of threads were chosen, the comments were then analyzed via a text-mining qualitative approach similar to the analysis methods used in Park, Conway, & Chen's research on online mental health communities in Reddit (2018), or O'Neil's examination of victim-survivors on Reddit (2018). Like those research articles, the analysis of Kotaku in Action would be focused on specific themes that are linked to the research hypothesis, namely themes that are closely tied to or associated with White Supremacist ideology, as well as some other themes that could increase vulnerability to radicalization by White Supremacist groups.

Four themes were chosen before coding began, based on reviews of existing literature on Gamergate, White supremacy, and other associated sociological factors such as conspiratorial thinking, toxic masculinity, sexism, etc. The first major theme was *explicit White Supremacist themes*, such as the use of racial slurs, coded White Supremacist lingo, such as the triple

parenthesis for Jewish people, and common White Supremacist talking points such as Black people having objectively lower IQ scores then White people (Perry, 2001), Black people as being innately excessively violent (Ferber, 2007; Diversi, 2016). Although there is a consistent use of 'colour-blind racism' in racist rhetoric within the past few decades (Perry, 2001; Ferber, 2007; Oh, 2016), it was decided that trying to parse actual racist rhetoric from simple ignorance was too murky and would lead to false positives if one was to attempt to look for that as well, despite there being literature written about it's use in geek-culture spaces (McKernan, 2015)

The second major theme was *perceptions of persecution.* In simple terms, comments that indicated that the users felt that they were a persecuted minority that were under attack from others. This is a common thread in White Supremacist ideologies (Perry, 2001; Oh, 2016; Cott, 2015), which often features wide-ranging conspiracy theories that are constructed to explain the difference between reality as it exists, and the world as perceived by White Supremacist ideology (Douglas, Sutton & Cichoka, 2017; Edi & Risley-Baird, 2016; Aupers, 2012; Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet, 2015). Previous literature that is specifically focused on Gamergate indicates that they feel that video game players and the video game industry as a whole is under attack from an ill-defined cabal of "SJWs", or social justice warriors, that have infiltrated academia, politics, video game journalism (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Braithewaite, 2016; Perrault & Vos, 2016).

The third major theme was *anti-feminism*, which dovetails into the persecution complex theme but nevertheless remains distinct enough to justify it's inclusion as a theme in it's own right. A lot of Gamergate's rhetoric is distinctly sexist, echoing much of the geek sphere's 'toxic technocultures' (Braithewaite, 2016; Massanari, 2015; Proctor, 2017; Gray, Buyukozturk, & Hill, 2017). Separate from their sense of persecution from feminists, they also often discuss how feminism is harmful as a concept in and of itself. However, the antipathy towards feminism is also consistently present in White Supremacist rhetoric and therefore justifies closer examination (Perry, 2001; Blee, 2012; Ferber, 2000).

The last theme is *dismissal of political ramifications*. Even though Gamergate is clearly a political movement with it's own ideology, it's members often define it as being a resistance to the politicization of video games by 'SJWs' (Perrault & Vos, 2016). They often describe a desire for video games to exist in their own space, untouched by politics or the issues of the rest of the

world, preferring it to be an escape (McKernan, 2015). This is connected to the colour-blind racism described previously (Cisneros & Nakayam, 2015; Matias & DeAngelo, 2013).

Specific comments that were considered relevant to the themes, either by supporting or contradicting them, were copied and pasted into a separate document that collected all of the gathered data. Comments were then given a different colour depending on which theme they corresponded with. Orange was used for the White Supremacist theme, blue for the persecution complex theme, green for the anti-feminist theme, and yellow for the dismissal of political ramifications theme.

Reflexivity

The perspectives involved in this data are extremely subjective, as exemplified by the Insider/Outsider dynamics (Merton, 1972) that largely define the Gamergate worldview. Gamergate is also a subject that by its very nature tends to generate very passionate and dichotomous beliefs. In other words, it is very difficult to have any real knowledge of the Gamergate movement and remain neutral.

Due to these factors, reflexivity is extremely important when examining data on such a contentious topic. The definition used in the Cambridge Dictionary is a good guide, describing reflexivity as "The fact of someone being able to examine his or her own feelings, reactions or motives (=reasons for acting) and how these influence what he or she does or thinks in a situation" ("Reflexivity meaning", 2018). From a practical research standpoint, reflexivity is an important strategy for ensuring that an acceptable level of scientific rigour is maintained (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). This is because while it is impossible for a human being to be truly free of bias, one can at least attempt to minimize the effects of pre-existing biases through self-examination of one's reactions to both research subject and data collected from said research.

With this in mind, I now offer the results of my own reflexive self-examination, showing my pre-conceptions, biases, and motivations for research. When discussing this thesis topic, I have often been asked *why* I chose Gamergate. It may be best to start at the beginning. As a long-time video game enthusiast, I was an inhabitant of the same subcultural 'spaces' that Gamergate occurred within, such as Twitter, various video game publications like Game Informer, Polygon,

Gamasutra, etc. I had even previously been an enthusiastic participant in various 4Chan image boards, the site from which Gamergate spawned (Salter, 2017). That moment in 2014 was a turning point for my identity as a 'geek', as I decided to no longer consider myself a 'gamer'. This was out of revulsion for what Gamergate members were saying and doing, particularly with regards to women. While they claimed to be championing 'Ethics in games journalism', they actually spent most of their time harassing and doxing female participants in video game subculture (Braithewaite, 2016; Massanari, 2015; Perrault & Vos, 2016).

Even though the movement has largely sunk into obscurity within the public's view, I was never able to let go of a sense of unease about how quickly it had seemed to erupt into the gaming subculture. Before 2014, I had assumed that gaming culture was only getting better. More people were playing, video games were becoming mainstream and we were no longer considered the objects of ridicule. New genres, perspectives, and subject matter was being tackled by both independent and AAA game studios. Surely this represented a maturing of the video game medium that would lead to video games finally getting the legitimacy as a truly artistic medium that I had assumed we had all craved for so long. From my 2014 point of view, Gamergate was offensive not just because of the horrible rhetoric and actions that people committed in the name of video games, but because it represented a desire to *regress*. Suddenly it was as if people wanted to return the medium to a lesser state where video games were only good for a surge of adrenaline rather then an attempt to make statements about the world around us.

Then the rise of the White Supremacist "alt-right" occurred, along with the campaign of Donald Trump and I noticed that the language used by Trump supporters was disturbingly familiar (Kelly, 2017). Tweets supporting Trump came with the same cadence as in 2014, featuring familiar memes, like Pepe the Frog, or calling leftists 'triggered SJWs' that I recognized from my 4Chan days (Salter, 2017). Further study was needed to see if Gamergate had expanded from simply being about attacking female participants in video game culture to now participating in a resurgence of White supremacy in the United States. If that was true, then it was also important to try to understand how and why this had happened, so that perhaps other similar cases could be prevented or predicted in the future.

Results

After an appropriate amount of threads were searched and archived, the posts within them were examined for any content that corresponded with the four main themes that were described in the previous Methods section. After examining 43 separate threads, it was determined that data saturation had been reached (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The persecution theme was clearly omnipresent compared to the gender and race-themes, which are more contextual depending on the thread. Although the numbers would naturally increase, the proportions would not. The collected results consistently show a clear emphasis on themes of being persecuted by outside forces, followed by anti-feminist and racist themes coming next in number. The least prolific theme was dismissal of politics within the video game industry. Finally, posts that directly contradicted the aforementioned themes were surprisingly common, numbering less then anti-feminist and racist posts, but substantially more then declarations that video games were/should be apolitical. When looking at these results, the reader should keep in mind that none of these categories are mutually exclusive. For example, posts that expressed feelings of the video game industry being under attack by SJWs also expressing contempt for feminism were by no means uncommon. All of the categories are linked by the ideology of Gamergate.

Persecution Complex themes:

At 345 instances, posts that included material on the subject of Gamergaters or gamers being persecuted, unfairly maligned, subject to united opposition, etc. was by far the most common of any of the research themes. It is important to note that this category included conspiratorial discussions on "SJWs" as a united monolithic force. This is consistent with previous research findings on the subject of Gamergate discourse (Braithewaite, 2016; Massanari, 2015; Chess & Shaw, 2015; Burgess & Matamaros-Fernandez, 2016). Particular emphasis was often placed on the "mainstream media", "The liberal news media", and "infiltrations" by SJW into the video game industry. It is important to note the distinction. While the mainstream media is considered to be untrustworthy by nature, the video game industry is instead constructed as a victim of external forces trying to infiltrate and control video game content for their own ideological purposes, ie. "*The gaming/regular media is leftist, so the coverage of his game is almost certainly going to be affected (either no coverage or negative coverage*" (Reddit user 1).

Posts expressing feelings of persecution were noteworthy by how widespread they were in the examined data. While misogynistic or racist content were usually clustered within threads that were on related subject matter, such as the Black Panther movie or news stories related to women in video games, posts that expressed feelings of being under attack could be found in nearly every thread. However, those sources of persecution were often undefined but distinct and depended upon the context of any given thread.

The most common source of persecution and opposition to the 'real gamers' of the Gamergate movement are often referred to as SJWs, or Social Justice Warriors. Exactly what is a social justice warrior is murky and likely intensely variable. The discourse within the data sample implies that members of Gamergate define anyone who attempts to interfere with social norms in a way that draws attention to inequality between privileged and non-privileged segments of society as an SJW. This is of particular import when people bring attention to inequality or problematic elements within the video game industry and video game/geek culture, as this post describes,

> *"…They on the other hand are really quick to try and get someone fired or defunded just for supporting us / sharing our perspective / not widely condemning us, based on the narrative that we are these horrible people that want to scare women out of the industry , hate gays and are transphobes , are islamophobes and are super racist , are worse than IS, because we dare manspread / mansplain / use our male/white privilege disagree with women on the internet"* (Reddit user 2).

Another common description of SJWs is that of people who are trying to force their own morals upon other people, and are believed to be willing to use underhanded tactics to force people who argue with their views to lose their jobs, reputations, etc. Communism and Marxism are sometimes tied to these groups as well.

> *"You think 4chan is the only one with Weaponised Autism?*
> *There's some seriously messed up individuals on the Anti side with a lot of time and an insane belief they're saving the world. For people in GG we may look in here every so often. For the Anti side this is their hobby, their life. We play games for fun, they fight and hunt for ways to push their ideas and punish the "evil doers who perpetuate wrongthink" for their fun."* (Reddit user 3)

"SJW" can be considered to be an umbrella term for all the forces that Gamergate positions themselves as being in opposition to. Essentially, SJWs are seen as moral entrepreneurs that are perceived as trying to bring about cultural change that would in some way disadvantage those who make up Gamergate's membership. It should be made clear that their definition of disadvantage is a loss of hegemonic privilege, although they do not perceive it this way and in fact the concept of white privilege is considered to be a myth that is used by self-hating white people and other SJWs to advance their own nefarious agenda, ie. *""Privilege" is just a code word for "Willingness to work hard""* (Reddit User 4).

The language used to describe these forces arrayed against Gamergate indicate that a perception of a monolithic faction that is constantly bent towards humiliating and turning society against them, "*They control the majority of the media. So, they most certainly have the influence. And apparently they have the will to use it too*" (Reddit User 5). While there are many factions and ideologies within the social justice sphere that work to many different, often mutually exclusive ends, discussion within the data sample assumes that all of these are in lockstep with one another. Hence SJWs are not really divided into specific factions or ideologies. Instead the assumption is that all people who are involved in social justice are "in" on the leftist conspiracy,

> "*I swear the left got fucking fat and lazy(both ideologically/mentally/ and physically) after they completely took over so much of academia and forgot how to lie or do anything even half convincingly. They assumed because they had the colleges and tons of politicians that they had the countries*" (Reddit User 6).

Furthermore, this murky conspiracy is commonly described as having great influence on all levels of society. One discussion in particular featured the expression of fear that everyone who had ever used the #gamergate tag on Twitter having a file on them

> "*This is scary Stasi-esque bullshit. So, this means that potentially every single person that posted in the tag on twitter (and possibly here too) has a file somewhere. This is seriously scary shit and setting a terrifying precedent even separated from the context of GG. Do they have files on the NYS posters too?*" (Reddit User 5).

Others responded that gamers and developers who did not express belief in leftist ideology were under attack from the equivalent of a witch hunt or McCarthyist Red Scare due to a Twitter controversy around a video game called the Last Night, "*Dont use the word "clique". It really*

undermines the reality that is happening which is called McCarthyism at worst and stalking at best." (Reddit User 7). There is also a common refrain that SJWs are able to use all of their undefined "cronies" and influence to prevent media platforms from fairly dealing with them. They believe that right-wing figures are unreasonably targeted by the mainstream and social media platforms. What Gamergate feels constitutes reasonable grounds for punishment for social justice advocates is significantly different then the majority opinion due to their ideological perspective on what social justice rhetoric represents, which will be discussed in further detail in the appropriate sections, "*Deepfreeze is a list of journos who did bad things. There's a world of difference between "list of people who did bad things" and "list of people who supported the other side".*" (Reddit User 8)

Another common feature in Gamergate discourse related to persecution is the perception that gamers as a whole are being slandered, this is likely related to an incident where numerous articles on the decline of the 'gamer' were published on the same day. (Perrault & Vos, 2016). These editorials, with titles such as "*Gamers don't have to be your audience. Gamers are over*" (Alexander, Aug 28, 2014), were perceived as intentionally coordinated attacks on the video game subculture and were a significant factor towards the beginning of Gamergate. To those who consider themselves part of Gamergate, the term "gamer" means anyone who plays video games, while the intent of the articles was largely to examine how video game audiences had diversified to the point where the stereotypical "gamer" that was often marketed towards was no longer an accurate image of video game consumers. However, three years after it and other similar article's releases, it is still used as proof of what Gamergaters believe to be mainstream society's contempt for anyone who participates in gaming as a hobby. A lot of posts describe how they feel attacked by mainstream society saying that gamers are misogynistic, racist, socially maladjusted, undesirable, etc. This was especially present in a thread about the WHO proposing the addition of "Gaming Disorder" to the ICD-11 draft, which was interpreted as a move by the powerful SJW conspiracy to begin a Soviet-style re-education strategy against gamers (Reddit user 9; Reddit User 6), even though it was intended to be a term for gaming addiction.

Another feature is the belief that Gamergaters represent the so-called 'silent majority' of 'real gamers', by which they mean people who actually play "real games" as opposed to casual

games, the definition of which is a subject of ongoing debate in Kotaku in Action. Therefore, although Gamergate is constructed as an underdog fighting against a huge monolithic enemy in the form of SJWs, they simultaneously present themselves as at least representing the majority of actual gamers, ie.

> *"Eh, aren't most game developers "evil gamergaters" according to them?Only when they're candid about what their goal is, otherwise they like to pretend that we are the fringe group while they are the majority. As seen by how Sunset is a best-selling series and World of Warcraft was an obscure failure."* (Reddit User 8).

The reasons given why Gamergate is not as influential as one would expect it to be if they truly did represent the majority of videogame consumers are manifold. First, the leftist (from their perspective) game media and mainstream media is described as using their influence to quash stories that are sympathetic to pro-Gamergate ideology, and continually run stories that are unfairly critical of their aims. Secondly, anyone who holds pro-Gamergate views is believed to face harassment, blacklisting, and other nefarious attacks upon their livelihood. Because people who refuse to toe the SJW line face oppression, the reasoning goes, then most people will be afraid to speak up in support of Gamergate even if they truly do support them. Finally, a lot of gamers are brainwashed by SJW propaganda and would support them more vocally if "the narrative" (a common concern in Gamergate posts) was not so unfairly tilted in favour of SJWs

> *"...We're not trying to censor anyone's opinion. We're just trying to make it clear that we disagree, but we're not being allowed to. We're being misrepresented and prevented from speaking up about it."* (Reddit User 10).

While SJWs have been described as a hugely influential and monolithic force, they are also portrayed as weak, cowardly, and otherwise easily overwhelmed when bereft of their underhanded powers of influence, false victimization, and media control. For example, the fact that video game developers often take steps to remove offensive content in video games is described as the result of corporations being too afraid of the possibility of bad PR to stand up to SJWs and their artificially inflated voices. The accompanying line of reasoning being that if these corporations did refuse to let SJWs coerce them into altering their content, the real gamers (invariably portrayed as secretly sharing the views of Gamergate) would then buy their product anyway and the SJWs would be revealed to be mere paper tigers (*"Judging by SJW game sales numbers I don't think they even buy games*

they agree with.") (Reddit User 11). Therefore, Gamergate must be the subject of persecution from SJWs because if their views were allowed to spread, the video gaming public would 'wake up' and sweep aside the SJWs as loud but powerless bullies. It is similar to how Umberto Eco (June 22, 1995) describes the fascist construction of the enemy in *Ur-Fascism*. Both overwhelmingly powerful, yet easily overcome by focused opposition, too strong yet too weak at the same time.

This sense of persecution also extends to their self-appointed mission to fight against unethical practices in journalism and really anything that is done for the purposes of social justice. This has mostly come in the form of various forms of online harassment through social media, doxing, death threats etc. (Braithwaite, 2016; Massanari, 2015; Douglas, 2016). It should be noted that there are a few instances in the collected data of posters expressing cynicism or at least uncertainty regarding the morality of Gamergate's practices. For example, in response to fears that archives of Gamergate member's online activities would be kept for use against them, one poster pointed out that there is an archive of online activities by SJW figures that has been made by the Gamergate community. In another instance, someone sarcastically pointed out that the acceptable level of ethics basically amounted to "*not having any wrong opinions about games or gaming culture or gamergate*" (Reddit User 12). The justifications of the problems pointed out by those and similar posts are that gamers (by which they mean those who share the beliefs of Gamergate) are under cultural attack, that they were attacked first in the form of the aforementioned "Gamers are dead" articles or outsiders describing Gamergate membership as being composed of racists/misogynists, etc *(...**Only difference is that they target people unprovoked and we deploy those tactics only if someone shits on us first.**)* (Reddit User 13, emphasis in original). A second justification is reminiscent of common justifications for trolling (Coles & West, 2016). They see their opposition as trying to engage in 'moral grandstanding' to make themselves appear better in the eyes of the world, and therefore revealing compromising information about critics of Gamergate is doing the public a service by revealing them as hypocrites. In other words, they feel it is okay when Gamergate members attack others because they are open about their aims, while it is unethical when people opposed to Gamergate attack them (for a very broad definition of attack) because they claim to hold the moral high ground against Gamergate,

"I mean, arguably we do the same thing to them with people searching through other people's history to see if they have any dirt on them.The only difference is that generally, they're the ones who claim very openly to "never have done x" in some moral grandstanding (Reddit User 14).

Overall, the collected posts that are thematically coded as primarily involving feelings of persecution against Gamergate members reveal a preoccupation with feeling attacked, bullied, and unfairly maligned as being racist, misogynist, and other socially undesirable traits. Posts also indicate that members of Gamergate do not see these attacks as being directed against members of Gamergate or the ideology of Gamergate itself. Instead they believe that mainstream society, especially the media, feels contemptuous of gamers and gaming culture. The reason for this perceived contempt towards gamers is a vaguely defined conspiracy of social justice warriors or SJWs that want to force video games to change for their own ideological desires. These desires can range from being part of an ongoing culture war by the forces of Cultural Marxism to wanting to make money by forcing people to only buy games that hold to socially progressive values. These SJWs are seen as both hugely influential and powerful, yet a vocal minority that must continually oppress 'real gamers' to keep the silent majority too frightened to speak up and reveal the SJWs true impotence. As members of Gamergate believe that they are under attack and even at risk of being made personal victims of this SJW conspiracy, posts express the opinion that they are justified in carrying out attacks or digging up and revealing information about those they perceive as opposing Gamergate. This is either because they feel that they were attacked first, or that those who are carrying out these vaguely defined attacks are hypocrites who are not as ethically upstanding as they position themselves to be. These perceptions of persecution were intimately linked with the other themes of this study, simultaneously expressing displeasure at being considered racist/misogynistic while refusing to consider the racist/misogynistic content of the discourse within Gamergate discussions. Rather, they felt that increased willingness to confront racist/misogynistic attitudes were symptomatic of the desire to further persecute straight white men, which they constructed as making up the bulk of 'real gamers'.

Misogynistic/Anti-feminist/Sexuality themes:

There were 144 posts that were found to include misogynistic themes. These could range from anti-feminist content to homophobia, rape myths and transphobic slurs. Out of the four main themes, this was the second most prevalent, and featured a significant amount of overlap with the conspiratorial persecution complex theme. It also had some overlap with the dismissal of politics theme, and surprisingly little overlap with the racism theme.

Similar to the persecution complex theme, Gamergate's opposition to feminism is framed as being reactive in nature. They believe that the video game industry and subculture is being unfairly maligned by feminists for various reasons. Some of the more well-known feminists that have been targeted by Gamergate, such as Anita Sarkeesian, Zoe Quinn, or Brianna Leigh, tend to be ascribed mercenary rather then ideological motives. Posts in KiA often dismiss them as trying to stir up trouble for profit, such as one thread where Zoe Quinn's motivation for tweeting at a developer that held anti-feminist views was that she wanted to draw attention to herself because she was releasing a new book at the time, for example,

> "*I imagine that Zoe Quinn has an enemies list out there. It wouldn't be too far removed from a blocklist. He got successful, her book is tanking, so she found an E3 Dev that she could cause drama about and targeted him. If not him, she would have found some other company to pick some intern out and went...***Ubisoft talks a big talk but this Dev HATES WOMEN AND WANTS ME DEAD!!! (Buy my book)**" (Reddit User 15, emphasis in original).

This ties into an important term in Gamergate speech, the 'professional victim'. This term is often used in discussions around feminists to dismiss accusations of harassment towards Gamergate and related movements. Posts that include it often imply or outright state that the harassment faced by feminists who attempt to critique geek cultures, especially video game subculture, is severely exaggerated, if not outright manufactured. These accusations of harassment are then used by feminists to draw media attention and prestige towards them by the leftist 'virtue-signalling' members of the media and public. That media attention is believed to somehow translate into significant income through book deals, Kickstarters, Patreon subscriptions, and speaking engagements. Interestingly, the professional victim label is used almost exclusively in an anti-feminist context, largely absent from racial contexts.

Malicious victimhood is a preoccupation of the anti-feminist discourse in this data set. In the hands of women, victimhood is constructed as a weapon that can be used to bully the falsely-accused gamers because of 'white knights' that are more interested in 'virtue signalling' then the truth. Much like the monolithic SJW conspiracy or "clique" in the previously discussed category, feminists are simultaneously massively influential and individually weak. Their ability to effect change is not even ascribed to any *personal* skills or talents. Instead they are only influential because they are seen as a totem that other SJWs wish to use to 'virtue signal'

> "*...Then she goes and takes a swing at a guy because 3 years ago, he expressed an opinion she doesn't like, and now because of this, a bunch of virtue signalling journalists are once again circling the wagons around her taking aim at her designated target. Disgusting.*" (Reddit User 16).

Virtue signalling is another important concept in Gamergate discourse that is almost always used in an anti-feminist or misogynist context. The reason given for why the general public is more sympathetic to 'professional victims' such as Zoe Quinn then the plight of gamers is not that Quinn and others' arguments are convincing. Members of Gamergate believe that they are obvious charlatans. Instead, anti-Gamergate feminists are engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship with other SJWs who support them to 'virtue signal'. Virtue signalling is seen as an insincere attempt to conspicuously display progressive and social-justice related values for the purpose of greater prestige in SJW circles, or for sexual favours from feminists, "*Good to see that Gies is still a pathetic shitbag. One day he'll finally get pity sex from one of the dye witches he's white knighting for, you'll see!*" (Reddit User 17). From their point of view, the belief that Gamergate is sexist or misogynistic is a fraud perpetuated by those more interested in scoring social prestige then actually helping people, with gamers framed as innocent victims.

Rape accusations are also considered to be weaponized by angry women, although it is less specifically associated with feminists. In a thread on the subject of a rape story written in Cosmo magazine, posts cite various well-known rape myths (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Stoll, Lilley, & Pinter, 2017; Ryan, 2011), such as questioning why the police wasn't called immediately, communication with the accused being framed as suspicious, and that false rape accusations are common and often successful. Instead, posts express the sentiment that men who are accused of rape should be given more sympathy, because they

are 'the real victims'

> "*I'm actually more concerned about innocent men who will suffer harassment and bullying because of those false allegations. Rape victims already get tons of sympathy and support, while falsely accused men get their careers destroyed merely because of allegations*" (Reddit User 18).

Men who are accused of both rape and harassment are framed as victims because they would both face 'bullying and harassment' due to women commonly using accusations of those crimes as ways to punish them for any perceived slights they should happen to feel.

The ability to weaponize victimhood is constructed as an almost exclusively female ability,

> "***That's the beauty of her strategy though - if she DOES get removed, she can blame it on Sargon's fans cyber bullying. And it literally doesn't matter if it's true or not. She's a woman claiming victimhood. That's enough for a lot of people***" (Reddit User 19, emphasis in original).

A number of posts explain that only women are able to claim harassment because "*Words + Penis = Harassment. Anita does not have a penis, therefore she is incapable of harassing.*" (Reddit User 20) In other words, harassment is not defined as something that is done *to* feminists, but as a sort of power that only women can access. There are no cases of harassment related to women in this data set that are sincerely believed, unless they are perpetuated by the SJW opposition. Furthermore, because harassment is perceived as a gendered dichotomy, men are not only unable to claim the power of harassment and thus weaponize victimhood themselves. Instead, any action a man takes can be turned against him to accuse him of harassment because "*Words + Penis = Harassment.*" (Reddit User 20)

This gendering of harassment and rape is a symptom of what Gamergate sees as a cultural trend towards the destruction of male identity by feminism as a whole, of which the anti-Gamergate feminists are a small part. Gamergaters are particularly upset that mainstream video games, which has often been constructed as a nearly completely white, heterosexual cismale space (Condis, 2016; Dunlop, 2007; Shaw, 2011; McKernan, 2015), are now being forced (from their point of view) to include different perspectives, characters, and even gameplay mechanics. These efforts towards inclusion, done principally out of a capitalist desire to respond to a

diversifying market (Braithewaite, 2016), are instead experienced as disruptive elements in their gameplay experiences. They express the belief that women and LGBTQ people should be able to play videogames, but that they should not be used for 'moralization' or 'lecturing players', as expressed in one post where the user describes the character of Flea from Chrono Trigger as the best trans character in video game history because she "…*Doesn't give a shit about the morality of the group of heroes before him, has some damn great quotes, doesn't need to lecture the player into any kind of drama or politics, just let people figure shit out by themselves.*" (Reddit User 21) Instead, acknowledgement of differing experiences due to gender or sexuality are percieved as attempts to either virtue-signal on a corporate level, or pander to SJWs, rather then trying to appeal to a growing female and LGBTQ market. This disruption is also experienced as a betrayal by video game developers that Gamergate members have identified with and supported for decades, only to be, in their eyes, pushed aside in favor of women and minorities who are not 'real gamers'. They do not describe this as an economic decision, but instead an ideological one, a symptom of the growing tide of anti-male sentiment that is slowly poisoning society.

Another issue that Gamergaters express fear over is the abstract ideology of feminism, which some believe to be a powerful and invasive female-supremacist philosophy that is taking over society through infecting society with concepts such as "toxic masculinity"

> "*They seem to define it as the culture that defines 'being a man' being poisonous to their crusade to emasculate men, end all gender roles (that don't benefit them) and generally just try to turn young boys into obedient boob-less girls. Its broad enough that it encapsulates literally anything men do at any point, and especially if what they do isn't something women like or god forbid the men enjoy.*" (Reddit User 22).

Academia is considered to be an accomplice in this feminist power-grab through the fields of gender-studies and "intersectionality" "*From the moronic intersectional feminist studies that believe gender differences are purely due to society and that they are actually the same, I expect nothing less*" (Reddit User 23).

Others believe that feminism is not an organized attempt to globally emasculate men so that women can take over the world, but that feminists are instead projecting personal issues onto society at large, which is why they are actually complaining about things that members of Gamergate do not see as structural issues, such as harassment,

> "*The only point that needs to be made when we talk about how "harassment keeps women out of certain industries and hobbies": When it is proven men get harassed more over and over again, and men still strive and even thrive, what does that say about women? There will always be critics. There will always be trolls. Get. Over. It*" (Reddit User 24).

Instead, feminists are often described as being personally weak-willed and fragile people who get too easily hurt by obstacles in life and ascribe failures to society instead of their lack of talent, strength, or conviction. Their ideology may also be ascribed to a lack of a father figure or hatred of that father figure (Reddit User 25; 26). On the other hand, male feminists are believed to either be virtue-signaling in hopes that feminists will have sex with them (Reddit User 17) or are "*shits raised by hateful bitch mothers who never were taught to be male by their fathers and were in fact raised to be female but fail at it due to you know being male.*" (Reddit User 6).

Although most misogynistic discourse is couched in the context of hatred towards feminists or feminism, there are some posts that are targeted towards women in general. For example, one user posts that it is impossible for women to be 'involuntarily celibate' (Reddit user 27), while the discussion around women attempting to create emasculated 'numales' through feminism is described as doomed to fail because women will always want a "Chad Thundercock" (Reddit User 28) and will complain that there are no more 'real men' around once they take over the world (Reddit User 27; 29). There is a perception that women and men have innate biological reasons for differences in behavior (Reddit user 30; 31; 33), and that women will innately seek stereotypically 'alpha males' while using 'omegas' for their own purposes (Reddit User 28; 29; 27). The sentiment that women are an inherently privileged class over men (Reddit User 39; 40) is also expressed due to them being perceived as having

> "*...zero responsibilities in* (*the work place, marriage, the finincal (sic) side of child rearing, the police, domestic violence that women are the sole perpetrator of in 20-40% of cases depending on the study but are always seen as the victim, the military, the massive amounts of debt you ring up in college or shopping.*" (Reddit user 32).

The numerous references to feminists trying to destroy gender and gender roles may explain how common transphobic language was in this data set. The term "tranny" and any derivatives, such as trannies, appears 10 times in the data set. Although there are some instances of posts saying that cishet men are treated as evil nowadays (Reddit User 33), most of the instances where trans people were referenced was in the context of angry denial of nonbinary genders, or gender as a cultural construct (Reddit user 23), which they seem to have confused

with sex. Instead, they believe that trans representation is encouraged by SJWs, once again, to further emasculate men and to suppress 'traditional masculine values' in society so that men will become weaker and less able to resist the control of the SJWs (Reddit User 23; 34; 36; 90). By including positive representations of trans characters in media, artists are seen as innately bowing to pressure or virtue signaling to SJW interests (Reddit User 35; 36; 37; 38; 41), regardless of the context of the character unless their transgender status is completely incidental and never brought up, like the previously mentioned Flea in Chrono Trigger (Reddit User 21). There is also a belief that the majority of people who claim to be transgender are actually so-called 'transtrenders' who are pretending to be trans because it's seen as popular in SJW circles (Reddit User 42; 43).

Discussion of different sexualities was comparatively rare. Although the term "faggot" is used 8 times in the data set, it does not have the same context of fear and danger as trans or feminist-associated terms do. It is instead only used as an insult. While it is still a serious homophobic slur, actual discussion of differing sexualities was rather muted and used as a joke (Reddit User 38) instead of a looming cultural threat. Interestingly however, there are a few references to fundamentalist Islamic homophobia in attempts to point out the hypocrisy of the left, who are often seen as supporting fundamentalist Islam (Reddit User 44; 45; 46; 47).

Much like the previous category, much of the discourse around feminism and gender topics were couched in a context of a looming threat to traditional values and social orders. From the way that feminism is depicted as an insidious global conspiracy that is created to put men under the control of power hungry women, to changing gender norms being constructed as a method to emasculate men and destroy traditional masculinity.

Racism/White Supremacist Themes

Consistent with previous sections, racist discourse in this data sample is preoccupied with how different foreign or minority cultures pose a growing threat to the White hegemony. These threatening minorities are once again often described as either pawns of or merely supported by the SJW conspiracy. Interestingly, the SJW conspiracy seems to be mostly depicted as being composed of White intellectuals. Their ascribed motivations vary significantly. Some believe that the SJWs want to weaken the fabric of the strong White identity so that White people can be replaced with more tractable minorities and self-hating White people (Reddit User

102). While others think that SJWs are motivated by virtue-signalling out of a selfish desire to gain social prestige within social justice circles, regardless of any suffering they inflict (Reddit User 76; 83). Finally, some think that White SJWs are infected with a deep sense of racial self-hatred and bitterness that they project onto the world at large (Reddit User 100; 82; 45; 65).

There are 118 posts that have been coded as including Racist/White Supremacist themes. This includes racially charged terms like "cuck", a slang term for a "…weak, effeminate, or inadequate man, who is often dominated by their female partner." (Dictionary.com, 2018; Kelly, 2017), which has recently taken on misogynistic and racist overtones due to the association with 'cuck porn', a genre of porn in which a weak white man is aroused by watching a black man have sex with his wife (Dictionary.com, 2018; Kelly, 2017). Thus, it is often used in white nationalist circles to describe either white men with progressive views as people who secretly fetishize being dominated by black men or women (Kelly, 2017), and to describe conservatives who hold views that are too accommodating to minorities as 'cuckservatives' (Dictionary.com, 2018).

The term 'cuck' appears 36 times in the data set, often within usernames (Reddit user 31;48; 49; 8; 50) which are not written here for the purpose of research ethics. Otherwise, the term is generally used to deride either SJWs, or parts of the mainstream media that are seen as being weakened or 'cucked' by the SJW cultural machine. For example, the BBC is described as being *"...cucked to mainstream US liberal media narratives for years…"* (Reddit User 51). Implying that they have been taken over by weak SJWs who wish to see themselves and their people dominated and emasculated for the purpose of sexual gratification (Reddit User 87). Hence, one can not only be a cuck, but one can become 'cucked', or assimilated into emasculating and racially weak liberal ideology. The term cuck appears 14 times outside of usernames (Reddit User 8; 54; 55; 56; 57; 51; 58; 59; 60; 61; 62; 63; 64).

Another white supremacist term that appears a few times is the triple parenthesis, or 'echo', in which something is enclosed in triple parenthesis like (((this))) to indicate that the subject is Jewish or somehow associated with Jewish people or the Jewish faith (Waldman, June 2, 2016). Once again, the term was most commonly found within an existing username, likely intended as a humorous mockery of people being upset by (accurately) associating the term with white supremacist discourse (Reddit User 31). Interestingly, the term that was enclosed within the 'echo' was "cuck" (Reddit User 31). The use of the echo was significantly less prevalent then

the term 'cuck', likely because cuck is associated with gender and ideology as well as race, giving it more applicability within the discourse. Furthermore, the echo is a signifier for a more overtly white supremacist ideology then many within a comparatively "Alt-light" movement such as Gamergate (Kelly, 2017) may be comfortable with. Outside of the username of a single user, the use of the echo only appears twice in the data-set (Reddit User 52; 53).

The majority of race-tinged discourse focuses on Muslims, Black people, and vaguely defined 'brown people' (Reddit User 65; 66; 67). Discussion around Muslim is categorized under White supremacy because Muslims are almost always coded as being middle-eastern people, as there is never any discussion about Muslims in other Muslim majority countries such as Indonesia. Muslims are constructed as the source of a constant terrorist threat that the media constantly ignores or underplays because of their liberal 'narrative' (Reddit User 68; 69; 70; 71). Once again the 'liberal media' and their SJW masters are described as being complicit in terrorist attacks carried out by Muslims because they refuse to consider all Muslims complicit in terrorism (Reddit User 71; 68; 72; 46; 74; 2; 70; 74).

The results do give a possible reason for why they consider the acknowledgement that most Muslims are not terrorists or approving of terrorism to be at best ignorant and at worst support for the destruction of western civilization (Reddit User 47). Posts indicate a belief that Islam is a belief system that can uniquely turn adherents to violence at a far higher rate then other religions or ideologies (Reddit User 69; 73; 70). This is exaggerated to the point where one post references "Sudden Jihad Syndrome" (Reddit User 69), a term used to describe what is perceived as Muslim people suddenly carrying out terrorist attacks for no reason, which justifies treating all Muslims as a potential threat. While some do believe that there are 'moderate Muslims', they also believe that they are not doing enough to violently stop radicalized Muslims to be considered trustworthy (Reddit User 75).

Meanwhile, there is evidence of the belief that "most" cases of "right-wing terrorism" are intentionally exaggerated because the leftists in power do not want to acknowledge the 'Muslim problem' (Reddit User 68; 74). Instead, incidences of right-wing terrorism are exaggerated to draw attention away from Muslims and other leftist terrorists like antifa (Reddit User 76; 74; 77; 45; 67; 79). Once again, because the 'left' consider terrorist acts committed by Muslims to not be inherent to the Muslim religion, Gamergate discourse believes that the left considers them to be under their umbrella. Furthermore, there is a strange belief that SJWs are completely and

48

hypocritically accepting of the most conservative Islamic practices such as death penalties for gay people, and the oppression of women (Reddit User 78; 47; 80; 45), even though that is clearly untrue.

Their depiction of the Portland stabbing incident of 2017 is an interesting look at how they construct crimes motivated by right-wing ideology. Their description of the perpetrator of the stabbing (Jeremy Christian) was of a mentally ill man who was vocally opposed to all forms of 'monotheism', including Christianity as well as Islam, and held a number of left-wing views, such as support for Black Lives Matter and gay marriage. He was not a threat to any of the girls that he was vocally harassing until one of the three men that were stabbed and killed began physically shoving him, which led to Christian lashing out with a knife (Reddit user 81). In their words, the reality of the situation was that the men were not heroically defending Muslim women, but were engaged in 'social-justice vigilantism', and the situation would have been less dangerous if they never intervened (Reddit User 81). They also try to disassociate Christian from being labelled right-wing by saying that he was instead mentally ill (Reddit User 81; 76; 82), and that his presence at an 'alt-right free speech rally' was unwelcome and that he was told to leave after giving a Nazi salute (Reddit User 81; 82; 83; 76; 85). Furthermore, the people that were killed trying to interfere with Christian were characterized not by a desire to help others, but to either virtue-signal (Reddit User 76), become famous (Reddit User 83), or martyr themselves for the SJW cause to 'wash the sin of whiteness away' (Reddit User 82). In this way, White people who are engaged in actions against racism are perceived as either insincere or consumed by self-hatred (Reddit User 88; 45; 82) instead of any rational beliefs.

Black people are discussed differently. Unlike Muslims, they are not seen as an acute existential threat. Instead, racist discussion about Black people generally alternates between claims that they are intrinsically more prone to crime (Reddit User 84; 76; 85; 86; 67; 68; 89), are inherently less intelligent then White people (Reddit User 76; 91; 92; 93; 94; 95), and that Black people want revenge against White people (Reddit User 96; 97). However, the most prevalent theme about discussion around Black people is that White people are being made to hate themselves because of greater attention being focused upon long-term systemic issues such as the effects of colonialism, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and policing. As before, this greater focus is laid at the feet of the murky SJW conspiracy, with those in academia believed to be the

main sources (Reddit User 98; 99; 100; 97; 101; 84). The motivation ranges from a desire for White people to be 'depopulated' (Reddit User 102) to bitterness and hatred (Reddit User 100).

When the slave trade is brought up, the long-term effects are either dismissed because they are believed to have ended long ago (Reddit User 103), or even more often that White people's part in the slave trade is unfairly exaggerated because Africans and Arabs had been trading slaves long before White people arrived (Reddit User 104; 105; 95; 106; 107; 108). Depictions of colonialism go even further, with multiple users explaining that Africa was improved by colonial occupation (Reddit User 94; 95; 109; 110; 18). The reason why Western colonialism is so often brought up, according to posts in this data-set, is not that Western countries were especially guilty of colonialist practices, but instead because Western civilization is believed to be innately more altruistic and caring then other cultures (Reddit User 111; 106). In other words, the usual SJW tactic of causing a weakening of national identity wouldn't work in non-Western countries because they feel less empathy for others (Reddit User 106).

This perception of Western society as being under threat from within by immigrants taking advantage of a sympathetic society shows up a few times in different contexts. One example is a poster whose mother was tragically killed due to medical malpractice in Canada (according to them), which he blames on the "*...mollycoddling of immigrant doctors from third-world shitholes...*" (Reddit User 66). This point is agreed upon by others in that same thread, where they commiserate that the health departments of various countries such as Canada, the USA, and the UK are knowingly using less-qualified third-world doctors instead of better trained Western ones because of vaguely defined mollycoddling (Reddit User 66; 112; 27). These discussions are mostly about ill-defined "brown" people, such as those from India or the Philippines.

An interesting thread of investigation is how the users in this data sample explain away people that are considered to be racists or to have said racist things in mainstream discourse. The example of Jontron (real name Jon Jafari) is a useful one. Jontron is a popular Youtuber who appeared on a debate stream with someone named Destiny. They began debating immigration and Jontron surprisingly began using known white supremacist talking points such as the erroneous belief that Black people committed more crime then White people regardless of social or economic status, and that White people were under racial threat from minorities seeking to overthrow them in their own country via demographic change. The general reaction in this data

set included that Jontron was being unfairly persecuted for expressing beliefs that were outside of the mainstream, and really only neutral to neutral-right (Reddit User 113; 116), that it was opportunistic hypocrisy because he would have been celebrated if he had said the same things about White people (Reddit User 114), or that he was being punished for telling the 'truth' that other people knew but were afraid to say (Reddit User 115).

A similar pattern occurred in a thread about a person who got Richard Spencer, a well-known and avowed white nationalist, to leave a gym they had been using because of his racist views. Posts defending Richard Spencer generally fell in a few categories. Some said that the woman who got him to leave was motivated by the opportunity to brag about 'fighting fascism' to their friends (Reddit User 116; 118), and that because there were no real fascists anymore, they had to attack the closest thing they could find, people like Spencer (Reddit User 117; 118; 67). Another defensive reaction was that Richard Spencer wasn't even "really" racist, despite being a white nationalist (Reddit User 84; 119). The rationalizations being either

> "*The irony here is compared to BLM and ANTIFA Spencer has not done one racist thing in his entire career as "leader of the alt-right". He just wants an America where being white is not seen as evil, and should not be a victim of cultural genocide. Which is happening in this country.*" (Reddit User 84), or

> "*I'd call it racism if he only wanted ethnostates for white people and fuck everyone else. If everyone gets their own country/continent/whatever then I don't think racism is a factor. Remember, racism is assuming superiority, not sorting people. That just makes you weird.*" (Reddit User 119).

Finally, the most common reaction was to describe this resistance as part of an ongoing attack on people that publically hold any right-wing views (Reddit User 120; 71; 121; 122; 123; 124; 125; 126). There is a real fear that left-wing activists are willing to attack any political opponents by 'arbitrarily' branding them racist and justifying any attacks against them (Reddit User 120; 121), which in this case was publically confronting Spencer about his racist activism. Others expressed the opinion that confronting racist people about their beliefs will only radicalize them even more, so they should be invited to participate and be treated nicely in the hopes that they will naturally shed those beliefs (Reddit User 122; 125; 126). However, they also added that SJWs don't actually want to decrease racism, they only wanted to be able to use the label as a club against their opponents (Reddit User 122)

Their depictions of minorities themselves were often based around fears of crime and violence, especially regarding Muslims, who were considered to almost all be complicit in terrorism as long as they were believers in Islam. Black people were portrayed as being inherently more crime-prone, less intelligent then White people, and eager to use grievances about past events to get more power from guilty White people. Actual white nationalist slang was only rarely used, with the term 'cuck' significantly more common then the other noticed white nationalist slang, the triple parenthesis "echo".

Dismissal of Politics in Videogames

This was by far the least common theme in the data set, at only 35 instances. However, it does fit the SJW persecution perception pattern that is clearly shown in the other categories. Many of the posts that fit this theme show a very narrow understanding of what politics actually is when applied to media criticism. An example is this post praising Yoko Taro, the writer and director of *Nier: Automata*,

> "*I think the success of Nier and the lack luster release of ME:A is quite telling. **Yoko Taro doesn't give a fuck about pandering to western politically correctness and has created a game and world that is incredibly intriguing and I am not going to lie, got me emotional at times**. ME:A, even if you got rid of the incompetent animations and lazy design, the characters and writing are just awful and that is something that can't be fixed.I think that says a lot about those who have political agendas or compromises making games and those who just want to make great games.*" (Reddit User 20, emphasis in original).

As someone who has actually played the entirety of Nier: Automata, I can say that the game does make a great deal of political statements and does have a political agenda. However, that political agenda does not precisely fit a social justice agenda beyond an abstract anti-war message. Similarly, another user states that the goal of *Nier: Automata* was not politics (Reddit User 127) Another user states that *Nier: Automata* isn't political because it is "*...a media that contains politics, like old X-Men, not politics shaped on a media, like new X-Men.*" (Reddit User 128). This is once again confusing, because the X-Men franchise has for decades been used as an allegory for the experiences of various minorities, particularly from the start of Chris Claremont's run beginning in 1975 onwards (Lund, 2015).

However, what *Nier: Automata* does include is a scantily-clad female protagonist, which Gamergate users seem to have interpreted as something that SJWs would be dead-set against. Therefore, by choosing to have a scantily-clad or 'sexy' protagonist, the creators of games like *Senran Kagura* and *Nier: Automata* are choosing to not shove politics in their games at the expense of the gaming experience (Reddit User 127). Furthermore, the success of those two games are seen as a sign that most video game players are also rejecting games that have 'political agendas', as SJWs are seen as anti-sex (Reddit User 20; 127; 129).

However, what constitutes politics seems to be extremely subjective. For example, one user says that

> "***The only time something is political is if it's made to be political or you push your politics on it.*** *I refuse to push politics into me playing video games. If I sit here and play Bomberman, there is nothing political about that. If I decide to play Binding of Isaac or Hearthstone or whatever, there is no politics in it. And saying that there is politics in everything is one of many reasons people are massively sick of politics and are hung over from it.*" (Reddit User 131, emphasis in original)

and another claims that

> "*The moment you turn a non-political thing into a political thing is the moment everyone else suddenly feels the need to react to it politically (and ignore its actual substance or quality). Keep politics out of the creative process and only the radicals (those who interpret everything as political anyway) will wail and gnash their teeth.*" (Reddit User 132).

Furthermore, posts indicate that users reject the concept of every media being a political statement as another SJW trick (Reddit User 133; 132).

However, context clues would indicate that it is not the presence of any kind of politics that they find disruptive to the gaming experience, but a special type of politics that is described as "identity politics" (Reddit User 130; 38), a rather vague term that seems to imply themes of social/progressive politics involving gender, class, race, etc. (Reddit User 130; 134). Bernstein (2005) noted that the expression had, in some circles, moved from it's previous progressive meaning to a derogatory term for feminist, anti-racist, and anti-heterosexist movements and ideologies. It is clearly intended to be derogatory in this data-sets' context.

With this in mind then, one can see that the intent of Gamergate's wish for games to not be political is actually specifically progressive politics, which is believed to be a tool of the SJW conspiracy. An example is when Jontron was removed from the game *Yooka-Laylee* due to not wanting to be associated with the controversy caused by his previously discussed statements. The developer, Playtonic, was described as *"…tying their game to a political ideology"* (Reddit User 135) and that choosing to remove him represented them choosing to

> *"…bow down to **Liberal pressure. This is not how you do business. Loud liberals don't spend money on anything, and are usually outraged for the sake of being outraged.** They should be ignored like the useless children they are.*
>
> *Start paying attention to whom is actually spending money instead of trying to please the mentally ill. I was going to buy this game day one, now I don't give a shit about it. When you inject your diseased narrative and two-bit politics into games, I suddenly lose all interest. Good luck selling your shit now, assholes."* (Reddit User 136, emphasis in original).

Ironically, the decision to remove Jontron from the game was motivated by Playtonic not wanting to associate their game with Jontron's own political ideology. However, rejecting their political ideology is described as alternatively cynical virtue-signalling to pander to SJWs (Reddit User 137; 114;139; 141; 147; 149) or hypocritical bigotry against non-SJW perspectives by cultural authoritarians (Reddit User 138; 114; 140; 142; 113; 146; 148; 150; 154). Therefore, despite the expressed belief that Playtonic should simply "*just…don't…take side?*" (Reddit User 143) or that "*Playtonic however, represents the interests of it's shareholders and employees and thus cannot voice a political bias unless every single one of them is in agreement should avoid the political battleground.*" (Reddit User 144), attempting to stay completely apolitical would not be possible, as choosing to ignore Jontron's statements is a political statement in itself.

Although there are relatively few expressions of dismissal of politics in videogames, there is a consistent contextual theme throughout those posts that are coded within that theme. The most important finding is that they are not apolitical, or politically apathetic. The closest to that would be some posts expressing a desire for a return to apathy (Reddit User 134; 145), or that they feel victimized because they feel that they are 'forced' to make a political choice when they perceive a game as being tied to a political ideology (Reddit User 136). A more accurate statement would be that they believe that games should not include "identity politics" (Reddit

User 130; 38), which are interpreted as being forced into games (and indeed all media) by SJWs to push their own political agenda (Reddit User 20; 151; 152; 153; 142; 139; 155). This is likely the reason why games like *Nier:Automata* and *Persona 5* are praised for not 'forcing politics into the game', despite them both having very clear political themes and messages (Reddit User 135; 127; 128). In fact, Japanese games are often praised in this data-set for not including (perceived) political themes, believing that the Western SJWs hate the Japanese video game industry and are trying to destroy it because they cannot control it (Reddit User 156; 157; 158; 159; 160; 137; 161; 162; 133; 127; 163).

Dissenting Opinions

There is an extra theme in this study, posts that explicitly contradict or push against the previous four themes. At 82 posts, this theme was unexpectedly prevalent within the data-set. Contextually, dissenting opinions were more common with regards to racist statements and discussions of SJW persecution. There were very few dissenting opinions about feminists or gender-related discourse.

Dissenting posts that involved persecution were more likely to take issue with the methods used, or the seriousness with which the other posters regarded the SJW clique. One user explained that "*...they seemed to be this 'clique' much more influence on sales then they actually have.*" (Reddit User 38). Another post expressed cynicism regarding the Gamergate claim that they were guardians of ethics, "*There's literally a thread about 'Racism is ok, we're all racists and it's not illegal.' ETHICS!*" (Reddit User 164). There were also posts about how dangerous it is to assume that SJWs are all evil (Reddit User 165; 166), and that both sides use the same tactics (Reddit User 166; 12). Finally, a notable post is one that dismisses suspicions of collusion among journalists because they saw them as all being "*...bottom feeders that jump onto whatever story gives them clicks and drama, it's not a collusion.*" (Reddit User 167). Other areas of disagreement involved liberal politicians inciting people to violence (Reddit User 186; 187; 13; 188), and the proportion of right-wing terrorism to left-wing terrorism (Reddit User 186).

Many of these dissenting opinions were generally restricted to specific situations, rather then entire ideologies. For example, while feminists are generally looked down upon, there were a few posts saying that Notch (creator of Minecraft) was trying to provoke Zoe Quinn by calling her a "cunt" and that by doing so he made the situation worse then it should have been (Reddit

User 168; 169). Similarly, a previously described thread where a group of posters were suspicious of a rape case did include a few who disagreed with the prevailing attitude and offered explanations for factors that seemed suspicious to the others (Reddit User 164; 170; 171). A few users did offer more or less accurate explanations of the term "toxic masculinity". Although they often included a statement that feminists have expanded and twisted the term into uselessness, there was an acknowledgement that it represented a real issue (Reddit User 172; 173; 13). Interestingly, one of the most common dissenting opinions was a dismissal of people being upset at the inclusion of female soldiers in the new *Call of Duty* game set in WW2. This was often a response to people believing that it was unrealistic and dismissed because there were women fighters in WW2 (Reddit User 186; 189; 86) and because *Call of Duty* is inherently unrealistic anyway (Reddit User 186; 190; 167).

Dissenting opinions seemed to be most common with regards to racially-charged topics such as ones involving refugees, Muslims, and known racists. A video of a "Youtube prankster" kicked out of Anita Sarkeesian's panel at a convention was considered suspicious by some users. This was because the prankster, JoeySalads, had engaged in racist and fraudulent scenarios that he tried to pass off as real (Reddit User 124; 174). There was also pushback against the claims that drowning refugee shots in news media were faked (Reddit User 175). Significant sources of dissenting opinions included the history of the slave trade and Africa (Reddit User 176; 177; 178; 179; 180), the Philando Castle shooting (Reddit User 181; 182; 183; 86; 184), and reactions to Richard Spencer (Reddit User 170; 185; 186).

Although counter-arguments to the dismissal of politics in games were rather sparse, a significant post explained that *Nier:Automata* was a political game, describing the political themes explored within the game's narrative, and how *Nier* was inspired by the events of 9/11 (Reddit user 191). Another dissenting opinion was that it was not out of the ordinary for Jontron to face consequences for expressing his personal views in public, as Jontron is a public figure that makes a living expressing his views on Youtube (Reddit User 192). Finally, there were two posts that disagreed with the argument that Western SJWs hate Japanese games like *Persona 5* by pointing out that despite there being a few complaints on NEOGAF, which is often perceived as an antagonizing faction by Gamergate, the overwhelming majority of discussion concerning *Persona 5* was positive (Reddit User 193; 194).

DISCUSSION

      Analysis of the data gathered for this study supports the thesis statement that Gamergate members represent an online subculture vulnerable to recruitment into White Supremacist groups. This discussion section will first analyze the results through the lens of Merton's Insider/Outsider dynamics. Next, the specific ideological parallels which make Gamergate a gateway for explicit White Supremacist beliefs will be examined. After a brief summary, the limitations of the research findings conducted in this thesis will be explained, followed by a conclusion which includes the implications of this thesis' findings, and suggestions of ways in which these results could be used in future research.

      A theoretical interpretation of the results using Merton's Insider/Outsider dynamics (1972) will be used to examine the dichotomy with which the ideology of Gamergate distinguishes allies from enemies. The digital environment's effect on the shape that this dichotomy takes will also be examined, as Merton did not predict the influence that the Internet has on current society, especially geek subcultures. The use of conspiracy theories is also a significant factor into how society is constructed by Gamergate ideology.

      The key factor that makes Gamergate members vulnerable to recruitment into White Supremacist organizations is the parallels between White Supremacist ideology and the ideology expressed in the data, especially with the so-called 'alt-right', another form of White supremacy hidden under a cover of plausible deniability by reframing their hateful rhetoric into "…broader populist conspiratorial anxieties about demographic change, immigration and government overreach…" (Futrell & Simi, 2017, pg. 76). The way that these anxieties have been projected onto the cause of resisting social justice themes in video games and the broader culture will be examined further.

Theoretical Discussion

      The theoretical perspective for this research paper was the Insider/Outsider dynamics as proposed by Merton (1972). In the journal article "Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge", Merton described the way in which a new (for 1972) doctrine of scholarship had been put forward that he felt represented a "…balkanization of social science" (Merton, 1972, pg. 13). This 'doctrine' was that only Insiders to different subjects and conditions

could truly understand and interpret those same subjects and conditions. Merton used the example that under this belief, only someone who was Black could truly interpret and analyze Black culture, only White people could truly analyze White culture, only Americans could analyze American culture, and so on (Merton, 1972). This belief would lead to a condition that Merton described as "extreme Insiderism" (1972, pg. 14). Under this condition, the perception of a group becomes solipsistic, in the sense that the only knowledge, attributes, or perception that can be true of a group are those that the group assigns to themselves. While this is an extreme interpretation of the Insider/Outsider dichotomy, it speaks to the foundation of the perspective that groups often believe that knowledge generated internally is more valid then knowledge generated externally (Merton, 1972).

Gamergate has a heavily dichotomized Insider/Outsider-based ideology, which is shown in a variety of factors both in Gamergate's creation and ideology. For example, the greater nerd technoculture, of which video game subcultures are a part, tend to cast themselves as Outsiders by default (Massanari, 2015; Braithewaite, 2016; Shaw, 2011). There are a few reasons for this. First of all, those who show interest in 'geek pursuits' often have characteristics that make them easy targets for bullying during their formative years in school, such as studiousness, a lack of social skill and graces, and anxiety towards social pursuits (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Lehman, 2015; Peterson & Raye, 2006; Bell, 2009; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2016; Bishop, et al, 2003). Secondly, the stereotypes and portrayal of those who play video games have nearly always been negative in popular culture until relatively recently (Kowert, Griffiths, & Oldmeadow, 2012; Maclean, 2016; Chess, Evans, & Baines, 2016). Therefore, members of Gamergate are 'primed' to expect hostility from mainstream society, especially with regards to a pastime that has become an integral part of their identity. This observation is supported by the data analyzed for this research paper, where there are repeated examples of posts calling out 'the media' for lying about gamers (Reddit user 40; 137; 195; 2; 150; 196). This is a possible factor in explaining why Gamergate is so hostile and dismissive towards mainstream sources, as they believe that those who are Outsiders can't possibly truly understand gamers and can point to their stereotypical portrayals as proof. This sense of hostility towards Outsiders is also unsurprisingly present in the 4Chan style discourse common in Gamergate posts, with Salter (2017), pointing out that:

"Some scholars argue that expressions of vulgarity and prejudice on 4Chan operate as a 'discursively constructed border fence meant to keep the uninitiated…far far away (Coleman, 2014: 40)'" (pg. 11, reference in original).

Another significant issue is that the identity around which what Proctor (2017) would describe as totemic nostalgia is performed is not a creation of the identity-holders. Instead it is the product of marketing campaigns that were designed to appeal towards a young White Male demographic that the video game industry assumed was their main audience and thus to whom it tried almost exclusively to appeal (Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017; Near, 2013; Chess, Evans & Baines, 2016; Dunlop, 2007; Shaw, 2011; Salter, 2017). After being treated as nearly the only demographic whose desires meant anything, it is easy to understand why so many members of Gamergate believe that only heterosexual White males should be the target market. However, the mainstream video game industry has recently attempted to increase profits by also marketing towards minority audiences. Merton (1972) did not discuss what the implications would be for an Insider/Outsider dichotomy where the Insider sphere was dependant on an outside (distinct from Outside) source. The video game subculture as defined by Gamergate is based around the *consumption* rather then the *creation* of the medium their identity is based around (Braithewaite, 2016), and therefore they do not actually control the video game industry. Their Insider status is now perceived as under threat, but the gaming industry is too vital to their identity as gamers to ascribe it Outsider status, since Outsiders are almost uniformly negative in Gamergate ideology.

Given this positioning, Gamergators cannot normalize this change by acknowledging that it is the nature of capitalist industries to try to gain wealth from wider markets. From the perspective of hegemonic geek culture, straight White male interests are the default to which everything should be directed (Condis, 2016; Dunlop, 2007; Shaw, 2011; McKernan, 2015). Therefore, this slight reorientation of marketing effort has to be the result of infiltration into the industry by Outside forces attempting to twist and corrupt video games into something that does not serve the 'real gamers' (Braithewaite, 2016; Chess & Shaw, 2015; Perrault & Vos, 2016). In other words, this is not a natural change to be adapted to, like a different generation of console hardware or a genre fad like the glut of JRPGs following *Final Fantasy VII* or the cover-shooter fad following the success of *Gears of War*. Instead this represents an invasion by the same Outsiders that Gamergate ideology has perceived as always wishing them harm. This is

particularly so from a gender perspective, hence the fury at Anita Sarkeesian, Zoe Quinn, and other so-called 'fake geek girls' (Heron, Belford & Goker, 2014; Braithewaite, 2016; Massanari, 2015; Tekobbe, 2015; Sonnet, 2014).

Though Merton suggested that discourse between outsiders and insiders was a way to prevent extreme Insiderism (1972), the nature of digital spaces like Reddit serve to actually further isolate participants from Outsider discourse. These digital spaces not only already prioritize straight White male perspectives (Daniels, 2013; Finlay, 2014; Salter, 2017), but ensure that exposure to conflicting or varying perspectives are limited due to features such as karma-voting, community-dependant modding, and threads being dependant on high karma for exposure within a subreddit (Massanari, 2015). In other words, Gamergaters can exist in a state of 'extreme Insiderism' because subreddit tools can ensure that posts from alternate perspectives can be modded or downvoted into oblivion (Massanari, 2015).

Not only do these tools allow for a state of collective solipsism, but the nature of Internet communication makes it easier for Gamergaters to strike back against their SJW foes. Anonymous communication gives trolls and aggressive posters the advantage in online conflict (Moore, et al., 2012), and Gamergate exists within a subculture where 'trolling' is considered to be a skill, with consequences taken less seriously then mainstream society does (Coles & West, 2016; Craker & Evita, 2016; Sparby, 2017).

To summarize this section, applying Merton's Insider/Outsider (1972) perspective provides a useful theoretical lens through which to view the results of the thematic analysis of the dataset. The data gathered indicates a significant pre-occupation with feelings of persecution and victimization by Outsiders who are part of a vaguely defined conspiracy of 'SJWs' with pervasive and malicious influence throughout mainstream society (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Braithewaite, 2016). This means that the Insider/Outsider dichotomy is extremely strong and that the definition of Outsider is very broad and easily applied to non-Gamergate-aligned perspectives. As their identity is built around the videogame industry almost exclusively marketing towards them for decades (Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017; Near, 2013; Chess, Evans & Baines, 2016; Dunlop, 2007; Shaw, 2011), they experience that industry including non-straight White male perspectives as a betrayal that is caused by infiltration by SJWs (Braithewaite, 2016).

This perspective is exacerbated by the nature of digital spaces such as Reddit, which offer tools that prevent outside perspectives from piercing Gamergate's ideological bubble (Massanari, 2015; Finlay, 2014). Taken together, this paints the picture of an ideologically isolated online community of White males who feel they are under attack from a shadowy force that controls mainstream society and is trying to enforce diversity by taking things away from them.

Ideological Parallels between Gamergate and White Supremacist ideology

Analysis of the data-set indicates a variety of factors that make believers in Gamergate ideology vulnerable to White Supremacist recruitment. This includes: a sense of persecution from mainstream society for being White males (Perry, 2001; Braithewaite, 2016; Adams & Roscigno, 2005; Schafer, Mullins, & Box, 2014; Kelly, 2017), a fear of interloping 'Others' attempting to upend the spaces their identity is based around (Brown, 2009; Bernstein, 2005; Proctor, 2017; Shepard, et al. 2015; Gillards-Matthew, 2011), being located within an isolated digital space that rejects conflicting perspectives (Adams & Roscigno, 2005; Brown, 2009; Massanari, 2015; Wong, Frank, & Allsup, 2015; Oh, 2016; Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015; Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet, 2016), identifying strongly with a subculture that has a history of marginalization of non-Hegemonic perspectives (Salter, 2017; Chess, Evans, & Baines, 2017; Harvey & Shepherd, 2017; Heron, Belford, & Goker, 2014; Dunlop, 2007; Shaw, 2011; Mckernan, 2015; Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2016), existing within a culture that exhibits a strong level of Hegemonic White privilege but resists dialogue about it (Matias & DiAngelo, 2013; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; Spanierman, et al., 2008; Chao, et al., 2015; Diversi, 2016), and finally, openness to wide-ranging conspiracy theories (Perry, 2001; Chess & Shaw, 2015; Aupers, 2012; Salter, 2017).

An essential distinguishing feature found in the results and supported by previous literature is that Gamergate ideology is more fundamentally focused on gender then race (Braithewaite, 2016; Heron, Belford & Goker, 2014; Proctor, 2017; Shepherd, et al., 2015; Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017). Although there was racially-focused content within the data set, there was also a higher likelihood of disagreement regarding race-focused content then gender-focused content. This may reflect Gamergate's position as an "alt-light movement" (Kelly, 2017, pg. 75) within the greater White Supremacist culture, an example of movements that

"…confine themselves to a denunciation of political correctness and leftist politics, and promote a secular 'classic liberalism' which roughly equates to a militantly anti-progressive strain of neoliberalism" (Kelly, 2017, pg. 75).

However, Gamergate's antifeminism parallels gender discourse in White Supremacist ideology (Blee, 2012; Kelly, 2017; Ferber, 1999), particularly White Supremacist discourse on the decline of masculinity due to feminism and changing views on gender and sexuality (Ferber & Kimmel, 2000; Schmitz, 2016; Keskinen, 2013). Furthermore, White Supremacist thought explicitly links race and gender together through the need to control White women so that more White children are born (Kesikinen, 2013; Ferber, 1999; Perry, 2001, Schmitz, 2016). The anxieties about masculinity that are clearly present in the data-set, such as the belief that feminists are trying to effectively emasculate all men (Reddit User 22; 27; 28; 29), can thus provide an avenue through which White Supremacist beliefs can metastasize into wider Gamergate discussion. An example of this is seen in the way that Gamergate has adopted the use of the word 'cuck' (Reddit User 8; 54; 55; 56; 57; 51; 58; 59; 60; 61; 62; 63; 64), a term that is used in White Supremacist discourse to indicate both emasculation and racial miscegenation (Kelly, 2017).

As described in the previous section, Gamergate is an example of what Merton describes as "extreme Insiderism" (Merton, 1975, pg. 14). They believe that only the traits, perspectives, and values that are assigned to them internally are accurate. The fact that they are so ideologically isolated but then choosing to echo White Supremacist discourse is a cause for great concern. It would indicate that they consider those who hold White Supremacist beliefs, either explicitly or implicitly, to be Insiders, or at least more trustworthy then mainstream sources. This sentiment is literally described by one Reddit user who writes "*Compared to mainstream "journalism" Richard Spencer has always and will always have the moral high ground*" (Reddit User 106). It is possible that due to them positioning themselves as opposed to the mainstream, Gamergate has more ideological empathy for other groups that position themselves as being opposed to mainstream thought, while their self-imposed isolation makes it difficult for them to change ideological course (Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet, 2016).

Let us for a moment consider this from the perspective of Gamergate. To them, the increased diversity in perspectives and opinions shown in popular media, including videogames, is not something new and fresh to be celebrated. Instead, it represents a loss of the source of their ability to participate in the hegemonic masculinity that society expects of them (Paaben,

Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2016; Braithewaite, 2016; Proctor, 2017; Bell, 2009), stolen by the very people that Gamergate believes to be the source of their discontent, especially the women that they percieve to be a galling reminder of their internalized sense of masculine inadequacy (Almog & Kaplan, 2015; Heron, Belford, & Goker, 2014; Grey, Buyukozturk, & Hill, 2016; Robinson, 2014; Tekobbe, 2015). Within their Insider sphere, they are the victims, people who only wanted to quietly play videogames and not be reminded of how negatively they are regarded by society. But unfortunately, society came to them. With the rise in popularity of the video game medium, the 'casuals' are able to outspend the 'real gamers' that were once kings of the video game landscape through sheer numbers. What's more, they face attacks from women telling them that their videogames, their one place to feel like a man, which were made and marketed to be sold to men (Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2017; Near, 2013; Chess, Evans & Baines, 2016; Dunlop, 2007; Shaw, 2011; Salter, 2017), are misogynist (Braithewaite, 2016; Lockhart, 2014; Proctor, 2017; Kelly, 2017; Salter, 2017). They are even attacked with multiple articles in mainstream and videogame publications proclaiming that 'Gamers are Dead', and that they were witnessing the 'Death of an Identity', and other insults (Alexander, Aug 2014; Plunkett, Aug 2014; Bernstein, Aug 2014; Wilson, Aug 2014). Although the point of the articles was that the gaming medium's audience was moving away from the stereotypical 'lonely man-child gamer' that was so often used to insult people who played video games, to Gamergate it was just more evidence that they were unwanted, and that the so-called SJWs were celebrating that they would soon disappear under the weight of the casuals and diverse players that were now enjoying games. Mainstream voices, even voices within the video game industry were taking the side of the SJWs now. How else could it appear but a coordinated cultural assault on the video game audience?

While Gamergate ideology is not something to be sympathized with, it is understandable why people in the situation that was just described would have fallen into such anti-progressive views. First of all, a large portion of Gamergate membership is from 4Chan, a forum site which is infamous for it's "non-PC" views (Sparby, 2017; Lockhart, 2015). Its ethos is intensely opposed to any attempt by others to modify their speech or 'censor' them (Massanari, 2014; Sparby, 2017; Salter, 2017). Secondly, many White Americans, which make up the majority of Gamergate members and 4Chan, are ignorant of concepts such as White privilege, and often react negatively to it being brought up, as it conflicts with the individualistic and universalist

ideology of the 'American Dream', the hegemonic ideology of the United States (Matias & DiAngelo, 2013; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; Spanierman, et al., 2008). Adding to that, the manner in which racist rhetoric is now deployed is in a so-called race-blind manner, in which racist ideas are discussed without *mentioning* race. For example, urban crime is a dog-whistle for saying that black people are violent (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015; Oh, 2016; Perry, 2001). This allows racist talking points to be given a cloak of rationality and logic, which geek spheres often valorize (Lockhart, 2015; Bell, 2009). Finally, most Gamergaters already see themselves as being marginalized due to being nerds, considered inadequate by the rest of society for being unable to attain the standards of masculinity expected of them (Lockhart, 2015; Braithewaite, 2016; Almog & Kaplan, 2015). Not only are they unaware of their privilege, but they are unwilling or even resentful of being reminded of it.

With all this in mind then, the only source of positive reinforcement of their worldview under what they saw as culture-wide siege against their very identity came from White Supremacist sources (Kelly, 2017). Only they explained to them that they weren't wrong to feel lost or confused or like they were losing control over what they had built their identity around. Instead of telling them that their concerns were irrelevant and that they were actually the group with the greatest privilege despite them not feeling privileged at all, White Supremacist ideology told Gamergaters that they were right to feel that things were better in the past. In fact, the reason things were changing for the worse was not happenstance or a vague change in the zeitgeist but was the result of an active and deliberate derailment by a shadowy group that they had already been primed to resent, the SJWs (Kelly, 2017; Sparby, 2017). White Supremacist ideology not only gives them a reason for why they are right to feel threatened as they do but also gives them an opponent that their Insider/Outsider dichotomy already felt was against them. It elevates their struggle from just being upset on the Internet about videogames. Instead they see themselves as crusader on the front lines of a culture war for the soul of what they see as Western Civilization, fighting against a vast conspiracy that has made them feel inadequate and emasculated all their lives (Braithewaite, 2016; Salter, 2017). It is perhaps unhelpful then, to ask how the members of Gamergate could gradually become subscribers to White Supremacist ideology. A more useful line of inquiry may be why so many other people in the exact same situation have not internalized ideology similar to Gamergate, if not Gamergate itself.

Summary

Taken as a whole, the results of this qualitative study paint a picture of a group that is most heavily pre-occupied with a very serious sense of being persecuted by shadowy forces in society that are trying to destroy or marginalize every aspect of their identity. Those aspects include being a gamer, being heterosexual males, and being White. From the perspective of Gamergate, these 'SJWs' are trying to turn society against them and push them out of cultural spaces that they had previously relied upon. These spaces range from the videogame subculture, to the hegemonic privilege that White males possess in society. The motivations ascribed to the SJW conspiracy consistently include a desire for power, projected self-hatred, white or male guilt, and a need to virtue-signal for greater social prestige. The SJW conspiracy, which includes feminists, anti-racists, and any supporter of "identity politics" is often, but not always, identified with left-wing politics.

Because the SJW conspiracy is seen as an insidious threat, any sign of support for progressive politics is generally at best considered suspect, and more likely a sign of infiltration by SJWs. Opposition to anti-feminist or what would be considered white supremacist ideology is also considered to be a sign of SJW control. This is because they believe that terms like misogyny, sexism, racism, and White supremacy have been twisted into ideological clubs that the SJWs use to attack opponents with, rather then applied with any rational consistency.

Gender-related ideology was shown to be considered a larger threat to Gamergate members then race-related ideology such as Black Lives Matter, even though BLM was still considered a negative force. Feminism was often described as a ploy for women to take over society by using concepts like toxic masculinity to make men effeminate and weak. Increased acceptance of trans perspectives were also perceived as a continuing effort to undermine masculine identity and reduce men to "omegas".

Race-related ideology was often described as an effort by shadowy academic SJWs who were trying to destroy the White identity, much like feminists were trying to do with the masculine identity. Concepts like "White Privilege", "Post-colonialism" and "Systematic racism" are meant to create a sense of White guilt that will lead to people being willing to discard their culture and allow foreigners to take over the West. SJWs are also believed to be complicit in Islamic terrorism, due to their perceived refusal to cover Muslim terrorists or to

admit that Islamic terrorism is distinct from other forms of terrorism and that it is more dangerous. This is once again believed to spring from either White guilt, self-hatred, or a desire for Western civilization to be destroyed. Similarly, people protesting against police violence is part of a conspiracy to weaken law enforcement so that gangs of minorities and foreigners will be harder to control.

Finally, even though there is much discussion around how forcing politics into video games and other media should be avoided, analysis of this data set indicates that this specifically refers to what they derisively refer to as "identity politics", which are forced into all forms of media by cultural authoritarians for the purposes of indoctrinating media consumers into SJW ideology.

Limitations

It is important to also discuss the limitations of these results. To begin with, Kotaku in Action is, as previously discussed, a very active subreddit that has existed since 2014. At the time of this writing, there are 95 000 subscribers to it (Kotaku in Action, 2018). Therefore, a content analysis of 43 threads collected in the Summer of 2017 may not reflect the opinions of all Gamergate members, or the content of all Gamergate threads. Furthermore, even though care was taken to choose Gamergate threads as objectively as possible to avoid bending the results to fit the desired result, the content of each thread was subject-sensitive. For example, if more threads on the subject of race had been chosen, it is possible (although not certain) that the results of the thematic analysis would have indicated more emphasis on racial issues than gender issues. Finally, this is not a subject which one can truly examine objectively due to the ethical and moral ramifications of Gamergate ideology, as well as the real-life consequences the movement has had, such as the emotional pain that their harassment and doxing has had on numerous critics. It should be noted that I vehemently oppose the ideology of Gamergate and White supremacy on moral, ethical, and rational grounds. While care has been taken to minimize the effects of ideological bias on the results of this analysis, it is impossible to remain truly 'unbiased' in the face of such content.

Conclusion

The results of thematic analysis of Gamergate posts on the Kotaku in Action subreddit supported the argument that Gamergate ideology possesses significant ideological parallels with

current White Supremacist ideology. Analysis indicated a preoccupation with feelings of persecution and marginalization, with resentment against feminism and topics involving gender and sexuality as a close second. Although racist speech was present, it encountered more pushback from other members then misogynist/homophobic/transphobic speech. Overall, the analyzed discourse shows many signs of vulnerability to White Supremacist indoctrination via appeals to their sense of loss of masculinity compared to the hegemonic masculine standard, and related sense of sexual and social marginalization.

Research Implications

The most relevant contribution of this study to the ongoing research of White supremacy and the alt-right is the detailed and thorough examination of the main platform of a movement that Kelly (2017) refers to as 'alt-light', or a 'gateway' version of an extremist ideology that introduces White Supremacist concepts in a more easily consumed context for those who have not yet fully internalized White Supremacist ideology. This thorough examination reveals a few implications for further research. First of all, the presence of greater then expected dissenting opinions within internal discussions implies the presence of some rhetorical fulcrums which may be used to help disengage members of Gamergate from falling further into White Supremacist ideologies. This is especially true when one considers that the dissenting opinions that were found in the data sample often involved ideological issues, for example the Gamergate posters who stated that Richard Spencer was a genuine Nazi and therefore immoral (Reddit User 170; 185; 186), or the discussion around the shooting of Philando Castle (Reddit User 181; 182; 183; 86; 184). This strengthens Kelly's (2017) description of Gamergate as being alt-light, which would indicate that not all of the people on the Gamergate subreddit are necessarily in agreement with White Supremacist ideology, but instead are 'testing the waters'. Therefore, research into methods of disengagement from "gateways" into harmful ideologies would be warranted.

Another important finding is that while Gamergate does possess significant ideological parallels to White supremacy, these parallels do not primarily originate in beliefs regarding race, but instead are concerned more heavily with gender. The results indicated a much greater emphasis on gender-related issues, including feminism, anxiety about changing perceptions of gender (ie. Nonbinary genders), gender roles, and women in spaces that they consider to be masculine. Therefore, people who are attempting to counteract Gamergate and Gamergate-

67

related ideology by focusing primarily on race may be making a mistake. While the main ideology of Gamergate is racist, those who identify as being part of Gamergate do not appear to consider race to be a primary concern compared to what they perceive as the destruction of masculine values in society (Reddit User 23; 34; 36; 90), for example. Further avenues of research could include gender norms within White Supremacist thought, as gender-based dog-whistles like "traditional masculine values" are less obvious to those who have not studied White Supremacist ideology then race-based dog-whistles about "welfare queens" or "urban crime"

Another implication is that the Insider/Outsider dynamics present in Gamergate will make research which involves actual communication with members of Gamergate, such as interviews or even posting an invitation for discussion on the Kotaku in Action subreddit, extremely difficult, and perhaps inadvisable. The style of communication that Gamergate uses is derived from 4Chan culture, which is designed to prevent outsiders from being able to usefully participate in discourse (Salter, 2017; Sparby, 2017). This style of communication is not only extremely offensive, but is very difficult to convincingly imitate, and part of Gamergate ideology is a hatred of those seen as being 'fake'. While one could instead openly identify as a social scientist who is doing research, this strategy is also likely to fail. Gamergate ideology is extremely paranoid about outside forces attempting to take advantage of them, and academia (especially social sciences) is identified as being part of the SJW conspiracy to corrupt Western civilization (Chess & Shaw, 2015). Therefore, explicitly identifying oneself as being engaged in social science research is unlikely in the extreme to lead anywhere helpful, and when one considers the willingness of Gamergate supporters to engage in acts of online and offline harassment, could in fact leave a researcher at genuine risk of threats, doxing, etc.

With that in mind, it is advised that future research does not involve trying to openly interact with Gamergate supporters outside of a one-on-one basis, and definitely should not attempt to post on the Kotaku in Action subreddit in any research capacity. Trying to pretend to be another anonymous Gamergate supporter is likely to fail unless the researcher has significant previous experience within 4Chan culture. Meanwhile, a researcher attempting to be open about their intentions is more then likely making themselves vulnerable to mockery at best, and a targeted harassment campaign at worst.

There is no reason to assume that this sense of persecution and anxiety about one's place within society is limited to this video game subculture. As has already been seen with the controversies and toxicity to which movies with female or minority leads like *Star Wars: The Last Jedi,* or the *Ghostbusters* reboot have been subject to, a new "Gamergate" could potentially spring from any geek subculture, if an appropriate inciting incident were to occur. Further research on what has been termed "geek masculinity" (Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2016; Braithewaite, 2016; Proctor, 2017; Bell, 2009) may be a good avenue for understanding what is causing this relatively recent increase in opposition towards non- Hegemonic viewpoints in so-called geek subcultural spheres, as there appears to be a greater emphasis on gender in said opposition (Paaben, Morgenroth, & Stratemeyer, 2016; Braithewaite, 2016; Proctor, 2017).

Finally, as mentioned previously, many people who identify as "gamers" and have the same demographics and cultural experiences as the majority of Gamergators did not actually support Gamergate, as evidenced by the failure of the movement to create lasting change. Examining what factors are correlated with resistance to Gamergate ideology could be a fruitful line of inquiry. This would be useful because, as Gamergate ideology so consistently parallels White Supremacist ideology, factors that help individuals resist alignment with Gamergate would also help individuals resist radicalization into White Supremacy.

References

Adams, J., & Roscigno, V. J. (2005). White supremacists, oppositional culture and the world wide web. *Social Forces, 84*(2), 759-778. doi:10.1353/sof.2006.0001

Alexander, L. (2014, August). "Gamers" don't have to be your audience: "gamers" are over. *Gamasutra,*. Retrieved from https://archive.li/l1kTW

Apple, A. L., & Messner, B. A. (2001). Paranoia and paradox: The apocalyptic rhetoric of christian identity. *Western Journal of Communication, 65*(2), 206-227. doi:10.1080/10570310109374700

Aupers, S. (2012). 'Trust no one': Modernization, paranoia and conspiracy culture. *European Journal of Communication, 27*(1), 22-34. doi:10.1177/0267323111433566

Barnes, B. R. (2010). The hawthorne effect in community trials in developing countries. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 13*(4), 357-370. doi:10.1080/13645570903269096

Bell, D. (2013). Geek myths: Technologies, Masculinities, Globalizations. In: Hearn, J., Blagojevic, M., & Harrison, K. (eds). *Rethinking Transnational Men: Beyond, Between, and Within Nations.* Routledge, New York. Retrieved from https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781135022471

Bernstein, J. (2014, August). Gaming is leaving "gamers" behind. *Buzzfeed.* Retrieved from https://archive.li/jVqJ8

Bernstein, M. (2005). Identity politics. *Annual Review of Sociology, 31*(1), 47-74. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100054

Bishop, J. H., Bishop, M., Gelbwasser, L., Green, S., & Zuckerman, A. (2003). Nerds and freaks: A theory of student culture and norms. *Brookings Papers on Education Policy, 2003*(1), 213; 141-199. doi:10.1353/pep.2003.0002

Blee, K. M. (2012). Does gender matter in the united states far-right? *Politics, Religion & Ideology, 13*(2), 253-265. 10.1080/21567689.2012.675705

Braithewaite, A. (2016). It's about ethics in games journalism? Gamergaters and geek masculinity. *Social Media + Society, 2*(4), 1-10.

Brown, C. (2009). WWW.Hate.Com. White supremacist discourse on the Internet and

the construction of Whiteness ideology. *The Howard Journal of Communication,*
20(2), 189-208.

Burgess, J. & Matamoros-Fernández, A. (2016) Mapping sociocultural controversies across

digital media platforms: one week of #gamergate on Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr.
Communication Research and Practice, 2(1), 79-96,
DOI: 10.1080/22041451.2016.1155338

Cap, P. (2018). From 'cultural unbelonging' to 'terrorist risk': Communicating threat in the polish

anti-immigration discourse. *Critical Discourse Studies, 15*(3), 285.
doi:10.1080/17405904.2017.1405050

Castle, T. (2012). Morrigan rising: exploring female-targeted propaganda on hate group

websites. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 15*(6), 679-694.

Chang-Kredl, S., & Colannino, D. (2017). Constructing the image of the teacher on reddit: Best

and worst teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 64*, 43-51.
doi:10.1016/j.tate.2017.01.019

Chao, R., Wei, M., Spanierman, L., Longo, J., & Northart, D. (2015). White racial attitudes and

white empathy: The moderation of openness to diversity. *The Counseling*
Psychologist, 43(1), 94-120.

Chess, S., Evans, N. J., & Baines, J. J. (2017). What does a gamer look like? video games,

advertising, and diversity. *Television & New Media, 18*(1), 37-57.

Chess, S., & Shaw, A. (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), 208-220. doi:10.1080/08838151.2014.999917

Chiesa, M., & Hobbs, S. (2008). Making sense of social research: How useful is the hawthorne

effect? *European Journal of Social Psychology, 38*(1), 67-74. doi:10.1002/ejsp.401

Cisneros, J. D., & Nakayama, T. K. (2015). New media, old racisms: Twitter, Miss America, and cultural logics of race. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 8*(2), 108-127.

Coles, B.A. & West, M. (2016). Trolling the trolls: Online forum users constructions of the nature and properties of trolling. *Computers in Human Behaviour, 60*, 233-244.

Condis, M.A. (2016). Playing the game of literature: Ready Player One, the ludic novel, and the geeky "canon" of white masculinity. *Journal of Modern Literature*, *39*(2), 1-19.

Craker, N., & Evita, M. (2016). The dark side of Facebook: The dark tetrad, negative social potency, and trolling behaviours. *Personality and Individual Differences, 102*, 79-84.

Daniels, J. (2013). Race and racism in internet studies: A review and critique. *New Media & Society, 15*(5), 695-719.

Darawsheh, W., & Stanley, M. (2014). Reflexivity in research: Promoting rigour, reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation, 21*(12), 560-568. doi:10.12968/ijtr.2014.21.12.560

DiAngelo, R., & Sensoy, Ö. (2014). Getting slammed: White depictions of race discussions as arenas of violence. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 17*(1), 103-128.

Dictionary.com (2018). Cuck. http://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/cuck/.

Diversi, M. (2016). The ever-shifting excuses for demonizing black people in america. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, 16*(3), 245-252. 10.1177/1532708616634769

Dixon, T. L., & Williams, C. L. (2015). The changing misrepresentation of race and crime on network and cable news. *Journal of Communication, 65*(1), 24-39. doi:10.1111/jcom.12133.

Douglas, K. M., Sutton, R. M., & Cichocka, A. (2017). The psychology of conspiracy theories. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 26*(6), 538-542. doi:10.1177/0963721417718261

Douglas, K. M., Sáenz, R., & Murga, A. L. (2015). Immigration in the era of color-blind

racism. *American Behavioral Scientist, 59*(11), 1429-1451.

doi:10.1177/0002764214566502

Dunlop, J.C. (2007). The US videogame industry: Analyzing representation of gender and race. *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction, 3*(2), 96+.

Eco, U. (1995, June). Ur-Fascism. *New York Review of Books, 42*(11). Retrieved from http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/

Edy, J. A., & Risley-Baird, E. E. (2016). Rumor communities: The social dimensions of internet political misperceptions: Rumor communities. *Social Science Quarterly, 97*(3), 588-602. doi:10.1111/ssqu.12309

Enzweiler, M. J. (2015). Swatting political discourse: A domestic terrorism threat. *Notre Dame Law Review, 90*(5), 2001.

Ethayarajh, K., & Rudzicz, F. (2017). The effect of photoperiod on the mood of reddit users. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 20*(4), 238-245. doi:10.1089/cyber.2016.0487

Euteneuer, J. (2016). Default Characters and the Embodied Nature of Play: Race, Gender, and Gamer Identity. *Press Start, 3*(1), 115-125.

Ezekiel, R. S. (2002). An ethnographer looks at neo-nazi and klan groups: The racist mind revisited. *American Behavioral Scientist, 46*(1), 51-71. doi:10.1177/0002764202046001005

Ferber, A. L. (2007). The construction of black masculinity: white supremacy now and then." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 31*(1),11 – 24. doi:10.1177/0193723506296829.

Ferber, A. L., & Kimmel, M. (2000). reading right: The western tradition in white supremacist discourse. *Sociological Focus, 33*(2), 193-213. doi:10.1080/00380237.2000.10571165

Ferber, A. L. (1999). The construction of race, gender, and class in white supremacist discourse. *Race, Gender & Class, 6*(3), 67-89.

Finlay, S.C. (2014). Age and gender in Reddit commenting and success. *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice, 2*(3), 18-28.

Freilich, J. D., Chermak, S. M., & Caspi, D. (2009). Critical events in the life trajectories of

domestic extremist white supremacist groups: A case study analysis of four violent organizations. *Criminology & Public Policy, 8*(3), 497.

Futrell, R., & Simi, P. (2017). The [un]surprising alt-right. *Contexts, 16*(2), 76-76. 10.1177/1536504217714269

Gold, S. J. (2004). From jim crow to racial hegemony: Evolving explanations of racial hierarchy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 27*(6), 951-968. doi:10.1080/0141987042000268549

Gotsbachner, E. (2001). Xenophobic normality: The discriminatory impact of habitualized discourse dynamics. *Discourse & Society, 12*(6), 729-759. doi:10.1177/0957926501012006002.

Gray, K. L., Buyukozturk, B., & Hill, Z. G. (2017). Blurring the boundaries: Using gamergate to examine "real" and symbolic violence against women in contemporary gaming culture.*Sociology Compass, 11*(3), n/a. doi:10.1111/soc4.12458

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough?: An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59-82.

Harvey, A., & Shepherd, T. (2017). When passion isn't enough: Gender, affect and credibility in digital games design. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 20*(5), 492-508. doi:10.1177/1367877916636140

Heron, M., Belford, P., & Goker, A. (2014). Sexism in the circuitry: Female participation in male-dominated popular computer culture. *ACM SIGCAS Computers and Society, 44*(4), 18-29. doi:10.1145/2695577.2695582

Hong, J. S., & Espelage, D. L. (2012). A review of research on bullying and peer victimization in school: An ecological system analysis. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 17*(4), 311-322. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2012.03.003

Jane, E.A. (2017). *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History.* London, UK: Sage.

Jeffries, D., & Jeffries, R. (2017). Marxist materialism and critical race theory: A comparative analysis of media and cultural influence on the formation of stereotypes and proliferation of police brutality against black men. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men, 5*(2), 1-22.

doi:10.2979/spectrum.5.2.01

Johnson, R. S. (2013). Toward greater production diversity: Examining social boundaries at a video game studio. *Games and Culture, 8*(3), 136-160. doi:10.1177/1555412013481848

Kelly, A. (2017). The alt-right: Reactionary rehabilitation for white masculinity. *Soundings,* (66), 68.

Keskinen, S. (2013). antifeminism and white identity politics. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research, 3*(4), 225-232. doi:10.2478/njmr-2013-0015

Kowert, R., Griffiths, M. D., & Oldmeadow, J. A. (2012). Geek or chic? emerging stereotypes of online gamers. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society, 32*(6), 471-479.

Lehman, B. (2015). Physical and nonphysical bullying victimization of academically oriented students: The role of gender and school type. *American Journal of Education, 122*(1), 133-159. doi:10.1086/683294

Lockhart, E. A. (2015). *Nerd/geek masculinity: Technocracy, rationality, and gender in nerd culture's countermasculine hegemony.*

Lund, M. (2015). The mutant problem: X-Men, confirmation bias, and the methodology of comics and identity. *European Journal of American Studies, 10*(2),

Maclean, E. (2016). Girls, guys and games: How news media perpetuate stereotypes of male and female gamers. *Press Start, 3*(1), 17-45.

Mantilla, K. (2015). *Gendertrolling: How Misogyny went Viral.* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Massanari, A. (2015). #Gamergate and the Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New Media and Society,* 1-18.

Matias, C. E., & DiAngelo, R. (2013). Beyond the face of race: Emo-cognitive explorations of white neurosis and racial cray-cray. *Educational Foundations, 27*(3-4), 3-20.

Mckernan, B. (2015). The meaning of a game: Stereotypes, video game commentary and color-blind racism. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology, 3*(2), 224-253.

Merton, R.K. (1972). Insiders and outsiders: A chapter in the sociology of knowledge. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*(1), 9-47.

Monahan, T., & Fisher, J. A. (2010). Benefits of "Observer Effects": Lessons from the Field. *Qualitative Research : QR*, *10*(3), 357–376. http://doi.org/10.1177/1468794110362874

Moore, M.J., Nakano, T., Enomoto, A., Suda, T. (2012). Anonymity and roles associated with aggressive posts in an online forum. *Computers in Human Behavior, 28*(3), 861-867.

Near, C.E. (2013). Selling gender: Associations of box art representation of female characters with sales for teen and mature-rated video games. *Sex Roles, 68*(3), 252-269.

Nieborg D., Foxman M. (2018) Mainstreaming Misogyny: The Beginning of the End and the End of the Beginning in Gamergate Coverage. In: Vickery J., Everbach T. (eds*) Mediating Misogyny*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. Retrieved from https://books.google.ca/books/about/Mediating_Misogyny.html?id=rRBMDwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

O'Neill, T. (2018). 'Today I speak': Exploring how victim-survivors use reddit. *International Journal for Crime, 7*(1), 44-59. doi:10.5204/ijcjsd.v7i1.402

Oh, D. C. (2016). Payback for pearl harbor: Racist ideologies online of karmic retribution for white america and postracial resistance. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 40*(3), 247-266. 10.1177/0196859916645922

Paaßen, B., Morgenroth, T., & Stratemeyer, M. (2017). What is a true gamer? the male gamer stereotype and the marginalization of women in video game culture. *Sex Roles, 76*(7), 421-435. doi:10.1007/s11199-016-0678-y

Pabian, S. & Vandebosch, H. (2016). An investigation of short-term longitudinal associations between social anxiety and victimization and perpetration of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 45*(2), 328-339. DOI:10.1007/s10964-015-0259-3

Park, A., Conway, M., & Chen, A. T. (2018). Examining thematic similarity, difference, and membership in three online mental health communities from reddit: A text mining and visualization approach. *Computers in Human Behavior, 78*, 98. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.09.001

Perreault, G. P., & Vos, T. P. (2016). The GamerGate controversy and journalistic paradigm maintenance. *Journalism*, doi:10.1177/1464884916670932

Perry, B. (2001;2002;). *In the name of hate: Understanding hate crimes*. New York: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203905135.

Plunkett, L. (2014, August). We might be witnessing the "death of an identity". *Kotaku*. Retrieved from https://archive.li/YlBhH

Proctor, W. (2017). "bitches ain't gonna hunt no ghosts": Totemic nostalgia, toxic fandom and the ghostbusters platonic. *Palabra - Clave, 20*(4), 1105-1141. doi:10.5294/pacla.2017.20.4.10

van Prooijen, J., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2016). Extreme political beliefs predict dogmatic intolerance. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 8*(3), 292-300. doi:10.1177/1948550616671403.

Reflexivity meaning in the Cambridge english dictionary (2018). Retrieved from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reflexivity.

Robinson, S. (2014). *Fake geek girl: The gender conflict in nerd culture.*

Ryan, K. M. (2011). The relationship between rape myths and sexual scripts: The social construction of rape. *Sex Roles, 65*(11), 774-782. doi:10.1007/s11199-011-0033-2

Salter, M. (2017). From geek masculinity to gamergate: The technological rationality of online abuse. *Crime Media Culture*, forthcoming.

Schafer, J.A., Mullins, C.W., Box, S. (2014). Awakenings: The emergence of White supremacist Ideologies. *Deviant Behavior, 35*(3), 173-196.

Schmitz, R. M. (2016). Intersections of hate: Exploring the transecting dimensions of race, religion, gender, and family in ku klux klan web sites. *Sociological Focus, 49*(3), 200-214. doi:10.1080/00380237.2016.1135029

Sharma, R., Wigginton, B., Meurk, C., Ford, P., & Gartner, C. (2016;2017;). Motivations and limitations associated with vaping among people with mental illness: A qualitative analysis of reddit discussions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 14*(1), 7. doi:10.3390/ijerph14010007

Shaw, A. (2011). Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity. *New Media & Society, 14*(1), 28-44.

Shepherd, T., Harvey, A., Jordan, T., Srauy, S., & Miltner, K. (2015). Histories of hating. *Social Media + Society, 1*(2), 205630511560399. doi:10.1177/2056305115603997

Singer, P., Ferrara, E., Kooti, F., Strohmaier, M., & Lerman, K. (2016). Evidence of online performance deterioration in user sessions on reddit. *PloS One, 11*(8), e0161636. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0161636

Spanierman, L., Oh, E., Poteat, V., Hund, A., McClair, V., Beer, A., & Clarke, A. (2008). White university students' responses to societal racism. *The Counseling Psychologist, 36*(6), 839-870.

Sparby, E. M. (2017). Digital social media and aggression: Memetic rhetoric in 4chan's collective identity. *Computers and Composition, 45*, 85-97. doi:10.1016/j.compcom.2017.06.006

Stoll, L. C., Lilley, T. G., & Pinter, K. (2017). Gender-blind sexism and rape myth acceptance. *Violence Against Women, 23*(1), 28-45. doi:10.1177/1077801216636239

Suarez, E., & Gadalla, T. M. (2010). Stop blaming the victim: A meta-analysis on rape myths. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25*(11), 2010-2035. doi:10.1177/0886260509354503

Tekobbe, C. (2015). *Attack of the fake geek girls: challenging gendered harassment and marginalization in online spaces.*

Vermeulen, L., Van Bauwel, S., & Van Looy, J. (2017). Tracing female gamer identity. an empirical study into gender and stereotype threat perceptions. *Computers in Human Behavior, 71*(1), 90-98. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.054

Waldman, K. (2016, June). (((The Jewish Cowbell))):Unpacking a gross new meme from the alt-right. *Slate* Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2016/06/02/the_jewish_cowbell_the_meaning_of_those_double_parentheses_beloved_by_trump.htmlal

Wilson, D. (2014, August). A guide to ending "gamers". *Gamasutra.* Retrieved from

    https://archive.li/2t93l

Wong, M.A., Frank, R., Allsup, R. (2015). The supremacy of online White supremacists: An

    analysis of online discussions by White supremacists. *Information & Communications*

    Technology Law, 24(1), 41-73.